

**Osservatorio
Fondazione Prada**

NEW SOCIETY

MIRANDA JULY

Milano

MIRANDA JULY: NEW SOCIETY

MIA LOCKS

American artist and director Miranda July (b. 1974) has produced performances, videos, and installations for more than three decades. From her earliest performances in 1990s punk clubs to complex, multi-media pieces in theater settings, July creates imaginative social worlds that question our assumptions about power and vulnerability. Her work employs a wide range of technologies, sometimes intentionally misused to explore new possibilities for collaboration and connection.

In her videos, we are not sure if we are getting July the actor, artist, director, or person. She plays all of these roles at different times, and sometimes flips between roles within a single work. Is she the charming artist asking for the audience's help, or the control freak director who 'shares' the lead roles with her cast? Or is this all an act?

This instability between artist and self is pushed furthest in *New Society* (2015). For a full two hours July plays the role of artist and gets the entire audience involved in playing themselves. It begins with July on stage alone, looking like a consummate professional in black pants and blazer and a head mic like she is about to give a TED Talk. Then she completely forgets her lines. She fumbles for an uncomfortable amount of time. Eventually she decides to pivot, to improvise in the face of failure. Her new idea is a proposal to the audience: "Stay in the theater with me for the rest of your lives and form a new society." We slowly realize this was her plan all along and that she was faking forgetfulness. And yet, the audience plays along and ultimately accepts her proposal by vote. "Aye," they yell with fists in the air, as instructed by July, and then they get to work with her as the self-designated leader. July asks for volunteers and then selects someone to design a flag, someone else to write their anthem on an electronic keyboard, and a small group to work together on drafting a constitution. Those with medical training become medics, and they create armbands by cutting the fabric off the bottom of July's shirt, as instructed by her.

July maintains the position of willful woman whenever she is performing. She never recedes. Whether she is the amateur artist or the instructive artist or the I-need-your-help artist or the collaborative artist, July's performative *I* is always in charge.

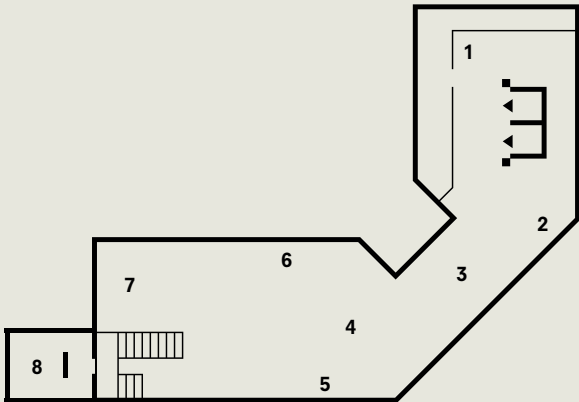
THE EXHIBITION

Curated by Mia Locks, "Miranda July: New Society" debuts the artist's latest work, *F.A.M.I.L.Y. (Falling Apart Meanwhile I Love You)* and presents a selection of earlier works that similarly probe the dynamic relationship between artist, audience, and artwork.

This first floor of the exhibition presents all of July's major performance works to date: *Love Diamond* (1998), *The Swan Tool* (2000), *Things We Don't Understand and Definitely Are Not Going to Talk About* (2006), and *New Society* (2015). Video documentation of each performance is presented alongside costumes, scripts, sketches, and other ephemera from the artist's personal archive. Also on view is an early short film called *The Amateurist* (1997), which explores the dynamic between professional and amateur, and a more recent work, *A poster to be ripped/Ripping* (2024), which explores how emotions can be transformed through a performative act.

The second floor of the exhibition presents more collaborative and participatory works including a special reprise of *Learning to Love You More* (2002-09), a website that offered creative assignments to the public and posted documentation of the resulting submissions. On the occasion of this exhibition, July has collaborated with a young Milanese woman to revisit one of the original prompts: "Make an exhibition of the art in your parents' house." The completed assignment is presented as its own installation within the exhibition. On view nearby are two previous collaborations with strangers—*I'm the President, Baby* (2018) and *Services* (2020)—in which mundane transactional encounters in July's own life evolve into intimate portraits. Finally, *F.A.M.I.L.Y.*—a multi-channel video installation comprising performances made in collaboration with seven strangers via Instagram—invites the public to submit their own videos to potentially be included in the final work, which will be completed during the run of the exhibition.

FIFTH FLOOR



1.

