

REVIVAL  
Curated by Giulia Civardi  
20 March – 10 May 2025

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Every summer in London, my neighbours gathered around monumental sound systems, listening to dub music until late. The reverberations from the garden created a hypnotic and meditative soundscape that connected me to my desires, the space and time I inhabited. When dub first came out, people were astonished. Emerging in Jamaica in the late 1960s and arriving in cinemas and homes turned into dance halls across the UK, this way of making music was filled with echoes and repetitions. The making-process involved copying and manipulating vocal or instrumental fragments of existing sound pieces onto basslines and into new hybrid tracks. Dub influenced many subsequent music genres – from electronica to hip-hop, post-punk and ambient rock – transcending temporal and cultural boundaries. In addition to creating immersive sonic environments, this music formed a space for collective resistance, speaking of experiences where people, especially of African Caribbean descent and of mixed backgrounds, were separated from their places of origin. Even today, these sounds convey a sense of community and spiritual transformation, bringing people home. If we consider that the word 'dub' was used for the first time in a filmic context to merge images and voices, how could this rhythm manifest visually?

Starting from the structure of dub music, which speaks of rupture and repair, something that leaves and returns, the exhibition observes through the works on paper and paintings of Denzil Forrester and Kate Spencer Stewart and the sculptures of Phoebe Collings-James, repeated visual gestures, felt and revised under new visual forms. The artists have in common strong connections with music, not only dub, but also genres that emerged from this style. They also share a process of reinterpretation of art historical and socio-political traditions, which still shape contemporary art and help us understand our positions as subjects in continuous formation. As sociologist Stuart Hall affirms, it is by 'detouring' through pasts that we can produce ourselves anew as subjects. "It is therefore not a question of what our traditions make of us, so much as what we make of our traditions. [...] Culture is not a matter of ontology, of being, but of becoming".

For over thirty years, Denzil Forrester (b. 1956, Grenada; lives in Cornwall, UK) has captured scenes from nightclubs and dance halls. Drawing in the dark with pastels and charcoal, without seeing clearly what he is doing, Forrester records on paper the rhythmic movements of people, sensing their joy and sadness, their vigour and desire. He then returns to the studio in the morning to continue painting. This deep, almost transcendental connection with music emerges in his practice through constant engagement with dub. As Denzil attests, 'Dub music is like a noise that intoxicates you and gets into your system. You're there, mesmerised, and it can take about half an hour to get used to this music. And after you get used to it, oh...'. This rhythmic experience emerges in his paintings and works on paper, both thematically and formally. As in the repetitive baselines of dub tracks, suddenly interrupted by echoing noises and booms, in the painting *Dub Dance* (1993), the colours move on different frequencies and gradations, following a harmony first, then becoming strong and flashing. The light is fragmented as if reflected by a disco ball, breaking bodies into distorted and enchanting shapes. The close-up, fluid figures in *Boom Boom Echoes* (2023) invite the viewer to be part of the scene. Although the works document a historical and cultural scenario of dance halls and music scenes from the eighties in London, these are not nostalgic representations stuck in that period. His works embody the energy of people who continue to gather, mixing stories and cultures. Forrester's rich oeuvre, infused with sound systems, purple lights and electric bodies, becomes a visual universe carrying traces of intergenerational stories and hybrid identities echoing over time.

With an interest in non-linear narrative and symbolic language, Phoebe Collings-James (b. 1987, London, UK; lives in London, UK) incorporates sound into her sculptural practice for its spiritual and transformative power. In *Joy comes with the morning* [V3], 2025 – a sound installation composed of a ceramic bell as an amplifier and a water vessel – the sounds of the sea and a metropolis blend with voices reciting poetry, and noises of trumpets and drums. Some of the recordings taken from the film *Our Song* (Jim McKay, 2000) tell the story of young girls from Brooklyn who find a sense of belonging and expression by playing musical instruments in a community band. While the sounds of wind instruments and the sculpture of a trombone recall parts of the body related to breathing, the sonic waves mixed with those of water evoke a sense of fluidity. By reinterpreting the tradition of sound systems through clay, Collings-James creates a soundscape to feel the malleability of bodies, activating different emotional processes. Musical references infuse her sculptural practice with revolutionary potential. The artist draws inspiration from Rastafarian and Jamaican music, from artists such as Midnite and Ranking Anne and Barrington Levy, and other figures as examples of protest and resistance. A group of ceramic sculptures presents different interpretations of the infidel: an archetypal character that symbolises dissent and divergence from traditional dogmatic patterns, embracing its own sense of spirituality. The rounded shapes recall abstract bodies that escape consolidated positions while creating new characters that bear ancient signs: the inscriptions on the surface of the sculptures are realised with sgraffito – a technique used in sixteenth century Italian architecture and traditional African ceramics, as well as in Babylonian and Sumerian cuneiform clay tablets. By reviving ancient forms of communication while acknowledging Caribbean resistance through the materiality of clay, Collings-James challenges Eurocentric ways of constructing knowledge, giving form to a transcultural language, a new material memory.

