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Skirball Cultural Center presents

***Away in the Catskills: Summers, Sour Cream, and Dirty Dancing*
by Marisa J. Futernick**

May 1—August 31, 2025

**An evocative, poignant, and joyful exploration of belonging,
assimilation, and loss**



DO THE WATUSI

"You see what she was wearing last night at the casino?"
"Where does she get off wearing a dress like that?"
"No one else thinks she is, the Jewish Martinis!"

Do the Watusi by Marisa J. Futernick, from the series Dirty Dancing, 2017.
Archival pigment print on Hahnemühle paper.

LOS ANGELES, CA—The Skirball Cultural Center announces ***Away in the Catskills: Summers, Sour Cream, and Dirty Dancing*** by **Marisa J. Futernick**, which sifts through the artist’s inherited and imagined memories of midcentury family vacations at Jewish resorts in New York’s Catskill Mountains, in the region known as the “Borscht Belt.” Through multimedia works that incorporate photography, text, and video, many created specifically for this exhibition and on view for the first time, Futernick juxtaposes her mother’s and grandmother’s strong feelings of Jewish community—bolstered by their experiences in the Catskills—with her own search for a deeper sense of belonging, inviting a conversation about memory, assimilation, and loss. The exhibition—the artist’s first solo presentation in a US museum—will be on view at the Skirball Cultural Center from May 1 to August 31, 2025.

“Marisa’s exhibition has particular resonance for the Skirball as it portrays a distinctly Jewish American story and invites others to consider how it might mirror their own family histories and experiences,” said Skirball Vice President and Museum Director **Sheri Bernstein**.

The Skirball’s Chief Curator, **Cate Thurston**, who also curated this exhibition, said, “While *Away in the Catskills* offers a playful look at American Jewish leisure experiences at midcentury, the exhibition is also infused with a profound sense of longing, as Marisa grapples with the loss of beloved family members, and the absence in her life of the kind of broader Jewish experience that was so formative and meaningful to her mother and grandmother. This further invites visitors to consider their own experiences as second- and third-generation Americans who may identify with this sense of cultural loss.”

“For many, recollections of the Catskills glow with nostalgia,” **Futernick** added. “My work celebrates this deep joyfulness while also questioning the more complicated aspects of this place, both past and present, and its reflection of generational changes, especially for women.”

The exhibition includes a series of fifteen prints, drawn from vintage color slides of the artist’s maternal family on vacation in the Catskills in the middle of the twentieth century. Futernick pairs these images with invented text and imagined dialogue peppered with Yiddish phrases, capturing the pleasure and freedom of summers in the Catskills, while posing questions about leisure, class, ethnic identity, and the lives of Jewish women. The series title, *Dirty Dancing*, is a reference to the famous music-laden 1987 movie set in the Catskills during the 1960s, which explores similar themes.

Two new works by Futernick expand the exhibition narrative. In *Bam, Crack, Rock, Pop*, the artist creates an installation from family objects and ephemera that captures what leisure time may have looked and felt like for Jewish vacationers. This work is coupled with a zine made by the artist that provides a deeper exploration of the objects in the installation. The meditative video work *I Never Learned to Play Mah Jongg*, 2025, is comprised of several hundred still photographs, weaving together vintage images of the artist’s family with new

photographs taken by Futernick during a recent research trip to the Catskills. A voiceover narration by the artist blends fictional dialogue and internal monologue to bring the stories of her mother and grandmother to life in the Catskills and beyond. This work captures the gulf between her mother's and grandmother's senses of Jewish identity and community and the artist's relative lack thereof, offering a poignant exploration of generational bonds.

The gallery also includes an annotated map of the Catskills based on Futernick's extensive archival and field research for the exhibition. The map features not only Jewish resorts and hotels but also those that welcomed other marginalized groups.

Visitors to the exhibition are invited to share their own favorite summertime memories and vacation stories on postcards featuring new photographs by Futernick, which can then be displayed in the gallery, taken home, or mailed to a loved one.

About Marisa J. Futernick

Marisa J. Futernick (b. 1980) is a Los Angeles-based interdisciplinary artist and writer who uses photography, text, painting, and video installation to examine the less visible social and political histories of the United States. Her recent solo exhibitions include *Concession* at Murray State University in Murray, Kentucky (2025); *Dirty Dancing: Revisiting the Catskills* at Brandeis University, Boston (2023); and *Popular Vote* at Glendale Community College, Los Angeles (2022). Futernick's work has been presented at numerous institutions, including the Whitechapel Gallery, London; Royal Academy of Arts, London; Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London; The British Library, London; Marjorie Barrick Museum of Art, University of Nevada, Las Vegas; Harvard University; and Yale University. She has published several artist's books, including *13 Presidents* (Slimvolume, 2016), *How I Taught Umberto Eco to Love the Bomb* (RA Editions and California Fever Press, 2015), and *The Watergate Complex* (Rice + Toye, 2015). Futernick holds a BA from Yale University and an MFA from the Royal Academy Schools, London, with additional studies at Goldsmiths College, London. She was born in Detroit, Michigan and raised in Hartford, Connecticut. After fifteen years in London, Futernick now lives in Los Angeles, where she is a core member of the activist group Artists 4 Democracy.

Donor Support

The exhibition *Away in the Catskills: Summers, Sour Cream, and Dirty Dancing* and its related educational programs at the Skirball Cultural Center are made possible with support from **U.S. Bank**. Media sponsorship provided by **70 Faces Media**.

About the Skirball

The Skirball Cultural Center is a place of meeting guided by the Jewish tradition of welcoming the stranger and inspired by the American democratic ideals of freedom and equality. We welcome people of all communities and generations to participate in cultural experiences that celebrate discovery and hope, foster human connections, and call upon us to help build a more just society.

Ticketing for Skirball Exhibitions

Tickets for the new spring exhibitions are now on sale. Admission to *Away in the Catskills:*

Summers, Sour Cream, and Dirty Dancing by Marisa J. Futernick and other exhibitions, including *Jack Kirby: Heroes and Humanity*, and *Diane von Furstenberg: Woman Before Fashion*: \$18 General; \$13 Seniors, Full-Time Students, and Children 2-17. Exhibitions are always free to Skirball Members and Children under 2.

Visiting the Skirball

The Skirball is located at 2701 N. Sepulveda Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90049. Museum hours: Tuesday–Friday, 12:00–5:00 pm; Saturday–Sunday, 10:00 am–5:00 pm; closed Mondays and holidays. Reservations are recommended for General Admission and the permanent exhibition Noah's Ark at the Skirball, which requires timed entry and is ticketed separately. For general information, the public may call (310) 440-4500 or visit skirball.org.