

## Cathleen Clarke, Leroy Johnson & Mariann Metsis

Margot Samel is pleased to announce a three-person presentation of works by Cathleen Clarke (b. 1988, Chicago, IL), Leroy Johnson (1937-2022, Philadelphia, PA), and Mariann Metsis (b.1991, Tallinn, Estonia) at Esther II, New York.

With a documentarian's eye but a poet's gaze, Leroy Johnson surveyed the pleasures, hardships, and contradictions within the Philadelphia neighborhoods where he spent his life. Through his occupations as a social worker, rehab counselor, teacher of disabled youth, and school administrator, Johnson pierced the fabric of collective human experience more deeply than most.

Constructed largely from materials found during his daily commutes, his house sculptures are replete with the textures of reality. Johnson represented the city as an accretion of marks. Intentional declarations graffitied on walls hold equal weight as the subtle beauty of the residue of life, of signage and surfaces worn and sunbleached past legibility—their degradation becomes, through Johnson's attention, painterly abstraction authored not by a single artistic hand but by the vast social forces at play. These sculptures are labyrinths of referent and possibility.

Mariann Metsis' work layers colors and textures, figures and abstraction, drawing on her experiences growing up immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union. On Metsis' canvases, different painting styles merge: some works want to reveal themselves to us, while others hide within the hue. Depicting a moment caught between the familiar and the eerie, the subjects perform for the canvas. Through her work, Metsis ruminates on how history functions: the past is not dead; it insists, returns, and contaminates the present. Her nonlinear treatment of time reveals the illusion of historical progress, unfolding in the pentimenti of the painting.

Starting from old photographs given to her by friends or family members that connect her present to the past, Cathleen Clarke abstracts familiar subjects to describe thresholds, particularly ones based in age or growth. Allowing for inspiration to interject with reality, illustrated children's books from the artist's childhood such as the compilation *The Tall Book of Make-Believe* originally published in 1950 by Harper & Brothers, play significant—even subconscious—roles in each work's development.

Margot Samel  
295 Church St  
New York, NY 10013

+1 212 597-2747  
info@margotsamel.com

margotsamel.com

Leroy Johnson (1937-2022, Philadelphia, PA) received his master's degree in Human Services from Lincoln University in 1988. Johnson has presented solo exhibitions at Margot Samel, New York, NY (2025); Mercer County Community College, West Windsor, NJ (2023); The Clay Studio, Philadelphia, PA (2022), among others. His work has been included in group exhibitions at Villanova University Art Gallery (1983), the Camden County Historical Society (1990), Cheltenham Center for the Arts (1996), Gloucester County College (1998), The Clay Studio in Philadelphia (1997, 1999, and 2000), the Art Gallery at City Hall, Philadelphia (1998, 2015, 2017, and 2019), the African Jazz Museum, Kansas City (2002), List Gallery at Swarthmore College (2004), Philadelphia's Magic Gardens (2011), and Tiger Strikes Asteroid (2021). His work is in the collections of the American Museum of Ceramic Art in Pomona, California and the Clay Studio in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Mariann Metsis (b. 1991, Tallinn, Estonia) lives and works in London. She studied at Central Saint Martin College of Art & Design, London; The Academy of Fine Arts Vienna; and received a BA in Fine Arts from the Slade School of Fine Art, University College London. Solo exhibitions include: *Bals des victimes*, Deborah Schamoni, Munich, Germany (2024); *Life under*, Galerina, London, UK (2023); *maalid2020*, Hoib Gallery, Tallinn, Estonia (2020). Selected group exhibitions include *The Apartment*, Galerina, London, UK (2025); *Shifting Sand*, Galerija Asni, Riga, Latvia (2024); *bending spines*, curated by Antoine Simeao Schalk, Berlin, Germany (2023); *High Stakes*, Lisa Boudet, Paris, France (2023); *just as when the night*, Light Eye Mind, London, UK (2019); *Paintings for the Temple of Love*, Cob Gallery, London, UK (2019); and *Cities Methodologies*, Slade Research Centre, London, UK (2014). Metsis has an upcoming solo exhibition at Margot Samel in July 2025.

