DENNIS DUGAN
LOCKS & BAGELS
OCTOBER 15–
NOVEMBER 25, 2026

M-ARCH PROJECTS is pleased to present Locks & Bagels, a solo exhibition of new and recent work by Dennis Dugan, on view October 15 through November 25, 2026. The exhibition brings together photography, prints, mixed-media works, found objects, and works incorporating text. It is also, in many ways, a return to New York—the city where Dugan first began making art.

Dugan's work as a photographer, printmaker, and mixed-media artist began in New York. While pursuing his career as an actor in the early 1970s, he photographed people and scenes he encountered on the streets, finding beauty in ordinary people, eccentric characters, and those living on the margins. He eventually began combining his photographs with printmaking, later incorporating glass, wood, metal, and found objects. He often works in multiples, using repetition to create a sense of movement and rhythm.

The exhibition takes its title from LOCKS & BAGELS, a work that brings together two things that could hardly be more familiar to a New Yorker. Locks and bagels are arranged in a repeated sequence, turning everyday objects into a visual joke as well as a study in shape, texture, and repetition. That unexpected pairing—finding humor and visual interest in the ordinary—is characteristic of Dugan's work.

New York appears more directly in 9th AVENUE, made from photographs Dugan took from the street in the early 1970s. The photographs of windows along 9th Avenue are arranged almost like laundry hanging from a line. Together, the individual windows become a portrait of the neighborhood and the city at a particular moment. The work captures something of the way New York reveals itself as you move through its streets: in fragments, details, and glimpses of other people's lives.

Photography remains central to Dugan's practice, but he rarely leaves an image alone. In OUT, THEY HAVE NAMES, and FIGURE IT OUT, photographs are repeated, cropped, framed, and combined with other images and materials. Some are playful; others have a more reflective quality, touching on memory, time, and the people who inhabit a city.

Language is another recurring element. In works including FONTS, IGNORE AMOS, TRAPEZE & ROLLERCOASTERS, KNOT NOT, and A IS FOR APPLE, words become part of the composition. Puns and familiar phrases are taken apart and put back together visually. Sometimes the joke is immediate; sometimes it takes a moment for the connection between the words and image to register.

Dugan's interest in timing and visual surprise has a natural connection to his career as an actor, writer, and director. He has directed such well-known comedies as Happy Gilmore, Beverly Hills Ninja, Big Daddy, The Benchwarmers, I Now Pronounce You Chuck & Larry, You Don't Mess with the Zohan, Grown Ups, Grown Ups 2, and Just Go with It. Comedy has been central to his filmmaking, and the quick visual joke, unexpected juxtaposition, repetition, physical movement, and sense of timing that shape his films also appear in his artwork.

As Dugan puts it:
"Everything I do, in art, in film, or in everyday life – I try to capture people's attention, involve them, surprise them, and, hopefully, make them laugh."

That approach is evident throughout Locks & Bagels. A photograph becomes a print; an everyday object becomes part of a composition; a familiar phrase

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becomes a visual punchline. But the work is not simply an extension of Dugan's comedy. His photographs, particularly those made on the streets of New York, come from a longstanding curiosity about people and the world around him. Humor and observation are often side by side.

Dugan's interest in people and in the way they move through the world has been a constant throughout his life. His family history includes a strong tradition of military service: his father, Charles, served as a staff sergeant in the U.S. Army during World War II, while his wife's father was a West Point graduate who served as a captain and pilot in the Air Force. He met her mother, an Army nurse, during World War II. This history sits alongside Dugan's own life in the arts, where observation, performance, and an awareness of an audience have remained central.

Dugan's first solo exhibition, Monkeys & Typewriters, was held at SHOCKBOXX in Hermosa Beach, California, in 2018. His practice has continued to move freely between photography, printmaking, sculpture, language, and found materials.

For Dugan, New York was where this way of looking began. Locks & Bagels brings that early experience into the present, drawing on the city's people, streets, objects, language, and humor. The result is both a continuation of Dugan's longstanding practice and a personal return to the city where it all started.

DENNIS DUGAN: Locks & Bagels will be on view at M-ARCH PROJECTS Tribeca from October 15 through November 25, 2026.
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