

Somaya Critchlow

Pastels

17 September–14 November 2026

Maximillian William is pleased to present a new collection of eight soft-pastels on paper by Somaya Critchlow. The works in this presentation show Critchlow's ongoing exploration of the materiality of pigment, with the medium allowing for a fragmentation and softening of her characteristically alluring and at times uncanny portraits. In these small-scale images, women are shown in gentle interiors or indefinite spaces, their poses and expressions adding to a language that feels at home within the painter's oeuvre.

Pastels continues a symbolic thread from *The Chamber*, Critchlow's solo exhibition at Dulwich Picture Gallery in 2025. The works in this presentation hold onto the same mixture of suspense and serenity: a sort of active silence that is only possible at the tail-end of an echo. Familiar themes, such as bridal garments, reappear. There's a sense of the Dutch/Flemish *tronie* about the women present, character studies of expression similar to the small paintings of peasants and farmers by Teniers the Younger. And yet, in both form and atmosphere, the images in *Pastels* build directly on a turn towards realism established in *The Chamber*.

In one pastel, a figure sits on a chair with hands on her knees and her neck angled back. The warmth of a Bordeaux red wall behind her body heightens its contrast with the discreet rendering of her expression. In another, a woman wearing a translucent silk shirt leans away from us as she looks over her shoulder, the soft furnishings in front of her form an almost abstract shape; her expression is somewhat brazen, and her thumb is as much a sensual implication as it is suggestive of an insult made famous in the opening scene of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. In other pastels there is a touching tranquillity, as if softened by memory. Here we find an ease that seems to eschew ambiguity altogether, instead delighting in the pure appreciation of form.

Somaya Critchlow (b. 1993, London) lives and works in London. She obtained her BA in painting at the University of Brighton before joining The Royal Drawing School, where she earned a Postgraduate Diploma in 2017.

In February 2025, Critchlow opened her first institutional solo show in the UK: *The Chamber* at Dulwich Picture Gallery, London. Recent solo exhibitions include *Triple Threat*, curated by Hilton Als at Maximillian William, London (2024); *Afternoon's Darkness* at Maximillian William, London (2022); and *Blow-Up* at Galerie Gregor Staiger, Zürich (2021). In April 2023, *Somaya Critchlow: Paintings and Drawings*, the artist's first institutional show in North America, opened at The FLAG Art Foundation in New York. Group exhibitions include *The Vandals*, Gladstone, New York, US (2026); *Lord Arthur Saville's Crime*, Sadie Coles HQ, London, UK (2026); *The Woman Question: 1550-2025*, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, Warsaw, PL (2026); *Postures: Jean Rhys in the Modern World*, curated by Hilton Als, Michael Werner Gallery, London, UK (2026); *The Power of Drawing*, The Royal Drawing School, London, UK (2026). Critchlow's work is held in public collections including, The Morgan Library & Museum, New York; LACMA, Los Angeles; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; the British Museum, London; The Box, Plymouth; and the Arts Council Collection, London, among others.