

Exhibition: *Eileen Cowin: Between Panic and Paradise*

Dates: August 23, 2026–January 3, 2027

Location: BCAM, Level 2



(Image captions on page 4)

(Los Angeles, CA—July 16, 2026) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) presents *Eileen Cowin: Between Panic and Paradise*, the Los Angeles–based artist’s first major museum exhibition. Often blurring the distinction between nonfiction and fiction, Cowin’s provocative photography and video works have explored romance and confrontation, the personal and the political, and the monotony and mystery of daily life, for more than 50 years.

Between Panic and Paradise spotlights major themes across Cowin’s career, from early experimentation with material processes to the artist’s interest in text and cinematic conventions to new reflections on aging. The exhibition brings together more than 50 works from LACMA’s collection, the J. Paul Getty Museum, and the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, with multiple exposures, Polaroids, inkjet prints, and video, spanning from 1967 to 2025. Along with loans from the artist, this presentation includes a significant selection acquired by LACMA in 2014.

LACMA’s relationship with Cowin extends to the very origins of the museum’s photography exhibition program. In 1985, her *Family Docudrama* series was included in *New American Photography*, curated by Kathleen Gauss shortly after the formation of the Photography Department. That exhibition was part of a seven-part series that recognized the work of Cowin and her peers, marking the beginning of LACMA’s sustained engagement with the experimental ethos of Southern California photo-based art.

Between Panic and Paradise is curated by Rebecca Morse, curator of LACMA’s Wallis Annenberg Photography Department, and Britt Salvesen, curator and department head of the Wallis Annenberg Photography Department and the Prints

and Drawings Department, with Hope Flores, curatorial assistant of the Wallis Annenberg Photography Department.

“Between Panic and Paradise affords us the opportunity to celebrate the career of an artist who not only paved the way for experimental narrative photography in Los Angeles, but who also helped inaugurate the photography program at LACMA more than 40 years ago,” said Morse and Salvesen. “In some ways, it has been a long time coming, yet it is occurring at what feels like the ideal moment in our culture and world.”

“Eileen Cowin has expanded the possibilities of photography to engage lived experience with clarity, complexity, and imagination,” said Michael Govan, LACMA CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director. “LACMA is thrilled to present this major survey and to showcase the breadth of her work, including our substantial holdings.”

Exhibition Highlights

Between Panic and Paradise is organized by bodies of work from different periods to reveal the artist’s recurring thematic concerns.

The earliest works in the exhibition, spanning 1967–71, are transparency overlays in which the artist combines personal images of friends and domestic interiors with mass-media images as in *Chicago* (1971). In these works, Cowin plays with ideas of withholding information and creating a public persona as well as with a variety of material processes.

In the late 1970s, Cowin began building narratives between pairs of Polaroid images and accompanying text as seen in *Dive* (1977), where two images and their written definitions differentiate “dive” as a verb from “dive” as a noun. This important body of work led to her series *One Night Stand*, and then to her highly lauded series from the early 1980s, *Family Docudrama*. Appropriating the look of theater set designs and television soap operas, a couple engaged in domestic activities dominates the series visually. However, Cowin’s illustration of conditions, situations, and attendant emotions comes to the fore.

In the mid-1990s, Cowin began to make multi-part compositions, such as the collaborative piece *Don’t Ever Lie to Me* (1994), featuring text by novelist Louise Erdrich. At the same time, Cowin made her first video work, dealing with memory and interpretation, examining how one scenario has as many readings as there are readers. In the single-channel video *I Give You My Word* (2002), Cowin and her husband both tell the story of their first meeting where some details diverge and others overlap.

Something Out of the Ordinary (2006) is a colossal “self-portrait,” made up of 352 photographs of Cowin’s personal items. The abridged selection on view includes

report cards, datebooks, faculty IDs, keys, maps, gloves, and makeup—objects of everyday life that are simultaneously mundane and sentimental. Each item is photographed against a white background, which is a significant anomaly in the artist's oeuvre, implying a more scientific framing.

Fear Itself (2014), one of Cowin's most ambitious video works, comprises five monitors, each presenting an actor responding, either emotionally or physically, to their greatest fear. The work is set to music arranged by four composers who were given the same prompt.

In her most recent work, ***The Uninvited Visitor*** (2026), Cowin reflects on the passage of time and the experience of aging. Addressing mortality with candor and wit, she considers the body, memory, and the stories people construct to make sense of their lives. Speaking in the first person, she evokes the ways experience is filtered through an anxiety-tinged inner voice and how we search for palatable answers to life's most difficult questions. At the same time, she brings a lifetime of artistic practice to bear, revisiting familiar strategies—such as wordplay and personal anecdote—while experimenting with new ones, including animation.

Publication

The exhibition's accompanying publication features a foreword by Michael Govan, scholarly essays by Rebecca Morse and Britt Salvesen, and special text contributions from Louise Erdrich. Published by DelMonico Books • D.A.P., New York in collaboration with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

About Eileen Cowin

Eileen Cowin (b. New York 1947) is a Los Angeles–based artist known for photography, video, and mixed-media installations that draw on the language of mass media and art history and explore the relationship between narrative, fiction and non-fiction, memory and experience. Her work has been presented in over 35 solo exhibitions and in more than 200 group exhibitions. Cowin's work is included in major public and private collections including the Brooklyn Museum, the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and The Art Institute of Chicago.

Eileen Cowin: Between Panic and Paradise was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Generous support provided by Contemporary Projects Endowment Fund and the Claire Falkenstein Foundation.

All exhibitions at LACMA are underwritten by the LACMA Exhibition Fund. Major annual support is provided by The David & Meredith Kaplan Foundation, the Blanchard Nesbitt Family, Louise and Brad Edgerton, Edgerton Foundation, Julie Jaffe, Stan and Ann Kroenke, Ezra and Lauren Perlman, The Michael Silver Family, and Marietta Wu and Thomas Yamamoto, with generous annual funding from Mary and Daniel James, Bert Levy Fund, Alfred E. Mann Charities, and Kelsey Lee Offield.

About LACMA: Located on the Pacific Rim, LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection of 155,000 objects that illuminate 6,000 years of artistic expression across the globe. Committed to showcasing a multitude of art histories, LACMA exhibits and interprets works of art from new and unexpected points of view that are informed by the region's rich cultural heritage and diverse population. LACMA's spirit of experimentation is reflected in its work with artists, technologists, and thought leaders as well as in its regional, national, and global partnerships to share collections and programs, create pioneering initiatives, and engage new audiences.

Location: 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, 90036. lacma.org

Image captions: (Left) Eileen Cowin, *Untitled*, from the *One Night Stand* series, 1977–78, printed 1999, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Norman Starr, © Eileen Cowin, digital image courtesy Museum Associates/LACMA; (center) Eileen Cowin, *Untitled*, 1980–83, printed 1999, from the *Family Docudrama* series, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Norman Starr, © Eileen Cowin, digital image courtesy Museum Associates/LACMA; (right) Eileen Cowin, *The Uninvited Visitor*, 2025, printed 2026, © Eileen Cowin, courtesy of the artist

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