A poster to be ripped/Ripping, 2024

Digital print on BlueBack paper, thumbtacks, and video

Poster: 182 x 130 cm; video projection, color and sound, 182 x 130 cm; overall dimensions:

182 x 260 cm

Courtesy of the artist

This diptych includes a poster July originally designed for Printed Matter, a nonprofit art bookstore in New York City, and a video documenting two people performing the poster's instructions: "A poster to be ripped in violent, disgusted anger, then carefully hung, piece by piece, with cool, relentless determination."

2.

Early Performances, 1997

Video documentation; color and sound

13' 57"

Courtesy of the artist

July's earliest performances took place in all ages punk clubs. This monitor includes two clips from performances in 1997—*The F-A-T-E* and *I Can-Japan*, which took place at Star Cleaners in San Francisco and at Yoyo A Go Go festival at the Capitol Theater in Olympia, WA, respectively—both of which capture July's unique voice, a mix of vulnerability, humor, and urgency. The accompanying vitrine includes shoes she made with a friend and a hand-sequined coat the artist wore during that time in her life, as well as handmade technology she fashioned for use in performances. Also in the vitrine is a pamphlet from Big Miss Moviola (now known as Joanie4Jackie), the underground distribution network for women filmmakers she founded in 1995 and ran for more than a decade.

3.

Love Diamond, 1998

Video documentation; color and sound

52' 49"

Courtesy of the artist

July's first full-length performance, which she thought of as a live movie, was commissioned by the Portland Institute of Contemporary Art in Portland, OR. It is a two-part tale of a mother and daughter dynamic, and a woman trapped in a loop with The Titan, an ambiguous but powerful figure. July plays all three characters while simultaneously controlling the slide imagery and digital projections. Audience members appear on stage to describe the elusive "love diamond," sometimes an actual glittering gem, at other times a complex social formation that occurs when two love triangles join each other. The accompanying vitrine houses the artist's notes and sketches, a slide carousel, and transparencies used during the performance alongside other ephemera.

4.

The Amateurist, 1997

Video; color and sound

14'

Courtesy of Video Data Bank, School of the Art Institute of Chicago

The Amateurist portrays the uneasy dynamic between two women: an 'amateur' and a 'professional.' July plays both characters, donning different wigs. The work focuses on this binary, employing only two camera views throughout. While the professional rambles on about her tedious job, the amateur is voiceless yet resilient. July is orienting our attention toward a shift from the presumably powerful position of the professional to the potentiality of the amateur.

5.

Things We Don't Understand and Definitely Are Not Going to Talk About, 2006

Video documentation; color and sound

54' 43"

Courtesy of the artist

Things We Don't Understand and Definitely Are Not Going to Talk About is a break-up story about a woman named Fiona who leaves her boyfriend Donnie for a co-worker named Kevin, abandoning not only Donnie but the cat they were poised to adopt together. The work marks a shift towards unexpected audience participation; at the start of the show July casts the main characters directly from the audience. With a live feed camera set-up backstage, hidden scripts, and the support of assistant directors, Amy Adrion and Alia Raza, the three audience members are seamlessly integrated into the show. July also enlists the help of the rest of the audience to read lines, create the sound of a drumroll, and answer questions by flicking a lighter on to indicate a "yes."

The accompanying vitrine and nearby ephemera include a script, costume elements, props, and yellow cue cards.

6.

The Swan Tool, 2000

Video documentation; color and sound

28' 45"

Courtesy of the artist

The Swan Tool combines video, performance, and live music to tell the story of a woman (played by July) who cannot decide whether to live or die. Rather than choose, she digs a hole in her backyard and buries herself. Following the self-burial she attempts to continue living and working, but the thing in the hole will not die and she is unable to forget about it. Meanwhile she works both in an insurance company and as a car door unlocker, using "the swan tool." July had recently been working at a company called Pop-a-Lock, and had her own swan tool for helping people get into their locked cars. Also on view here are July's costume and props, including a floating plastic grocery bag and a beeper, as well as performance notes and other ephemera.

7.

New Society, 2015

Video documentation; color and sound

86' 34"

Courtesy of the artist

New Society is a social experiment performed in real time with an audience who accepts July's proposal "to stay in the theater with me for the rest of your lives and form a new society." The performance charts a twenty-year story of July and her audience, who navigate a range of emotional experiences together. During each run of the show, July selects one person to design a flag (several flags are on view here), and those with medical training become medics who create armbands by cutting the fabric off the bottom of July's shirt. Eight cut green shirts appear here from eight different performances at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in Brooklyn, NY. Also on view are July's black pants, which 'age' over the course of the show, getting dirty and ripped as the complex and heartbreaking story unfolds.