Kate Spencer Stewart's (b. 1984, Phoenix, AZ, US; lives in Los Angeles, US) minimal paintings depict everything and nothing. It is almost impossible to see them in photographs. We must walk around them, lower our eyes or move them in various ways to discover the details. The surface transforms with light and movement, creating voids, flashes, optical mixes, and moments of suspense. If observed long enough, the colours become intoxicating and hallucinatory; their shadow imprints on the retina like white noise in space, setting in motion a process of transcendence similar to that caused by ambient music and drone. Stewart grew up playing different instruments including the organ, piano, sax, accordion, and bass. Before exhibiting in galleries, her paintings were presented in music venues. Stewart's process involves layering brush strokes and repetitive marks over underpainting, often in contrast to the final layer. The works echo the minimalist tradition of 'color field', particularly Ad Reinhardt's signature black paintings, where colour became a subject in and of itself. Stewart's paintings become visualisations rather than representations; they are not only objects to look at, but to look with. Gazing intently at the paintings may reveal a multitude of stories. *Frag* (2025) recalls the hedonistic influences of Fragonard's Rococo; *Troche* (2025), a pictorial study of the pigment Rose Madder, derived from madder roots and highly sensitive to light, conjures Egyptian tombs, the ruins of Pompeii, and J.M.W. Turner's eerie landscapes. Other 'black studies' evoke voids and theatrical backdrops. As the artist asks: 'Why can't we see the world as pure matter, pure form, pure gesture? [...] Is it language that holds us back?'

Giulia Civardi



REVIVAL, 2025, with works by  
Phoebe Collings-James, Denzil Forrester, and Kate Spencer Stewart  
Curated by Giulia Civardi, exhibition view at Francesca Minini, Milan  
Ph. Andrea Rossetti





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Artworks

# DENZIL FORRESTER

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**Denzil Forrester**  
Boom Boom Echoes, 2023  
Oil on canvas  
203 x 274.5 cm

Copyright Denzil Forrester.  
Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London and New York. Photo by Todd-White Art Photography.



**'Boom Boom Echoes'** is a dynamic work by British-Grenadian artist Denzil Forrester, which captures a crowd of revellers moving in unison to the beat of the music. Animated by flashes of green and red, the painting embodies Forrester's signature depictions of reggae and dub nightclubs – a subject that has endured throughout four decades of his practice. The painting is informed by the artist's gestural sketches, made in-situ in East London's clubs in the 1980s. Bathed in a wash of purple, the painting is imbued with a hallucinatory atmosphere which reflects the power of the DJ as Forrester saw him, "a witch doctor: the unifier of all the people in the space, giving energy and strength to all at the same time."

Dub emerged at about the time Forrester moved from Grenada to Stoke Newington, London in 1967 and the music became vital to his life and practice. The artist explains, "you probably wouldn't see a lot of your friends or family living in London", so it was dub that "rekindled our community spirit". Working rapidly in the semi-darkness, Forrester would allow each drawing only the length of a record, before moving on to the next in sync with the changing soundtrack. Back at his studio the artist transposes these frenetic sketches into painterly compositions, using angular brushstrokes that pulse with the rhythm of the music.





**Denzil Forrester**  
Dub Dance, 1993  
Oil on board  
123.2 x 185 cm

Copyright Denzil Forrester.  
Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London and New York. Photo by Mark Blower.



An explosion of movement, colour, energy and pattern dances across the canvas in Denzil Forrester's '**Dub Dance**'. The radial composition gives order to the frenetic scene that depicts five characters engaging in varying activities, surrounded by colourful patterns and strokes indicating music and movement. Forrester explains, "I just wanted to draw movement, action and expression. I was interested in the energy of the crowd, particular dance movements and what the clubbers wore. In these clubs, city life is recreated in essence: sounds, lights, police sirens, bodies pushing and swaying in a smoke-filled room." The dynamic sets of legendary dub DJ Jah Shaka and his roving sound system had a formative influence on the development of Forrester's work at the time.

The varied strokes found in 'Dub Dance' were inspired by Forrester's interest in German Expressionism, sparked during his time at the Royal College of Art in the early 1980s, as noted by Sam Thorne, Director of Nottingham Contemporary. Peter Doig has also reflected on the important influence of German Expressionism on young painters such as himself and Forrester in the 1980s, following the major retrospectives of Max Beckmann and Phillip Guston and a survey show of a new generation of American and German artists working in the Expressionist tradition held at the Royal Academy of Arts, London in 1981.

Forrester's treatment of colour is notably intense in 'Dub Dance' and the artist has talked of his early obsession with master colourists such as Monet and Cézanne, recalling, "...in 1979 I was in love with Monet. I did my degree at Central Art School and we'd literally go to Paris three or four times a year - you'd go see the Monets and come back to your studio. He and Cézanne made a big impression on me. When I started, I was quite cubistic, but the cubists got their stuff from Africa anyway." Forrester's debt to early cubism is also revealed in his treatment of space, as he toys with perspectival depth to generate movement in this work.



