

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Kenturah Davis:
clouds

5–6 Cork Street
London
W1S 3LQ

Friday 31 May –
Saturday 20 July 2024

Opening:
Friday 31 May, 6–8pm

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



Stephen Friedman Gallery is pleased to present *clouds*, Kenturah Davis' debut solo exhibition in the UK. The drawing series that comprise this show are united by a common text—an essay penned by Davis that explores perception as an expressive and existential state. The artist's writing flows through themes of dance, African diaspora, musical notation, literature, Egyptian hieroglyphs, and theoretical physics, invoking the guiding voices of the choreographer Katherine Dunham, composer Florence B. Price, theorist Saidiya Hartman, author Toni Morrison, and physicist Carlo Rovelli. Each of Davis' bodies of work is a study in movement that translates photographs taken by the artist. Though composed on a flat page, Davis recognises her drawings as dimensional vessels, planes where she charts, layers, and reimagines significance.

Two of Davis' series are portrait-based: the first, grouped drawings of figures in various postures. During photo shoots for these studies, the artist invited Black women to come to her studio and improvise movement, capturing their gestures with long-exposure photographs resulting in kinetic, unbound physiques. Drawing closer to the work, portions of Davis' essay emerge, detailing the extraordinary careers of Katherine Dunham and Florence B. Price, two trailblazing Black creatives of the twentieth century who used art to pursue individual and societal metamorphosis. As a choreographer, Dunham infused dance with her background in anthropology, using her body as a vehicle to express radical ideas about space, time, and diaspora. As the first Black female musician to compose for a national symphony orchestra, Price arranged music to navigate states of instability, transition, and freedom—such as in her rediscovered piece *Clouds*.

Davis' second portrait series features single drawings of figures framed with recessed mantles that display vessels of various proportions. Designed by the artist and carved by her partner, each of these sculptures was crafted from one of two types of wood: ebony from Ghana, where the artist lived for many years, and ash from Los Angeles, sourced from a tree at her home. These multimedia works can be likened to her series *Text(tiles)*, multi-panel artworks that juxtapose portraits with woven fabrics, underscoring the etymological root of text from the Latin word “to weave.” Inserting a physical vessel into the image plane, she encourages her audience to comprehend that each dimension of the work has the capacity to hold meaning—literally and figuratively.

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Contact Us

For press enquiries please contact:
press@stephenfriedman.com

For sales enquiries please contact:
sales@stephenfriedman.com

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The third series is a group of twelve drawings based on Davis' snapshots of clouds. Building on the cloud as a symbolic muse for choreography and composition, she considers the natural formation through the lens of quantum physics. As a billowing mass made up of atomic particles, a cloud shifts between states of being solid, liquid, and gas—an element that fluctuates between the micro and macro. Drawing from Rovelli's writings on the relativity of time, Davis' compositions encourage her audience to question systems of artistry, science, philosophy, history, race, and gender for which meaning is assigned, not inherent. Welcoming shifting observations and evolving thoughts, her text and image reject an explicit reading.

For each work, Davis arranges the text in a new formation to highlight different passages, incising the sculptural passages into a polymer plate, then embossing them onto paper with an etching press. She scores each parchment with a grid - rendering the photograph section by section - using sharpened charcoal pencils for portrait works and powdered indigo pigments for cloud works. With an exacting and meticulous hand, she creates a surface that resembles an ancient rubbing, emphasising how light and dark shadows reveal - rather than conceal - essential ideas within her essay. Through the blurred focus of the body, the soft edges of the cloud, and the swelling surface of the vessel, Davis balances the rigid with the fluid; the frame and grid for each serve as structured systems wherein physical and meteorological bodies roam freely.

Notes to editors

Kenturah Davis

Kenturah Davis was born in 1980 in Los Angeles, California. She earned her BA from Occidental College in Los Angeles and an MFA from Yale University School of Art in New Haven, Connecticut. She has had several notable solo exhibitions in recent years including 'Dark Illumination', Oxy Arts, Los Angeles, California (2023); 'Apropos of Air', Matthew Brown Gallery, Los Angeles, California (2021); '(A)Float, (A)Fall, (A)Dance, (A)Death', Jeffery Deitch Gallery, New York, New York (2021); 'Everything that Cannot Be Known', SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah, Georgia (2020); and 'Blur in the Interest of Precision', Matthew Brown Gallery, Los Angeles, California (2019).

Her work is represented in numerous collections including the Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, Texas; Brooklyn Museum, New York, New York; Guggenheim Museum, New York, New York; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, California; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, Massachusetts; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, California; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, California; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas; Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York; Perez Art Museum, Miami, Florida; Rubell Family Collection; National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian, Washington D.C.; Studio Museum, New York, New York; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

The artist is represented by Matthew Brown Gallery in Los Angeles. Kenturah Davis lives and works between Los Angeles, United States and Accra, Ghana.

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Stephen Friedman Gallery is a contemporary art gallery that was founded in 1995 with a focus on representing exceptional artists from around the world. Since its inauguration, the gallery has been based in Mayfair, London. In October 2023, the gallery expanded and relocated to Cork Street. In November 2023, the gallery opened its first location outside the UK at 54 Franklin Street in Tribeca, New York.