

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Deborah Roberts: I have something to tell you

9 June–23 July 2022

Private view:
Wednesday 8 June, 6–8pm

Gallery hours:
Tuesday–Friday, 10am–6pm
Saturday, 11am–5pm



Stephen Friedman Gallery is pleased to present **Deborah Roberts'** second solo exhibition at the gallery, 'I have something to tell you'.

The show features new paintings dominated by black backgrounds and some of the largest works the artist has ever made. Simultaneously powerful and vulnerable, heroic and insecure, Roberts' subjects reveal how systemic racism, gender politics and western beauty standards shape the way Black children grow up. Amongst the references that inform the series are prominent incidents of racism in the UK, including the recent case of Child Q.

By mastering collage – a medium used since the early twentieth century to challenge socio-political norms – Roberts exposes the inequities and violence of contemporary society. Composing works using found materials from the internet, literature and photographs, the artist deconstructs stereotypes perpetuated by mainstream visual culture. Roberts juxtaposes these with hand-painted details, combining a range of skin tones, facial features, hairstyles and clothes to embrace an expansive view of Black identity.

Roberts continues her investigation into the psychological burden that Black children bear by highlighting their lack of visibility. Subtle variations in skin tone render Roberts' figures barely discernible, drawing the viewer in closer to acknowledge their presence. This is emphasised by her sparse use of line, alluding to the chalk outlines drawn around bodies in crime scenes.

Roberts also draws upon Western art history to critique current racial injustices. The twisted poses of her figures recall Egon Schiele's contorted human forms, addressing the violence inflicted on Black individuals forcibly arrested by the police. Roberts references Picasso's Black Period and his reluctance to acknowledge the influence of African art on his own practice. She instead champions the so-called 'primitive' African designs appropriated by Picasso, letting them stand out in the clothes worn by several of the children.

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Contact Us

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Social Media

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Running concurrently with Roberts' exhibition at the gallery is a group show that explores the notion of collage entitled 'From Near and Far' co-curated by Roberts and Katy Hessel, founder of The Great Women Artists podcast. The presentation includes new and historical works by 16 female artists including Jordan Casteel, Kenturah Davis, Lubaina Himid, Hudzanai-Violet Hawami, Anne Rothenstein, Betye Saar, Amy Sherald and Mickalene Thomas amongst many others.

A major touring solo exhibition of Roberts' work is currently on view at Art + Practice in collaboration with California African American Museum, Los Angeles. The artist has a forthcoming two-person show with Benny Andrews at McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, Texas later this year.

Deborah Roberts

Deborah Roberts was born in Austin, Texas, USA in 1962 where she continues to live and work.

Roberts' first institutional presentation in the UK took place in October 2021 at Bluecoat, Liverpool. She exhibited in group projects at Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and Scottish National Galleries, UK in 2021. The artist's major touring solo exhibition 'I'm' opened at The Contemporary Austin, Texas in January 2021, following the installation of her first outdoor public mural there in September 2020.

Roberts' work is held in collections including Scottish National Galleries, Edinburgh, UK/ American Patrons of the National Library and Galleries of Scotland; Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, Texas; Block Museum of Art, Evanston, Illinois; Brooklyn Museum, New York; Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas; Dallas Museum of Art, Texas; Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery, Saratoga Springs, New York; He Art Museum, Guangdong, China; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington DC; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, Massachusetts; Legacy Museum, Montgomery, Alabama; Manchester Art Gallery, England; Montclair Art Museum, New Jersey; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts; Pérez Art Museum Miami, Florida; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, California; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Virginia and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

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Stephen Friedman Gallery was founded in 1995 with a focus on representing emerging and established artists from around the world. Since its inauguration, it has been based in Mayfair, London, on Old Burlington Street. The gallery now has three spaces in which solo and group exhibitions are presented throughout the year, while additional works can be viewed by appointment in private rooms and office spaces. A landscaped private garden offers the option to exhibit outdoor sculpture.