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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
upstairs: *Touch*

Sam Contis, TM Davy, Darrel Ellis, Alina Perez, Mosie Romney, and Sylvia Sleigh
curated by Augusto Arbizo

April 10 - June 5, 2021

Touch brings together six artists in a conversation about community, family, and place. Comprised of paintings, photographs, and works on paper, the show features artworks which observe people in domestic settings as well as outdoors, and touches upon the human need for a sense of location and belonging. Works by four contemporary artists are placed in dialogue with portrait works by the late artists Darrel Ellis (1958 – 1992) and Sylvia Sleigh (1916 – 2010), respectively.

The five featured photographs by Sam Contis (b. 1982) are from her *Deep Springs* series, made in the environments of a small all-male liberal arts college east of Sierra Nevada. Contis shows us the students and desert landscape through her lens, exploring ideas of community, masculinity and bonding, and examining a sense of toil and intimacy with the land. Light and nature are also featured prominently in the four canvases that TM Davy (b. 1980) has painted for the exhibition, distinctly illuminating the face and personae of four close friends — Joseph, Edgar, Sarah Nicole, and Nathan — from a summer spent together on Fire Island. These closely observed portraits convey an intimacy between each other, and also with Davy, who captures them — and the prismatic effects of light — with precision and tenderness.

Alina Perez (b. 1995) contributes a new grisaille drawing of her father smoking while intently looking outdoors into the night. The artist's practice often features meticulous and dramatic depictions of her family and loved ones, imbued with a vivid sense of narrative; highly expressive and tonally luxuriant, her charcoal drawings are filled with natural symbolism and suffused with affection. Mosie Romney (b. 1994) is represented by a chromatically charged portrait based on a faded classroom photograph. With an assured combination of brushwork and collage, Romney creates a vivid and commanding interpretation of the found source material, with the young student surrounded by a lush, spray-painted, lace-patterned background, and with eyes gleaming with rhinestones.

Darrel Ellis's mixed media works from the 1980s and '90s are based on a cache of family photographs (from the 1950s) that he re-worked to create narratives about his own family and personal biography. As part of the gay artistic milieu of the 1980s, he modeled as a subject for artists such as Peter Hujar and Robert Mapplethorpe while he also created evocative self-portraits. Much of Ellis's own source imagery and material are from photographs taken in Harlem and the Bronx by Thomas Ellis, the artist's father, who was killed by police before the artist was born. These re-photographed and manipulated pictures, sometimes recaptured as ink and watercolor drawings, show intimate scenes (including a repeated image of his older sister as a baby with their grandparents) and convey Ellis's intensely personal investigation of his own identity and family. A prolific and visionary practitioner of appropriation and the reworked image, Ellis died of AIDS at the age of 33, shortly before his inclusion in The Museum of Modern Art's "New Photography 8" in 1992.

A pastel portrait from the 1980s and an early outdoor watercolor by Welsh-born painter Sylvia Sleigh gently anchor the exhibition, placing emphasis on the act of close looking. A feminist artist known for her realist paintings, Sleigh subverted traditional notions of figuration and portraiture by specializing in thoughtful and carefully observed depictions of women and men — with special attention to facial



features, skin, and hair — which revealed their vulnerability and individuality, and in Sleigh's own words, their "dignity and humanism."

The exhibition is curated by Augusto Arbizu. Special thanks to Van Doren Waxter, NY; Candice Madey; Max Warsh; and Klaus Von Nichtssagend Gallery, NY.

Sam Contis (b. 1982, Pittsburgh, PA) received her MFA from Yale University's School of Art in 2008. Recent solo exhibitions include the Berkeley Art Museum, the Pacific Film Archive, and Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery, New York. Recent group exhibitions include *Being: New Photography* at MoMA, New York. She is a recipient of the 2017 Nancy Graves Foundation Artist Grant and the 2016 Aaron Siskind Foundation Fellowship. Contis' work is in the public collections of the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; KADIST, Paris and San Francisco; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; and the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven. Contis lives and works in California.

TM Davy (b. 1980, New York, NY) received a BFA from The School of Visual Arts, where he also currently teaches. In 2011-12, Sarah Michelson included commissioned portraits by Davy as part of her set, at performances at The Kitchen, NY (Devotion #1); The 2012 *Whitney Biennial* at The Whitney Museum of American Art, NY (Devotion #2); and The Museum of Modern Art, NY (Devotion #3). Recent solo exhibitions include Galerie Thomas Fuchs in Stuttgart, Germany, and 11R, New York. Recent group exhibitions include *The Lure of the Dark: Contemporary Painters Conjure the Night*, MASS MoCA; Galerie Suzanne Tarasieve, Paris; Andrew Edlin, New York; Aarhus Kunstmuseum, Denmark; and the Tate Modern, UK. Davy lives and works in Brooklyn, NY.

Darrel Ellis (1958-1992, New York, NY) was included in Nan Goldin's exhibition *Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing*, Artist Space, New York, in 1989. In 1992, his work was shown in *New Photography 8*, curated by Peter Galassi at MoMA, New York, one year after the artist's first solo exhibition at Baron/Boisante Gallery, New York. Ellis' exhibition at MoMA ultimately opened several months after the artist had died from AIDS in 1992. A major retrospective of Ellis' work was mounted in 1997 at Art in General, New York, curated by the artist Allen Frame, Ellis' friend and later executor of his estate. The exhibition circulated to five museums in the United States.

Mosie Romney (b. 1994, New York, NY) received a BFA from SUNY Purchase in 2016. Recent solo exhibitions include Y2K Group, New York. Recent group exhibitions include Nicodim Gallery, Los Angeles; Meredith Rosen Gallery, New York; and Gern en Regalia, New York. In 2018, Romney was an artist in residence at the Home School, Husdon. Romney lives and works in Ridgewood, Queens.

Alina Perez (b. 1995, Miami, FL) received her BFA in Painting at the Rhode Island School of Design in 2017. Recent exhibitions include Monya Rowe Gallery, New York, and Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York. Perez was a participant at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in 2017, and has attended residencies at the OxBow School of Art Saugatuck, MI, and the Vermont Studio Center, Johnson, VT. Perez is currently attending Yale University in New Haven as a 2021 MFA candidate.

Sylvia Sleigh (b. 1916, Llandudno, Wales, d. 2010, New York, NY) attended the Brighton School of Art, Sussex. Sleigh's first solo exhibition was at Kensington Art Gallery, London, in 1953. After marrying the art critic Lawrence Alloway (b. 1926), she moved to the United States in the 1960s, where she became known for a series of feminized portraits of friends and associates living in New York's SoHo and East Side, made during the 1970s.

Image: Darrell Ellis, *Untitled (Self-Portrait)*, c. 1990, ink and wash on paper, unframed: 11 1/2 x 9 inches (29.2 x 22.9 cm). Darrel Ellis Estate, Courtesy Candice Madey, New York.

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