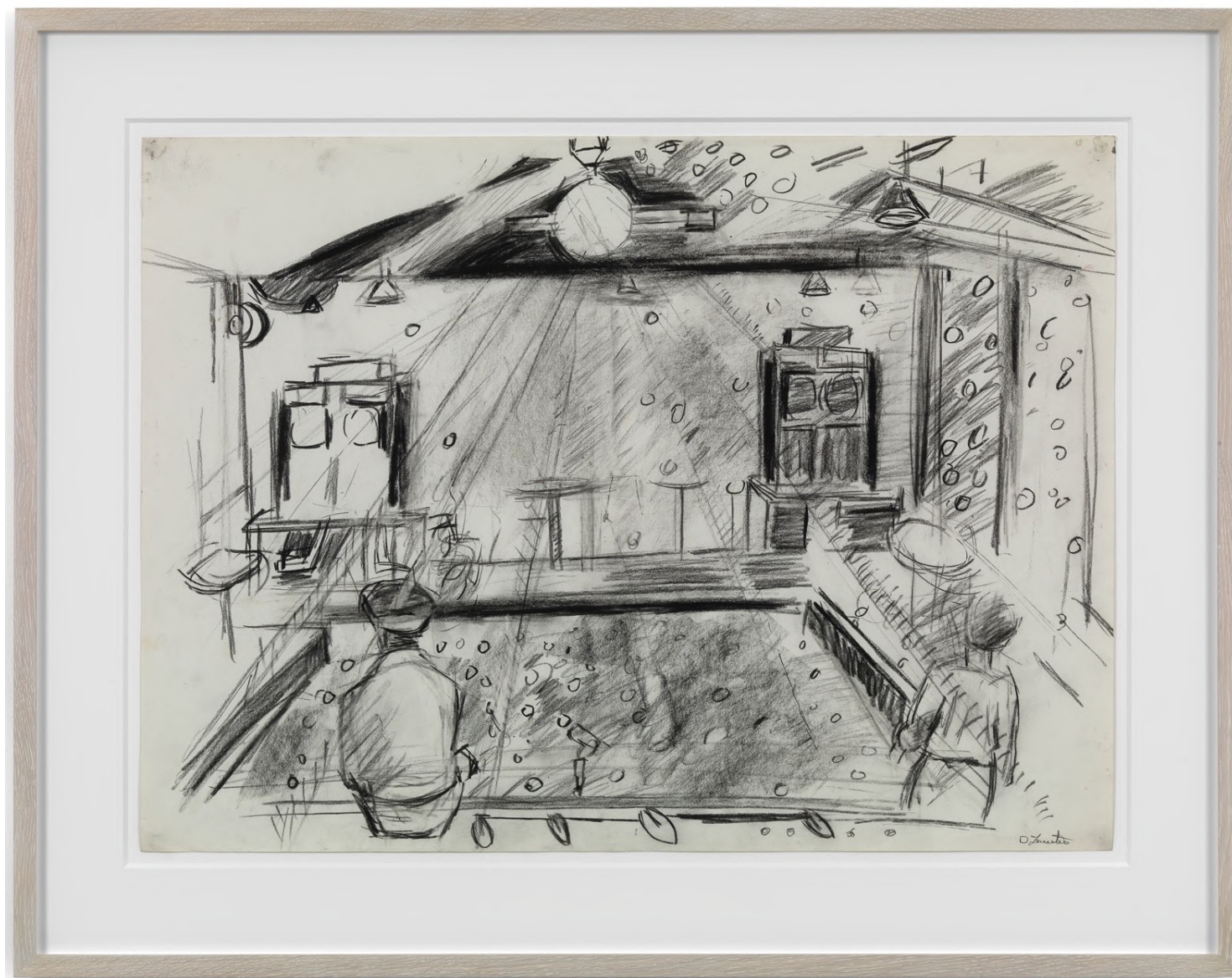
**Denzil Forrester**  
Untitled, 2019  
Charcoal and pastel on paper  
59.5 x 84cm. Framed: 77.7 x 102.5cm

Copyright Denzil Forrester.  
Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London and New York. Photo by Todd-White Art Photography.



This dynamic drawing by Denzil Forrester was created in Kingston, Jamaica, where the British- Grenadian artist spent a two-week residency in the spring of 2019. Visiting for the first time, he discovered that its dub music scene was still flourishing and engaged in sketching the city's nightclubs. Dub originated in Kingston at about the time Forrester moved from Grenada to live in East London in 1967. In the late 1970s, he started regularly sketching in-situ at 'blues' clubs where his local West-Indian community gathered. Forrester explains, "you probably wouldn't see a lot of your friends or family living in London", so it was dub and reggae music that "rekindled our community spirit". In this body of work, Forrester connects with core of his practice: "I'm interested in gesture as movement, action and expression," he explains. "That's why I still love going to nightclubs."