8.

The Crowd, 2004

Audio

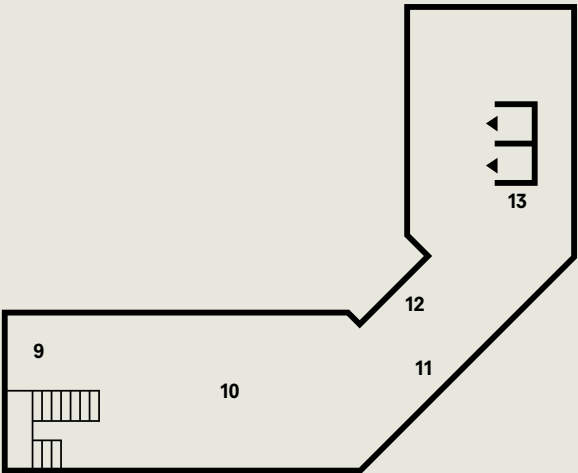
1' 18"

Courtesy of the artist

The Crowd is an audio recording of July screaming to a crowd as if she were on stage at a rock concert. She asks a series of questions, to which the crowd roars in response with varying degrees of delight. The work was originally created for the 2002 Whitney Biennial at the Whitney Museum

of American Art, New York, and was part of a series of audio pieces installed in the main elevator. Here, *The Crowd* is placed in the restrooms.

SIXTH FLOOR



9.

Two Things Are Sure, 1993/2024

Collage with found photographs, stickers

114.3 x 114.3 cm

Courtesy of the artist

This collage includes found photographs that July connects using orange dot stickers normally used to color code folders in an office setting. Instead, July repurposes the stickers to create connections, refashioning them to form an energetic shape that passes between a diverse range of people, emanating from their bellies or shooting out of their hands. Smaller arrangements of these works were originally exhibited in a gallery in Seattle, WA, but this new configuration combines them to create a grander scale across time and space.

10.

F.A.M.I.L.Y. (Falling Apart Meanwhile I Love You), 2024

Video installation; 9 monitors; color and sound; posters

Courtesy of the artist

A poster to be danced in front of, 2024

Poster on newsprint

45.7 x 60.9 cm

Courtesy of the artist

Participants thus far: @enter_laughing (Augusta Dayton), @donaldklee (Donald Lee), @thongria (Zoë Ligon), @craigmontyames (C.M. James), @nitegallery (Amanda Medina),

@projectofsorts (Nathan Westerman), @goatzfoot (Lisa Ziegenfuss)

F.A.M.I.L.Y. is July's latest work, started in 2020 and made in collaboration with seven strangers via Instagram. Participants send video responses to a series of prompts from July, who then brings them into her studio using the 'cut out' tool from a free editing app designed for social-media content. The result is a series of surreal performances in which July and her participants explore intimacy and boundaries through a completely new physical language. Oddly realistic tactile sounds—created by the sound designer July works with on her feature films—heighten a subtle sense of uncanniness.

During the first exhibition period, the artist will select three new participants to produce new videos. Information to apply and participate can be found on the QR code that appears on three monitors in the exhibition or at [this link](#).

By the close of the exhibition, all nine components will be on view, debuting the final work in its entirety for the first time. Viewers are invited to take a poster, an enlarged version of the collage that appears in the background of the videos, shot in July's studio.

11.

I'm the President, Baby, 2018
Fabric, rods, and mixed media
Variable dimensions
Courtesy of the artist

I'm the President, Baby is a portrait of Oumarou Idrissa, whom July met when he was her Uber driver in Los Angeles. Four curtains are linked to Idrissa's iPhone and bed using smart home technology. The small framed texts that appear next to each curtain explain the different apps Idrissa was using at the time and how they cause the curtains to open and close throughout his sleepless nights in Los Angeles. This disembodied performance captures the psychological impact of migration and the gig economy. Originally commissioned for "The Future Starts Here," an exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the work ran off live data in real time. It now replays the activity from Idrissa's nights in 2018.

