

## Cathleen Clarke *Episodes*

Margot Samel is pleased to announce *Episodes*, a solo exhibition of new works by the Brooklyn-based artist Cathleen Clarke. This marks the artist's second solo exhibition with the gallery.

### Episode I: *The Dance*

Today it was the stench of lavender she smelled most clearly. It made her sneeze—*tchee*. She was full of it. Full. The scent of tangerine and lemon lingered too, and all the other soaps. She took things as they came, wet, cold, clean in her hands. She blew a long white sheet into the air with such force that the clothesline crackled before her. Back and forth it went, each movement undoing the knots she'd tied to the trees, maybe a year ago, maybe ten, but she didn't notice. She folded the sheet over the thin dark line into a practiced rectangle, hovering perfectly above the grass like mist on a winter morning. The second was a long-sleeved shirt. The third, a pillowcase. The knot trembled at the end of the trees with each new weight. But she didn't see such things. As she reached for the next piece, her body knew the line was misbehaving, something was off between the basket and her small dominion. But she didn't dwell on it.

It was the wind.

Black clouds rolled above her like a curse, releasing the first full drops: *drup drup* on the roof, *blump blump* on the asphalt, *pft pft* on the grass. The whole act had begun to look less like a chore and more like a dance. How she moved between the sheets, making space, fitting the whole household on that lean line knotted between two trees, so long ago she didn't care to remember. Then the clouds swallowed the blue whole and—*blop*—the woman looked at her boot. Her shoulders were soaked; the white sheets bowed under the weight, bending on the grass like men in prayer. The basket slipped from her hands. She froze. Her three siblings were now beside her, standing at the edge of the house, their small hearts worried something had gone wrong. It was as if that single drop on her boot had opened a portal to another time, when she was six, or nine, standing on the same grass, hand in hand with her siblings, watching their mother hang laundry in a storm. One piece after the next, on that lean line between trees, never halting, never hearing their cries, the mud on her soles erasing all that clean, a day's work stepped on with the fallen sheets. Intent only on keeping up with a dance she couldn't even see.

### Episode II: *Sweet Dreams Keep Up at Night*

*Driiiin*. She was awake at the very first sound, or so she thought. The sky was still black. She rubbed her eyes, took a monumental sip of water from the glass on her nightstand, the first heroic act of the morning, stretched, yawned, stood. She went to the closet. Opened the left sliding door.

Shapes loomed, almost indistinguishable, but surely not it. *Uhm*. She shut the left, opened the right. Nothing. She buried her whole head into the fabrics like an ostrich in sand. *Uhm?* Then left again, then right again, diving deeper, hands rummaging where no hands belonged. Soft fabrics from the guts of the closet whirled behind her, blue dress, red trousers, purple velvet coat, but *where was it?* She tripped against a mountain of clothes, nearly died from the dread of turning on the light, *click*, and everything looked worse under the violent clarity. She didn't have time for this. She was late. "Late! Late! Late!" she yelled at the pile of drowsy clothing. "Time to go, time to go, time to GO!" She bolted into the hallway, knocking on every door, even though she could swear there were less doors than yesterday, barged into what she thought was her brother's room, light ON, and gasped. A stack of dirty plates stared back from the kitchen sink. The kitchen? Had she drunk poison or what? She splashed water on her face and, by accident, greasy dishwater in her hair, *great*, and began searching for her school bag. She was certain she knew where it was, or so she thought. Drawer. Couch. Cabinet. She could swear the house had more cabinets.

"Oh no, no, no," she said, collapsing into a chair like a crushed flower. She could already see her teacher's big red face, screaming, chasing her to the grave, into the afterlife. Suddenly she was running for her life, down the old schoolyard, back home, back to her room, back to sealed eyes. Back to silence. Her siblings were shaking her awake. "It's late, it's late, it's LATE!" *Ohs and ahs. Let me sleep.* She was so tired now, too heavy to protest. They lifted her like a rag doll and pulled her into her grey school uniform, skirt, stockings, long sleeves, the uniform she had looked for everywhere. They dragged her to the dining room. Her heart hammered behind the lazy curtains of her eyelids. Downstairs, her parents laughed at the sight of her. The smell of bacon, fried eggs, pancakes and syrup filled the air, tempting her finally awake. "Come sit! Have breakfast! Your naughty siblings, they always fool you, don't they? Don't you remember? The school's closed because a meteor fell on it!"

