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**SANTA BARBARA MUSEUM OF ART TO PRESENT THE EXHIBITION  
MARTIN MULL: THE JOYS OF INDOOR/OUTDOOR LIVING  
IN JUNE 2027**

**First Major Museum Exhibition of Mull's Artwork to be Curated by Actor and Musician  
Steve Martin and Ann Philbin, Director Emerita of the Hammer Museum**

SANTA BARBARA, Calif. – June 9, 2026 – The Santa Barbara Museum of Art (SBMA) announced today that it is organizing the exhibition *Martin Mull: The Joys of Indoor/Outdoor Living*, curated by Steve Martin and Ann Philbin, set to run next year from June 27 to October 17, 2027.



Credit: Martin Mull, **October (Majorette)**, 2007. Oil on linen, 60 x 72 in. Collection of Claudia and Kevin Bright. © Estate of Martin Mull.

Martin Mull (1943–2024), well known as an actor, comedian, and musician, studied painting at the Rhode Island School of Design in 1967 and throughout his long entertainment career never stopped making and exhibiting his art. This will be the first major museum exhibition of Mull’s artwork in 20 years.

“We are excited to be presenting this exhibition of the work of Martin Mull at SBMA,” said Amada Cruz, Eichholz Foundation Director and CEO of the Santa Barbara Museum of Art. “For many, the exhibition will be a surprising introduction to this iconic actor's painting practice. The show is conceived by Ann Philbin, Director Emerita of the Hammer Museum, and Mull’s long-time friend and enthusiast Steve Martin. Philbin and Martin will co-curate in close collaboration with our own Chief Curator, James Glisson. The exhibition will be the centerpiece of the Museum’s summer program in 2027 and continues the SBMA legacy as a place of discovery and the unexpected.”



Credit: Martin Mull, **Shepherd**, 2006. Oil on linen, 72 x 60 in. Private Collection.  
© Estate of Martin Mull.

This presentation will feature Mull’s cool, surreal, and often dark takes on postwar American life. Extraordinarily skilled with a brush, Mull combined scenes drawn from his childhood in the Midwest and sourced from old photographs to create physically impossible situations. Women float above trains, streets transform into rivers with splashing swimmers, or tightrope walkers scale tiny bedrooms. Frequently set in the newly built suburbs of 1950s and 1960s, these paintings undercut the period’s consumerism and homogeneity, when economic growth fueled a baby boom and better standards of living. They depict an underbelly of tension and darkness behind the prosperity of postwar “white culture” in America.

“Martin Mull’s work as an artist will certainly be his primary legacy,” said Steve Martin. “After a full-time career in painting, in the last twenty years of his life with his technical gifts fully developed, Martin’s art coalesced into tight, narrative paintings of a peculiar nature. Combining surreal elements with family idioms, he formed his own worried portrayal of American life.”



Credit: Martin Mull, *Evidence*, 2003. Oil on linen, 60 1/8 x 72 1/16 in. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Gift of Steve Martin. © Estate of Martin Mull.

The time is right for a reevaluation of Mull’s career as an artist. Steve Martin, a serious art collector and writer about art, knew Mull for over 50 years and avidly followed his parallel career in the visual arts. Co-curator Ann Philbin, whose long record of bringing attention to emerging and under-known artists is well known, brings her expertise in works on paper, ensuring that the artist’s exquisite drawings will receive overdue attention. This exhibition reunites Martin and Philbin in a curatorial endeavor, as Martin co-curated the critically acclaimed show *The Idea of North: The Paintings of Lawren Harris* at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles in 2015.

“With the characteristic light touch we know from his comedy, Martin Mull explores the dystopic landscape of postwar suburban America,” observes Philbin. “His surreal and haunting images have a simmering—sometimes even sinister—tension and feel oddly resonant in this moment.”



Credit: Martin Mull, *Envy*, 2008, from the series “Seven Deadly Sins.” Oil on linen, 30 x 40 in. Private Collection. © Estate of Martin Mull.