When the *blue* curtains are completely closed, Oumarou is asleep on his queen-sized mattress on the floor of his studio apartment in Los Angeles. If the curtains are partially open or moving, then he's sleeping fitfully. His sleep data triggers this movement via a smart curtain track powered by a Somfy® motor. Sometimes he dreams of someone pushing down on him so he can't move or get up. Sometimes he dreams he's in Niger, talking to his mother about ordinary things. If the curtains are wide open, then he's awake.

Each time the *brown* curtains open, Oumarou has opened WhatsApp—the free, secure, worldwide messaging service. Every night around 11pm he begins to talk and message with his friends and family in Niger. "I don't have any close friends in America," he told me, "so my phone is my everything." He exchanges videos and pictures with his

21 sisters and brothers and responds to requests for money, most often to pay for food, school tuitions, christenings and medicine. He used to talk to his mom every night, but she passed away two years ago. Just before she died, Oumarou texted to tell me she was sick. We had sporadically kept in touch after our long drive together. Just a few hours later he texted me that she had died, and he was headed back to Niger for her funeral.

If the *pink* curtains are open, Oumarou has tapped 'online' on the Uber app, making himself available to receive calls for rides. Like most UberBLACK drivers, he leases a black SUV and often barely makes enough money to cover the cost of the lease. At times he has also lived in his leased cars, as many UberBLACK drivers do. "When you sleep in a new SUV you wake up sick from the fumes," Oumarou told me. We met up when he got back from his mother's funeral in Niger. He was frustrated that he had lost his place to live while he was out of the country. I rent a small house where I work from 9am to 5pm, so I suggested he live in it from 5pm to 9am until he got a new place. We shared the house in this way for seven months.

When the *green* curtains are open, Oumarou is looking at Instagram. He posts pictures of soccer games, family, luxury hotels, and beaches (from his side job as a traveling bodyguard). On November 8, 2016, he posted a video of himself voting for Hillary Clinton: *I vote for Her. First time voter, historic day.* Since we were registered to the same address, I showed him our polling place and we voted together. On November 9, he wrote: *The way I feel last nite was the worst feeling I ever have in my life. We love you Hillary this pain will go forever.* Later that day he wrote: *Motherland we coming back,* and I wondered if he really would go back to Niger. On November 10 he posted a video of himself in the black suit he wears to drive for Uber; he was standing tall by a rooftop pool in Beverly Hills. *I'm the president, baby,* he said. And then, speaking as the president, he told us to: *Stay focused, stay humble, you know, be positive in life, enjoy, life is beautiful, baby.*

Note: If Oumarou is sick, traveling, or needs privacy, this work runs on a pre-recorded script.

12.

Services, 2020

Digital prints on Matte Plus photographic paper with collage elements

4 prints: 86.5 x 68 cm; 1 print: 61 x 91.4 cm

Courtesy of the artist

Services is a portrait of Jay Benedicto, whom July met as a telemarketer who randomly called her in 2020. After answering Benedicto's scripted questions, July asked if she could pose a few questions of her own, turning an otherwise purely transactional relationship into something more open-ended. July eventually invited Benedicto to collaborate on a special artist commission for the 2020 no. 46 of *Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin*. The resulting portfolio includes photographs and images of their text exchanges, which capture July's and

Benedicto's attempts to connect and create while wrestling with the wild disparity of their circumstances during a global pandemic. July occasionally embellished the photographs, collaging graphics pulled from Benedicto's Facebook page. The five images on view here were made in response to the following prompts, one which was responded twice, which evolved out of longer text exchanges (from left to right):

"Make a mask out of whatever you have lying around"

"Copy that Mickey graphic you posted"

"Bow down in front of someone or something that you love"

"Act out a dream" (two answers to the same request)

While the work in its entirety was developed into a limited edition book sculpture with MACK Books in London, this is the first time any of the photographs have been exhibited.

13.

Learning to Love You More: Assignment #43, 2024

Installation

Variable dimensions

Courtesy of the artist with Miriam Goi and Antonella Cei

On the occasion of this exhibition, July decided to revisit Assignment #43 ("Make an exhibition of the art in your parents' house") with a call via Instagram, to which a young Milanese woman, Miriam Goi, responded.

Learning to Love You More (2002–09) is a website made in collaboration with Harrell Fletcher that consists of 70 creative assignments. When the website was active, anyone could complete an assignment by uploading the requested photograph, drawing, sound recording or text; and some eight thousand works were ultimately submitted. The web project and archive are now in the collection of The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA).