

For immediate release

## Mercer Union presents Danielle Dean's first institutional solo exhibition in Canada, featuring expansive video commission *Hemel*

**27 March 2024, Toronto, ON** - Mercer Union presents *Out of this World*, a solo exhibition by British-American artist **Danielle Dean**, running from **13 April to 15 June 2024**. The exhibition features *Hemel*, the artist's first major commission in Canada, produced by the gallery in partnership with [Spike Island](#), Bristol; and [The Vega Foundation](#). This is the seventh project in Mercer Union's *Artist First* commissioning platform, following Parastoo Anoushahpour, Faraz Anoushahpour, and Ryan Ferko's exhibition *Lovers' Wind* earlier this year.

Drawing from archival records and materials like film and advertising, Danielle Dean produces bold environments to ground and enliven her rhizomatic, research-based projects. Commissioned specifically for *Out of this World*, Dean's new film *Hemel* is situated in an expanded cinema experience, coexisting and in dialogue with props and backdrops that draw attention to elements of the film. Shot on 16mm, the film is an intimate portrait of Hemel Hempstead, where the artist was raised, and unfolds as a personal essay on the town's history as a planned community under the New Towns Act. Newly constructed after WWII, and located just outside of London, U.K., Hemel Hempstead was designed with a utopian vision in mind: imagining an exodus of residents from the city into the suburbs, where they could live, work, and attend school without ever having to leave. Factories and industrial areas were integrated into the town, serving as primary employers and economic drivers for the community. To this day, heavy and light industry remain significant employers in the town, consequently attracting immigration that has transformed the makeup of the town.

*Hemel* locates the town as a microcosm for exploring the issues of race, class, and contemporary conditions of labour—markers of Dean's research-focused practice, which also investigates historical representations in popular culture. The work's central reference is a 1957 sci-fi horror B-movie shot in town about the arrival of a non-human entity that infiltrates the minds of residents and endangers life with a toxic black slime. Playing a composite character based on herself and the movie's protagonist, Dean's extraordinary vantage brings together real and imagined worlds, both past and present.

"Inspired and resolute, *Hemel* introduces film to the material repertoire of Danielle Dean's practice," says **Aamna Muzaffar**, Assistant Curator of Mercer Union and the curator of the exhibition. "By exploring the embodied, intergenerational, and intercommunity tensions of race and class in Hemel Hempstead, Danielle's vision for the work foregrounds the power of testimony and leverages the visual language of cinema in a refreshing use of fiction."

**Theresa Wang**, Director & Curator of Mercer Union, adds: "*Hemel* offers a way of understanding how our familiar worlds are made and how we contend with those histories. For Mercer Union, the film asks important questions about the role of communities in times of societal change, and the underlying structures that support their creation."

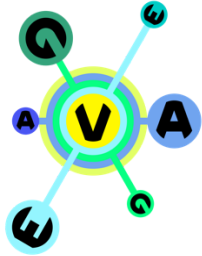
*Hemel's* presentation in Toronto extends relevant discussions to the Canadian context, where body and labour politics have likewise been shaped by tensions between single-industry towns and urban centres. The exhibition opening will be followed by a suite of discursive public programs presented in dialogue with Dean's project, including an artist talk on 14 April at 12:00pm in partnership with [Images Festival](#).

Images are available [here](#) for download.

**Danielle Dean** is an interdisciplinary artist whose work explores the geopolitical and material processes that colonize the mind and body. Dean developed commissioned projects with the Wellcome Collection in London (2023); and with Performa 21, New York (2021). She has presented exhibitions at ICA San Diego (2023); The Contemporary Austin, Texas (2023); Midnight moment, Times Square Arts, New York (2023); Tate Britain, London (2022); The Whitney Biennale, New York (2022); and Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (2018). Dean holds a Master of Fine Arts from California Institute of the Arts, and is an alumna of the Whitney Independent Study Program.

*Hemel* (2024) is co-commissioned by Mercer Union, Toronto; Spike Island, Bristol; and The Vega Foundation. The film is produced by LONO Studio and made possible with the generous support of Patrick Collins, Jill and Peter Kraus, Patrick and Daniela Schmitz-Morkramer, and an Anonymous Donor.

Presenting Support for Danielle Dean: *Out of this World* is provided by The Vega Foundation.



*Out of this World* is made possible with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts through the Arts Abroad Program. The exhibition is presented in partnership with Images Festival, Toronto.



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#### ABOUT MERCER UNION

Mercer Union is a non-profit, artist-run centre dedicated to commissioning and producing new works of contemporary art, and providing an engaging program that encourages critical inquiry and conversation. We champion ambitious exhibitions that empower diverse Canadian and international artists in formative and established stages of their practice.

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