Forrester's drawings are typically quick sketches, made quasi-blind on dark, bustling dance floors. This example captures a crowd of jostling revellers moving in unison to the beat of the music. The artist's angular, gestural technique captures the rhythmic energy of the music. Sam Thorne, Director of Nottingham Contemporary, describes the importance of these in-situ drawings to the artist's larger, painterly compositions. "On a single night, [Forrester] might make as many as a dozen drawings, each done quickly, in the time it took for a record to be played. Four or five minutes tops". "When I came to make the paintings, I had the physical experience of having been there in the club. The main thing was being there," Forrester explained.



**Denzil Forrester**  
Night Strobe, 1984  
Pencil and compressed charcoal on paper  
56 x 76cm. Framed: 75.4 x 95.4cm

Copyright Denzil Forrester.  
Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London and New York. Photo by Todd-White Art Photography.

Rendered in varied strokes of pigment, '**Night Strobe**' is an early example of Denzil Forrester's depictions of dance halls, a subject that has endured throughout four decades of his practice. Forrester explains, "In 1980, I started going to all-night 'blues' clubs. The music playing in these clubs was reggae which generated particular dance movements and specialised clothing, all of which play an important part in my painting". Whilst Forrester's painting of the following year 'Night Strobe', reverberates with energy, the disco ball's reflected light in this sketch falls on empty, static planes. Perched in two corners of a quietly symmetrical composition, the figures who inhabit this tranquil work seem absorbed in thought.

Eddie Chambers explains that "one of the most important features of [Denzil] Forrester's work from the 1980s is the way in which, inadvertently perhaps, it has created a series of historical documents related to the making of Black Britain. The late 1970s and early 1980s saw the burgeoning of the British sound system: mobile, countercultural reggae enterprises characterised by dub music, MCs, DJs, and fiercely partisan followings of young Black people, primarily males. [...] Some of that which Forrester observed was perhaps what we might expect – exuberant dancing, rhythmic movement – but in his sketches the artist also captured people playing dominoes, and in some instances, improbably perhaps, catching a nap. The fascinating bringing together of these and other elements is what gives a number of Forrester's paintings an almost otherworldly sensibility, resulting from the surreal interactions that human beings are capable of, in particular spaces and times."





**Denzil Forrester**  
Night Star, 1983  
Charcoal and pastel on paper  
41.8 x 60cm. Framed: 64 x 83cm

Copyright Denzil Forrester.  
Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London and New York. Photo by Todd-White Art Photography.

Rendered in angular strokes of pastel on paper, '**Night Star**' is a dynamic work on paper by British-Grenadian artist Denzil Forrester. This drawing exemplifies Forrester's depictions of the London reggae and dub nightclub scene of the 1980s, a subject that has endured throughout four decades of his practice. Forrester explains: "I was interested in the energy of the crowd, particular dance movements and what the clubbers wore. In these clubs, city life is recreated in essence: sounds, lights, police sirens and bodies pushing and swaying in a smoke-filled room."

Forrester's work began in the nightclubs of East London. The artist would take his sketchbook with him and draw in situ before developing the larger, painterly compositions in the studio the next day. Each sketch was dictated by the length of the record, roughly four minutes long, with the next beginning in sync with the changing soundtrack. The artist transposes the freneticism of these drawings in his paintings by using angular and hurried brush strokes to emulate the rhythm of the music. Forrester still uses the drawings from the 1980s and '90s to formulate the compositions of his works on canvas today. In the foreword of a monograph published in 2019, Peter Doig writes "I believe Denzil is one of the most important painters to come out of London in the early 1980s and his early works remain as relevant and vital today as when they were first made."





**Denzil Forrester**  
Red Stripe, 1982

Compressed charcoal and pastel on paper  
56 x 76cm. Framed: 74.6 x 94.8cm

Copyright Denzil Forrester.

Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London and New York. Photo by Todd-White Art Photography.

**'Red Stripe'** is part of Denzil Forrester's dancehall drawings series, captured in-situ in the dub and reggae clubs of 1980s North-East London. Dreamily familiar, echoing themes and compositions which reverberate throughout the artist's oeuvre, this work crystallises the imagery of Forrester's night club paintings and sketches- a subject which has characterised much of his work. Rendered in technicolour pastel, the work varies from Forrester's typical blue-purple palette. It flashes pink, yellow and green, pulsing with the music it captures.

The artist explains, "In 1980, I started going to all-night 'blues' clubs. In these clubs, city life is recreated in essence: sounds, lights, police sirens, bodies pushing and swaying back and forth. It's a continuation of city life with some spiritual fulfilment. The idea of finding tranquil moments among a complex and cluttered environment is the basic structure for my paintings. The figures and images in my work are crowded together, whereas the spaces in-between echo the music of the 'blues' clubs but are also reminiscent of the light that breaks through a forest, or the light that reflects from a nightclub's mirrored ball."

