

*SUCKER*, Jillian Medford's fourth album as IAN SWEET, is a massive leap forward for the songwriter and pop auteur. Perfectly merging her recently showcased pop sensibilities with the widescreen indie rock that she first made her name on, *SUCKER* is both sumptuous and fully realized, as Medford digs her hands into tough questions about looking ahead and personal growth. Her musical voice has only become more unique amidst an ever-growing field, and *SUCKER* is proof positive that even with a considerable discography in her arsenal, Medford is just getting started.

*SUCKER* follows Medford's 2021 breakthrough and Polyvinyl debut *Show Me How You Disappear*, which chronicled her time spent in an intensive outpatient program that included six hours of group therapy a day. "*Show Me How You Disappear* was written during a really difficult period of my life after reckoning with a mental health crisis," she explains. "I survived that very moment in my life through writing that record, and the extreme urgency to heal is reflected in the songwriting. With *SUCKER*, I felt more capable to take my time and experiment without being totally afraid of the outcome. It wasn't life or death—it was just life, and I was lucky to be living it."

Work on the new album started in the fall of 2022; feeling newly untethered in the wake of a "COVID relationship" that had recently come to pass, Medford took a cross-country road trip from her L.A. home to an artist residency at The Outlier Inn – a New York Catskills based recording studio where she took up residence to demo and produce *SUCKER* in full. "I was feeling very stuck in L.A. and was trying to get comfortable with spending more time alone again," she recalls about her hermetic confines, which included 24-hour studio access to create in an unfettered fashion. "I went there not knowing exactly what I wanted to do or make, but I knew I wanted to explore and get out of my comfort zone. I forced myself to make things on the spot, in the moment and not overthink it too much."

Feeling inspired, Medford brought her demos to life with co-producers Alex Craig (Binki, Claud) and Strange Ranger's Isaac Eiger along with mixing engineer Al Carlson (St. Vincent, Jessica Pratt), all of whom helped shape *SUCKER* into its current form—a record that reconciles Medford's beginnings with where she's landed at this current moment. "I revisited the reasons why I started playing music to begin with," she explains. "I wanted to get more personal and showcase a more confident side musically and lyrically. I've always been very doubtful about my own work and don't often share it with a lot of people. But there was something about this record where I felt very secure with what I was writing about and wanted everyone to hear."

The result: ten songs that count as the strongest Medford's ever put to tape, bringing to mind the guitar heroics of indie rock legends Broken Social Scene, the searing hooks of '90s alternative rock, Leslie Feist's dusky songwriting, and shoegaze's warmth. The quietly explosive title track is practically a miniature epic, with oceanic guitars rippling behind Medford's tactile vocals, while first single "Your Spit" swerves and sways with a distinctly pop gait that packs a punch.

"Sometimes I get imposter syndrome when I write poppier music, because of who people assume I actually am as a musician, and where they'd like me to fit in in the 'indie' space," she says while talking about the song's sound as well as navigating the expectations that come with being boxed in genre-wise. "I think the indie rock world really feeds off trauma. If you're not going through something terrible, people are like, 'What's the story?' That's fucked me up a bit, but it's a really beautiful thing when you're feeling healthy and it shows in your music, too — and I don't want to be forced into any narrative."

Indeed, *SUCKER* showcases Medford's ability to push herself into previously unexplored territory: The arpeggiated and dusky beauty of "Emergency Contact" belies the songs' biting sarcasm, as Medford reflects on codependency and a recent breakup that forced her to recognize destructive patterns she

willingly—and sometimes, purposefully—falls into in spite of her best interests. “There’s some sneering energy to it, as I’m trying to convince myself that I didn’t really want what I had lost anyway,” she says. Then there’s the surging and anthemic “Smoking Again,” which Medford describes with a laugh as “pretty dramatic” before breaking down the song’s all-too-relatable themes: “I often put myself in situations that I know won’t be beneficial to me, just to get a rise out of myself. Almost like setting up obstacles just to see if I could overcome them.”

The disorienting sensation of falling in love and staying in love appears throughout *SUCKER*, but this isn’t a break up album so much as it is a reclamation album. “I’ve put a lot of pressure on myself over the years, and with this record I think the intention was to let go and put more trust in myself,” Medford states while discussing how this splendid album represents where she’s at as an artist—and *SUCKER* feels like the culmination of her personal and professional accomplishments so far, as well as the first step in a bold and exciting new future for IAN SWEET as a whole.