In Mull’s paintings, something is amiss, storm clouds linger over paradise. This uncanniness takes on different forms. There are intimations of Old Testament vengeance and prophecy

breaking through into 20th-century America. In *Pride*, a man stands in front of a clapboard house in the countryside and holds two kid goats. The effect is menacing, even sacrificial, an impression confirmed by the painting being part of Mull's series *The Seven Deadly Sins*. Another work from the series, *Envy*, shows two women in an office perhaps from the 1940s stiffly posing for the camera. This generic photograph from an unknown location of now-anonymous women becomes a kernel for a psychodrama. Who envies whom, and what happens next? Still other paintings bring out the latent desires and fears that are suppressed in daily life. In *Winter/Summer* and *Spring/Fall*, nude women cavort in plain view against the background of an unassuming neighborhood—a disturbing fantasy or, equally probable, a nightmare of social embarrassment.



Credit: Martin Mull, *Band on the Run*, 2014. Oil on panel, 30 x 40 in. Private Collection. © Estate of Martin Mull.

Mull's art is much too clear-eyed for nostalgia, but it presumes we know about the nostalgia for the postwar era. Mull gives us a partial version of the racial and economic uniformity offered as the good life in the 1950s and 1960s before the paroxysms of the Civil Rights movement, the Vietnam protests, and the counterculture. Mull upsets any storybook picture of perfection—in his works, something is always off or, less subtly, blowing up in the background. This is where

his relevance lies for the deeply unsettled 2020s. The dry tone of Mull's paintings, the curiosity and matter-of-factness they display about the stresses and complexity of the world and the difficulty of neatly summing them up, make them excellent guides for navigating our current times with discerning eyes, free of dogmatism and cliché.

Presented in the main galleries of the museum (6,000 sq. ft), the exhibition will comprise more than 50 paintings and drawings, the majority of which are on loan from the artist's estate and the collections of Mull's friends and colleagues in the entertainment industry. Mull's artworks are held in the collections of museums across the U.S., including LACMA, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Walker Art Center, and the UC Irvine Orange County Museum of Art.

An exhibition catalogue, with texts by Steve Martin, Dave Hickey, James Glisson, and other contributors to be confirmed, will be designed by Purtill Family Business and published in June 2027 by DelMonico Books. [Images of more work here.](#)

### **About the Contributors**

**Martin Mull** was born in Chicago and lived with his family in North Ridgeville, Ohio, and, later, New Canaan, Connecticut. Mull broke into show business in the 1970s as a musical comedian. He gained notoriety in the 1976 nighttime absurdist comedy soap opera *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*, followed by the spin-off talk show parodies *Fernwood 2 Night* and *America 2 Night*. Over the years, he also appeared in *Rosanne*, *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*, and the Netflix-produced fourth season of *Arrested Development*. As a visual artist, Mull showed in group and solo exhibitions, and a book of his work, *Paintings, Drawings and Words*, was published in 1995. Later in life, he became a prolific writer. In April 2026 a collection of his short stories, *Life Sentences*, was released by Hard Cider Press. Written during his final years and described by critics as “clever, deftly funny, and acutely heartfelt,” these tales are about men similar to Mull pushed up against the intractable realities of aging and illness. Mull lived most of his life in Los Angeles with his wife and daughter.

**Steve Martin** is one of the most well-known talents in entertainment. His work as a comedian and actor has earned him an Academy Award, five Grammy Awards, an Emmy, the Mark Twain Award, and the Kennedy Center Honors. Martin began his career on *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* (1967–69), and in the mid-1970s he shone as a stand-up on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson* and NBC's *Saturday Night Live*. Martin's films are widely popular successes and include *The Jerk* (1979), *Planes, Trains & Automobiles* and *Roxanne* (both 1987), *Parenthood* (1989), *L.A. Story* and *Father of the Bride* (both 1991), and *Bowfinger* (1999). Martin is also an accomplished Grammy Award-winning, boundary-pushing bluegrass banjoist and

composer. His work as an author includes the novel *An Object of Beauty*, the play “Picasso at the Lapin Agile,” a collection of comic pieces, *Pure Drivel*, a bestselling novella, *Shopgirl*, and his memoir, *Born Standing Up*. Martin’s 2018 Netflix special with Martin Short titled “An Evening You Will Forget for the Rest of Your Life” received four Emmy nominations in 2018. Martin and Short also executive produce and star together in Hulu’s Emmy Award-winning series *Only Murders in the Building*, along with Selena Gomez.

**Ann Philbin** is Director Emerita of the Hammer Museum UCLA, Los Angeles, where she served from 1999 to 2026. Over more than two decades, she transformed the museum into one of the leading contemporary art institutions in the U.S., celebrated for its ambitious, artist-centered program and commitment to innovative and socially engaged work. Under Philbin’s leadership, the museum gained an international reputation for its exhibitions, public programs, and support of emerging and underrepresented artists, most notably through the creation of the Made in L.A. biennial, a landmark platform for artists working in the greater Los Angeles area. Between 1990 and 1999, Philbin held the post of Director and Chief Curator at the Drawing Center, in New York City.