Forrester's drawings are typically quick sketches, often made quasi-blind on dark bustling dancefloors. The artist's angular, gestural technique mirrors the energy of the dub music playing. Sam Thorne, former Director of Nottingham Contemporary, describes the importance of these drawings to the artist's larger, painterly compositions. "On a single night, [Forrester] might make as many as a dozen drawings, each done quickly, in the time it took for a record to be played. Four or five minutes tops". "When I came to make the paintings, I had the physical experience of having been there in the club. The main thing was being there," Forrester explained. The artist still uses the drawings from the 1980s and '90s to formulate the compositions of his paintings today.



## DENZIL FORRESTER

b. 1956, Grenada, West Indies  
Lives and works in Cornwall, UK

Forrester received a BA in Fine Art from the Central School of Art, London in 1979 and an MA in Fine Art from the Royal College of Art, London in 1983. He was awarded the decoration of Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire or MBE in December 2020. Forrester received the Morley Fellowship from Morley College, London in 2019; a Harkness Fellowship in New York in 1986-88; and a scholarship by the British School at Rome in 1983-85.

Pulsating with rhythm, the artist's expressive depictions of dance halls and clubs capture crowds of people moving in unison with the beat of the music. Flashes of vivid colour, gestural brushstrokes and frenetic compositions characterize his work. Forrester explains: "I just wanted to draw movement, action and expression. I was interested in the energy of the crowd, particular dance movements and what the clubbers wore. In these clubs, city life is recreated in essence: sounds, lights, police sirens, bodies pushing and swaying in a smoke-filled room."

In his recent work, Forrester's scenes of urban dancehalls are juxtaposed with themes of social injustice, vivid recollections from his childhood and contemporary views of Cornwall. Peter Doig notes that these "dreamlike" works "emerge as much from [the artist's] imagination as from his studies of real life" and possess "a subtlety and form that has perhaps come about because he is reflecting upon his past."

Forrester was awarded the 2021 South Bank Sky Arts Award for his solo show 'Itchin & Scratchin', presented at Nottingham Contemporary and Spike Island, Bristol (2020-2021). A large-scale public artwork for Brixton Underground Station was unveiled by Transport for London in September 2019.

Stephen Friedman Gallery and Andrew Kreps collaborated to present a solo exhibition by Forrester in October 2024. Bringing together new paintings with historical works, the show spanned their two spaces in New York. Stephen Friedman Gallery has previously exhibited solo projects by Forrester in London (2023, 2019) and for Frieze Masters (2020). His work was the focus of three solo shows curated by Peter Doig and Matthew Higgs at White Columns, New York (2016); Tramps, London (2016) and Jackson Foundation, St Just, Cornwall (2018).

Notable group exhibitions include 'Beyond the Bassline: 500 Years of Black British Music', British Library, London (2024); 'Thin Skin', Monash University Museum of Art, Cauldfield East, Australia (2023); 'Is it morning for you yet? 58th Carnegie International', Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (2022); 'Forecast Form: Art in the Caribbean Diaspora, 1990s-today', Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Illinois (2022); 'Life Between Islands: Caribbean-British Art 50s - Now', Tate Britain, London (2021); 'Mixing It Up: Painting Today', Hayward Gallery, London (2021) and 'Get Up, Stand Up Now: Generations of Black Creative Pioneers', Somerset House, London (2019).



Denzil Forrester in his studio.  
Courtesy Stephen Friedman Gallery, London and New York.



# KATE SPENCER STEWART

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Kate Spencer Stewart  
*Phthaloish*, 2025  
oil on linen  
110 x 110 cm

Photo Marten Elder. Courtesy of the artist and Emalin, London



Kate Spencer Stewart  
*Phthaloish*, 2025  
oil on linen  
110 x 110 cm

Photo Marten Elder. Courtesy of the artist and Emalin, London



Kate Spencer Stewart  
*Troche*, 2025  
oil on linen sized with rabbit skin glue  
56 × 56 cm

Photo Marten Elder. Courtesy of the artist and Emalin, London



Kate Spencer Stewart  
*Troche*, 2025  
oil on linen sized with rabbit skin glue  
56 × 56 cm