Cathleen Clarke (b. 1988, Chicago, IL) received a BFA from the Academy of Art University, San Francisco, CA. Recent solo exhibitions include *Morning Star*, Night Gallery, Los Angeles (2025); *The Night Grows Long*, Margot Samel, New York, NY (2024); *Hungry Soul*, Nathalie Karg Gallery, New York, NY (2022); *Whatever Hour You Woke There Was a Door Shutting*, Fou Gallery, Brooklyn, NY (2021). Selected group exhibitions include: *Beyond Ecstasy*, Stems Gallery, Paris, FR (2024); *As She Is*, curated by Rejina Pyo, Soho Revue Gallery, London, UK (2024); *Thank you, I'm rested now. I'll have the lobster today, thank you*, Pangée, Montreal, Canada & Margot Samel, New York, NY (2024); *White Columns Annual Benefit & Exhibition*, White Columns, New York, NY (2024); *Dreamscape*, Ames Yavuz Gallery, Sydney, AU (2024); *Night at Dunes*, Dunes Gallery in collaboration with Night Gallery, Portland, ME (2024); *The Blue Hour*, Workplace, London, UK (2023); *Maskenfreiheit*, Margot Samel, New York, NY (2023); Clarke has an upcoming solo exhibition at Workplace, London in June 2025.

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**Margot  
Samel**



Mariann Metsis  
*Hüljes VII*, 2025  
Oil on linen  
11 3/4 x 5 7/8 x 3/4 in | 30 x 15 x 2 cm

# Margot Samel



Mariann Metsis  
*Cheburashka II*, 2025  
Oil on linen  
15 3/4 x 11 3/4 x 1/2 in | 40 x 30 x 1.2 cm

# Margot Samel



Mariann Metsis  
*Hüljes VI*, 2024  
Oil on board  
17 3/4 x 13 3/4 x 1 in | 45 x 35 x 2.5 cm

# Margot Samel



Leroy Johnson  
*EZ Park*, c. 2005 – 2010  
Mixed media, found objects, collage  
16 x 17 1/4 x 8 3/4 in | 40.6 x 43.8 x 22.2 cm

# Margot Samel



Leroy Johnson  
*Juicy*, c. 2000 – 2005  
Mixed media, found objects, collage  
12 x 15 1/2 x 4 1/2 in | 30.5 x 39.4 x 11.4 cm

# Margot Samel



Leroy Johnson  
*Untitled*, 2005  
Mixed media, found objects, collage  
7 1/2 x 9 x 10 1/2 in | 19.1 x 22.9 x 26.7 cm

# Margot Samel



Leroy Johnson  
*Frankford & Girard, 2012*  
Mixed media and collage  
18 x 24 in | 45.7 x 61 cm

# Margot Samel



Leroy Johnson  
*Untitled*, c. 2010 – 2015  
Mixed media, found objects, collage  
10 3/4 x 14 1/2 x 6 in | 27.3 x 36.8 x 15.2 cm

# Margot Samel



Leroy Johnson  
*Stop!*, c. 2010 – 2015  
Mixed media, found objects, collage  
10 1/4 x 19 1/2 x 8 in | 26 x 49.5 x 20.3 cm

# Margot Samel



Leroy Johnson  
*Act Now*, c. 2005 – 2010  
Mixed media, found objects, collage  
9 3/4 x 9 3/4 x 11 3/4 in | 24.8 x 24.8 x 29.8 cm

# Margot Samel



Cathleen Clarke  
*Waterfall*, 2025  
Oil and acrylic on canvas  
20 x 16 in | 50.8 x 40.6 cm

# Margot Samel



Cathleen Clarke  
*Girl Descending Staircase*, 2023  
Oil and acrylic on canvas  
40 x 20 in | 101.6 x 50.8 cm

# Margot Samel



Cathleen Clarke  
*Sleepwalker II*, 2024  
Oil on paper  
15 x 11 in | 38.1 x 27.9 cm (unframed)  
18 1/2 x 14 1/2 in | 47 x 36.8 cm (framed)

# Margot Samel



Cathleen Clarke  
*Sleepwalker IV*, 2025  
Oil on paper  
15 x 11 in | 38.1 x 27.9 cm

# Margot Samel



Cathleen Clarke  
*Sleepwalker III*, 2025  
Oil on paper  
15 x 11 in | 38.1 x 27.9 cm