

Press Release

Martine Syms, *COM PORT MENT*

9 March - 23 April 2016

Opening 5 March 2016, 5 - 8 PM

1.

What does Martine Syms want? We discuss this obliquely one Monday morning in her studio, where the posters for *COM PORT MENT* have just been delivered by UPS. “They don’t look like shit,” she says approvingly. We’re both a bit distracted but arrive together to this question in our usual circuitous ways—via talk of “originality,” our distaste for the ritual of airports, Kevin Young’s “troot,” found footage filmmaking, a particular YouTube phenomenon that will not be named, unreliable narrators, the anxiety of being duped. What *doesn’t* Martine Syms want? Martine doesn’t want to be known, and yet most weeks recently she has given talks that verge on the autobiographical. Martine doesn’t want to have to move her studio again, but the landlord is doubling their rent. Martine wants people to stop asking her what she thinks of living in Los Angeles. We have known each other since she was nineteen and I was twenty, and together we have been trying to figure out our respective questions-of-want ever since. Right now we’re solving using the elimination method.

2.

Researching the cucoloris might bring you to a rather charming footnote by Barry Braverman on page 261 of his published guide to storytelling techniques: “*Kooks, cukes, coo-koos*, and *cookies* are industry jargon for a *cookaloris*, named, I think, after a gaffer named Mr. Cookaloris in the 1930s. I’m not sure about this. And his family isn’t talking.” Appropriately, a tool used by grips and cinematographers to manipulate light and shadows for dramatic effect possesses its own refracted origin story. “I think...I’m not sure...And his family isn’t talking.” Cucoloris-like sculptures along with a wall painting (“LIFE IS BETTER WHEN I’M CRUEL”) and a number of posters (all 22×28”, a standard size for movie posters) comprise the three formal elements of *COM PORT MENT*. I always appreciate an allegiance to the Rule of Threes.

3.

For *Spectacle*, a journal included in Gwen Allen’s survey of Los Angeles artists’ magazines, the authors of the first issue’s editorial statement wrote, “Los Angeles is hard to know. It looks familiar: It’s a town we all grew up in, right there on the television set. [...] If it is true that everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation, then Los Angeles is the site of that process.” The editors of *Spectacle* wrote this over thirty years ago, but I had an immediate flash of recognition. I thought of having eavesdropped on the other audience members in Martine’s *Black Box* at Human Resources—a recent exhibition intended as a sort of companion to *COM PORT MENT*—audibly debating amongst themselves the intentionality, authorship, and subjects of the array of sixty projected video lessons. I thought of all her other work: the semi-autobiographical performative lectures, the gleanings of images and news articles and Google searches, the ongoing conceptual devotion to the sit-com, the looping gestures that invoke an endless stream of Vine clips and reaction GIFs as much as they do Giorgio Agamben. Is this not exactly the realm where Martine’s work lives: in between that which is lived directly and that which is represented? I copied and pasted the quote into an email to Martine and clicked “Send.”

- Karly Wildenhaus