Photo Marten Elder. Courtesy of the artist and Emalin, London





Kate Spencer Stewart  
*Frag*, 2024  
oil on linen  
35x35 cm

Photo Marten Elder. Courtesy of the artist and Emalin, London



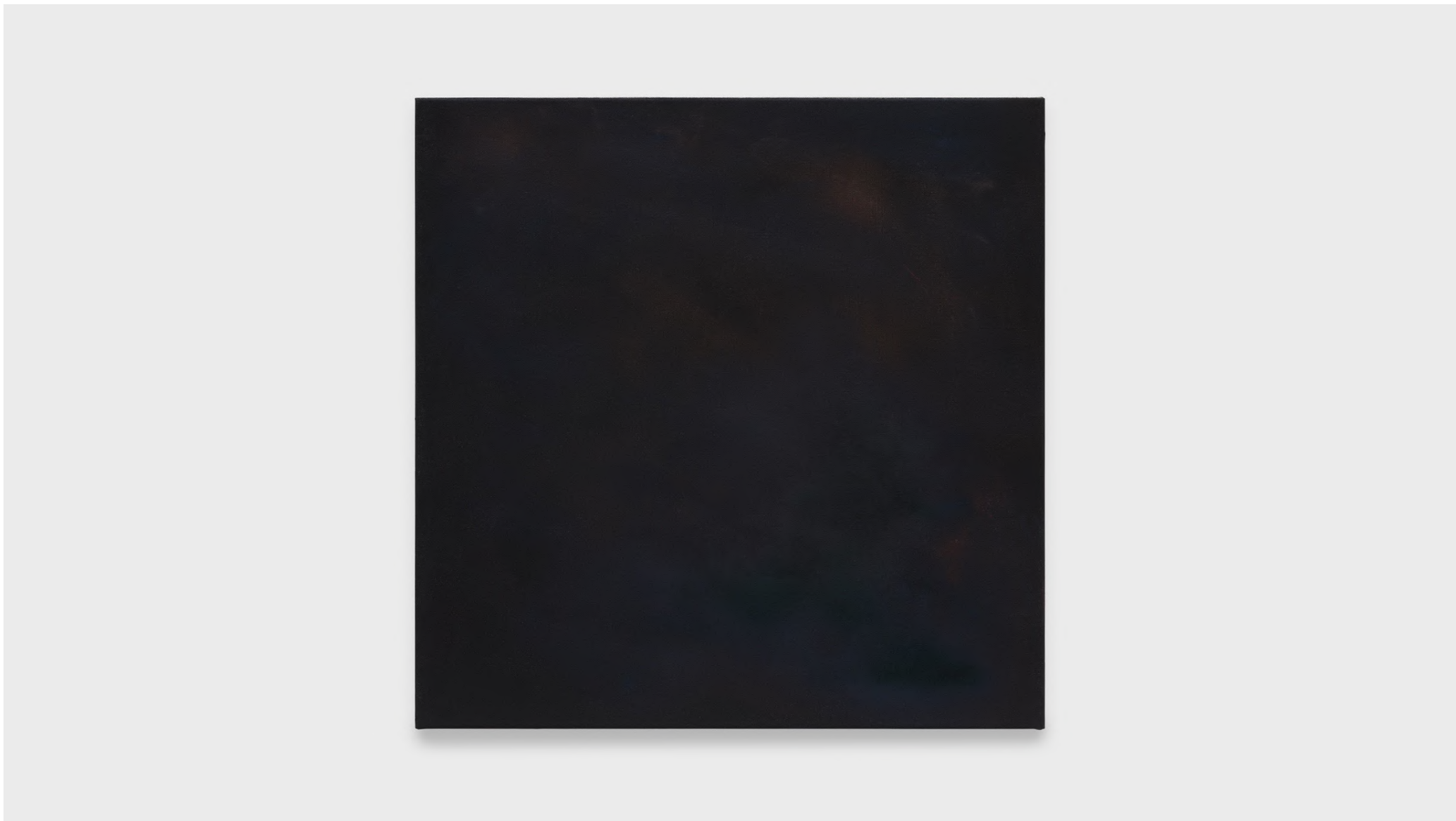
Kate Spencer Stewart  
*Frag*, 2024  
oil on linen  
35 x 35 cm

Photo Marten Elder. Courtesy of the artist and Emalin, London

“The void is complex and ambiguous as a subject/non-subject for painting. Being like: ‘well, this is an object, it’s black, and there’s some shiny stuff on it. And that’s it’. Or you can stare deeply into it and see... the future, perhaps, or a burning house of parliament, I don’t know. [...] Another word I like to use instead of void is drone, which can be spiritual, mechanical, violent, ambivalent or soothing in the same ways, except one is absent and the other is present.”