### Episode III: *Altered State*

She really couldn't tell. Had she turned it off? She remembered opening the oven, taking the pie out, setting it on the counter. And then? "Arghhh," she grunted, smacked her heels together, and turned back. She rushed toward the door, head down—*ding-dong*. She barely registered the unfamiliar sound and kept toward the elevator. "Madame," came a whisper from her left. She turned. "*J...Jimmy?*"

Her brother stood there in a black suit and hat, a red tie, gold buttons, a green velvet trim around his neck. He was smiling. "Pleasure," he said. "Okay," she laughed nervously. "You got me. Good one! But I have to run. I think I left the oven on!" Jimmy didn't move. His smile was fixed, sculpted, like the marble desk in front of him. She turned in confusion. Everything was where it should be, the elevator, the stair door, but the baroque ceiling above her, the polished floors, the marble desk, a doorman? Her brother? She stumbled outside. The street, the house number, the facade, it was all hers. This was her building. *Ding-dong*. She was back in the lobby, eye to eye with Jimmy, who was now reading a newspaper behind the desk. "Jimmy," she said, exasperated, "seriously?" "Ma'am," he replied. "That's my name, yes. But I'm afraid we've never met. What is yours?"

She ran to the elevator, her hand reaching for the button she'd pressed for twelve years, only it wasn't there. "What?" she whispered. Then louder, "Jimmy, where the hell is the button?" "There is no button, ma'am. I call the elevator. Please—your name?" She shouted her name five times. Spelled it. He still didn't get it. Her scalp prickled. "Look, Jim," she said, breathing hard, "it's okay. A mistake. But please, let me up. This one time?" A bead of sweat rolled down his temple as he shook his head no.

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She bolted to the stairs—locked. She fumbled with her keys. None fit. Then—*ding*. The elevator doors opened behind her. She lunged inside. The doors sealed. Relief flooded her. Her finger pressed the spot it always had, only there was no button. A glowing screen appeared in front of her instead. “Ma’am?” The voice echoed beyond the doors. “Maaaam?”

They reopened. The lobby was empty. A draft brushed her cheek. The stair door ajar. She ran. She was ready to climb all ten floors if she had to. She looked up the stairs before stepping forward. Standing at the top was Jimmy—*thirty, maybe forty years older*—dressed in the same black suit, the gold buttons dulled, the green trim faded. She gasped. Then screamed. She screamed so hard she felt her hands tremble, the walls shudder, her jaw lock open and collapse on itself like a bear trap. A streak of red bloomed on her lips. She touched it, stared, felt something hard against her tongue. She reached into that sticky, metallic taste. “God, Jimmy,” her voice changed now, strange and lisping, “look.” She opened her hand. In her palm, a tooth, white as snow. “My tooth. It fell. Just like that.” She tried to fill the gap with her tongue, to fix the strange shape her speech had taken, “Please, Jim,” she almost couldn’t help but whistle through her words. “Just let me go home.”

—Alja Zoë Freier

Cathleen Clarke (b. 1988, Chicago, IL) received a BFA from the Academy of Art University. Recent solo exhibitions include *Episodes*, Margot Samel, New York, NY (2026); *A New Path*, Workplace, London, UK (2025); *Morning Star*, Night Gallery, Los Angeles (2025); *The Night Grows Long*, Margot Samel, New York, NY (2024); *Focus Series*, Workplace, London, U.K. (2023); *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: *Growtesque*, Plein Ventures, Helm Contemporary, New York, NY (2025); *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; *Maskenfreiheit*, Margot Samel, New York, NY (2023); *Evening Shadow*, Make Room Gallery, Los Angeles (2023); *Holiday Capsule*, Platform Art, (2022); *Vanitas*, Nathalie Karg Gallery, New York, NY (2021).

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