**James Glisson** joined The Santa Barbara Museum of Art in 2020 as Curator of Contemporary Art and in 2024 he was named Chief Curator. Previously, he served as the Interim Virginia Steele Scott Chief Curator of American Art at The Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, California.

**Amada Cruz** has served as the Robert and Mercedes Eichholz Director and CEO of The Santa Barbara Museum of Art (SBMA) since October 2023. Cruz has a proven track record as a visionary leader and change agent throughout her illustrious career, championing inclusion, diversity, equity, and access, and empowering and inspiring Museum staff. During her two and-a-half years at SBMA she has advanced the Museum’s mission “to integrate art into the lives of people” through engaging the diverse communities of the Santa Barbara region and increasing the Museum’s local relevance and global visibility through its slate of exhibitions and robust educational programs. Under Cruz’s creative direction, and in collaboration with James Glisson, SBMA has mounted engaging exhibitions drawn from its collections of Greco-Roman antiquities, Asian art, and 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century American and French art as well as presenting work of contemporary artists. Cruz came to SBMA from the Seattle Art Museum, where she served as the Illsley Ball Nordstrom Director and CEO from 2019 to 2023. Over her 30-year career, Cruz also has held posts as the Director of the Phoenix Art Museum; Executive Director at San Antonio-based Artpace, an artist residency program; Director of the Center for Curatorial Studies Museum at Bard College; and Acting Chief Curator and Manilow Curator of Exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago.

## Works Checklist



Martin Mull, **October (Majorette)**, 2007. Oil on linen, 60 x 72 in. Collection of Claudia and Kevin Bright. © Estate of Martin Mull.



Martin Mull, **Cold War Entertainment**, 2005. Oil on linen, 60 x 144 in. Collection of Jennifer Tilly. © Estate of Martin Mull.



Martin Mull, **Shepherd**, 2006. Oil on linen, 72 x 60 in. Private Collection. © Estate of Martin Mull.



Martin Mull, **Boy and Sheep (Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man) or East Valley Incident**, 2004. Oil on linen, 48 x 72 in. Collection of Ted and Nicole Sarandos. © Estate of Martin Mull.



Martin Mull, ***Social Network***, 2011, from the series "Progress." Oil on linen, 42 x 32 in. Collection of Ted and Nicole Sarandos. © Estate of Martin Mull.



Martin Mull, ***The End of the Line***, 2014. Oil on linen, 60 x 45 ½ in. Private Collection. © Estate of Martin Mull.



Martin Mull, ***The Necessary Distraction of Science***, 2005. Oil on linen, 60 x 144 in. Collection of Robin and Daniel Greenspun. © Estate of Martin Mull.



Martin Mull, **Endgame**, 2014. Oil on linen, 60 x 50 in. Private Collection. © Estate of Martin Mull.



Martin Mull, **Band on the Run**, 2014. Oil on panel, 30 x 40 in. Private Collection. © Estate of Martin Mull.



Martin Mull, **Envy**, 2008, from the series "Seven Deadly Sins." Oil on linen, 30 x 40 in. Collection of Steve Martin. © Estate of Martin Mull.



Martin Mull, **Pride**, 2008, from the series "Seven Deadly Sins." Oil on linen, 30 x 40 in. Private Collection. © Estate of Martin Mull.



Martin Mull, ***Evidence***, 2003. Oil on linen, 60 1/8 x 72 1/16 in. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Gift of Steve Martin. © Estate of Martin Mull.

### About SBMA

The Santa Barbara Museum of Art is a dynamic cultural institution dedicated to integrating art into everyday life. Through internationally recognized exhibitions, thoughtful stewardship of a distinguished permanent collection, and immersive arts learning experiences for all ages, SBMA connects historic and contemporary perspectives in meaningful ways. We foster curiosity, dialogue, and creative exploration, serving as a welcoming civic space where art enriches individual lives and strengthens our community.

Location: 1130 State Street, Santa Barbara, CA.

Hours: Tuesday – Sunday, 11 AM – 5 PM | Free 1st Thursdays, 5 – 8 PM

Connect with SBMA Online: [sbma.net](http://sbma.net).