- Kate Spencer Stewart in conversation with Alex Bacon, *Emalin, Stories*, 2024





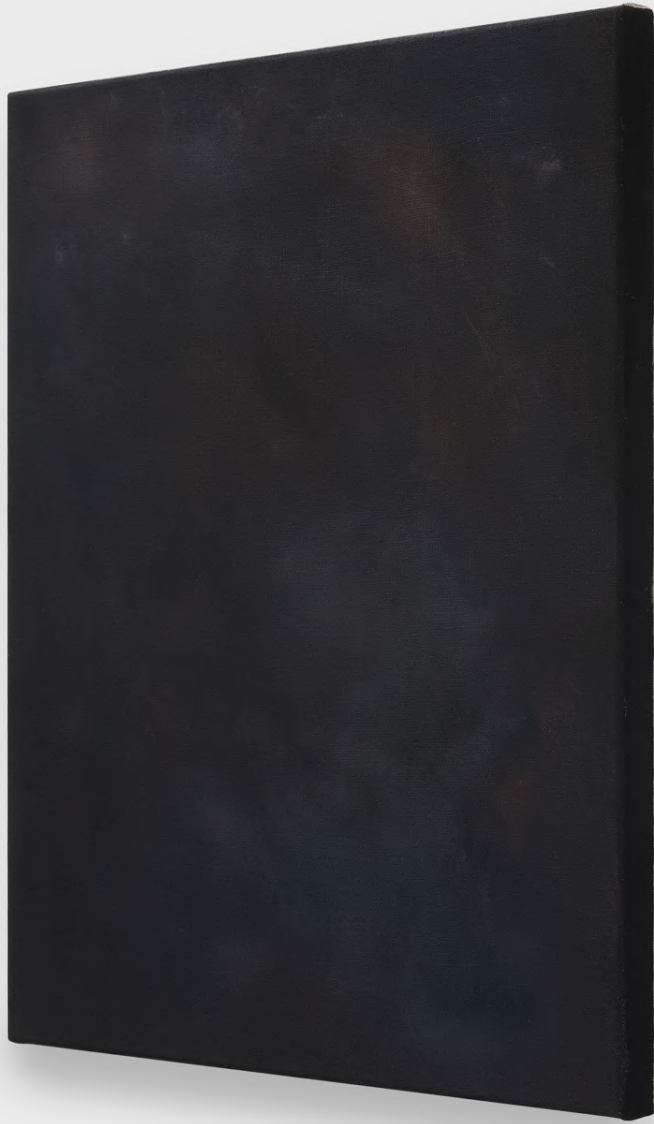
Kate Spencer Stewart

*Terme*, 2025

oil and tempera on linen sized with rabbitskin glue

56x56 cm

Photo Marten Elder. Courtesy of the artist and Emalin, London



Kate Spencer Stewart  
*Terme*, 2025  
oil and tempera on linen sized with rabbitskin glue  
56x56 cm

Photo Marten Elder. Courtesy of the artist and Emalin, London

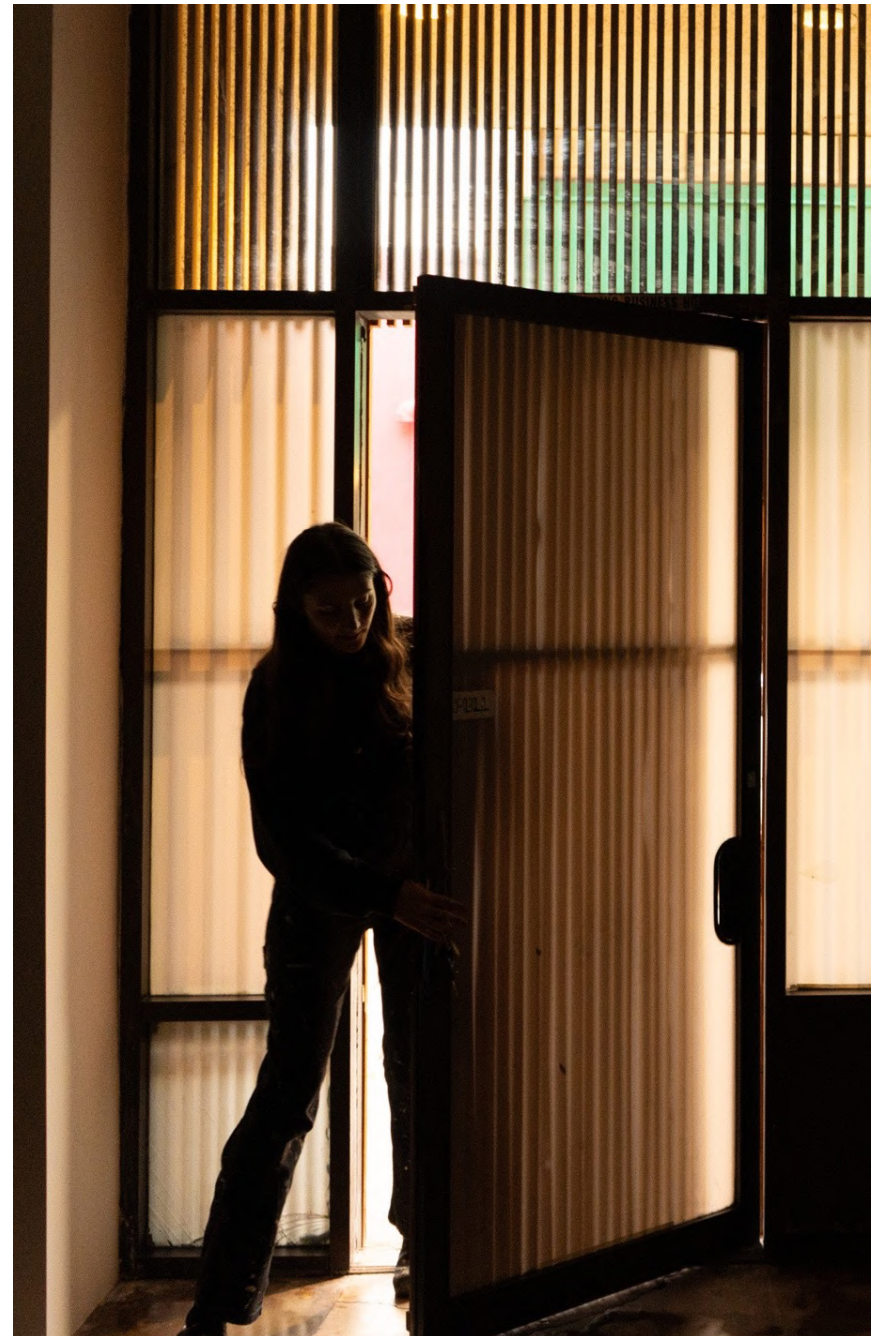
## KATE SPENCER STEWART

b. 1984 in Phoenix, AZ, USA  
Lives and works in Los Angeles, USA

Kate Spencer Stewart (b. 1984 Phoenix, AZ, US) lives and works in Los Angeles, CA, US. She graduated with a BFA from Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles, US in 2006 and completed her MFA in painting at University of California, Los Angeles, CA, US in 2017.

Kate Spencer Stewart is a painter working with the hesitations, suspicions and instincts of abstraction and refusal. Her works, usually in oil and tempera on linen canvases, are always square, as a gesture of avoidance to suggest the representation of either portraiture or landscape. Ranging between vast fields and focused vignettes, each painting represents Stewart's attempt to paint 'nothing, or the void'. Her process unfolds through repetitive mark-making on top of underpaintings that are often in secret contrast with the final coat: she re-examines and reiterates the surface with overlays of crushed pigment and iridescent oil. Drawn to the impossibilities of capturing ambience, hum and atmosphere, Stewart layers the earthiest and most synthetic materials to offer a view toward transcendence.

Recent solo exhibitions include AIR FORCE, Paul Soto, Los Angeles, CA, US (2025); Diurne, Emalin, London, UK (2023); Disintegration Suite, Paul Soto, Los Angeles, CA, US (2023); Convention, Bureau, New York, NY, US (2022); Nature, La Maison de Rendez-Vous, Brussels, BE (2022); Kate Spencer Stewart, Park View / Paul Soto, Los Angeles, CA, US (2020); and The Gallery @ Le Hangar Restaurant, Paris, FR (2019). Stewart's work has been included in group exhibitions held at Paul Soto, New York, US (2024); Hissss, Los Angeles, US (2024); ABERTO, São Paulo, BR (2023); Hakuna Matata, Los Angeles, CA, US (2023); Emalin, London, UK (2022); Neuer Kunstverein Wien, Vienna, AT (2021); Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York, NY, US (2021); Misako & Rosen Gallery, Tokyo, JP (2021); and Piktogram Gallery Warsaw, PL (2019).



Courtesy the artist and Emalin, London. Photo: Hannah Tacher

# PHOEBE COLLINGS-JAMES

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**Phoebe Collings-James**  
Joy comes with the morning [V3], 2025  
stoneware ceramic bowl, rope, sound  
Dimensions variable

### Joy Comes with the morning

The sculptural elements of the exhibition live in the matrix of an audio work composed and recorded by the artist. A sound installation combines free-standing, water-filled ceramic vessels that act as sounding stones or wells, receiving a rich tapestry of acoustic fragments, woven together from daily journeys through the streets of London and new recordings of poetry generated over the course of a year within tarot circles led by artist Daniella Valz Gen. Recordings of the watery movements of the sea resound with horns and samples from the coming-of-age, brass band film *Our Song* (Jim McKay, 2000), that tells the story of three young girls in Brooklyn, New York who find expression playing musical instruments in a community marching band.

The sculptures continue the artist's study of ceramic form through an engagement with tenderness, eroticism and the haptic qualities of clay, working with the malleability of the medium as it transforms, receives impressions, yields to wheel-thrown and hand-built techniques and layers of slips and oxides. Works in unglazed red stoneware embody the transformation of earth to stone through the elemental force of fire, while the surfaces of other works bear delicate traces of plants foraged from Camden Art Centre's garden. The many vessels speak to the artist's interest in how these forms relate to the body as a container that holds precarious states of being – the site of physical as well as emotional processes.



**Phoebe Collings-James**  
Infidel [blue blurr fire], 2025  
Glazed stoneware ceramic  
78 x 23 x 23 cm



**Phoebe Collings-James**  
Infidel [blue blurr fire], 2025  
Glazed stoneware ceramic  
78 x 23 x 23 cm



## Infidels & Brass bell

Phoebe Collings-James' works across media function as debris of knowledge, feeling, violence, language, and desire that result from living and surviving within hostile environments. At SculptureCenter, Collings-James exhibits *Infidels*, a new series of ceramic sculptures that explore relationships between heresy, faith, and orthodoxies of religion, state, and society. Intensely colored by iron-rich glazes, using various firing techniques, each of Collings-James' sculptures elaborates on the position of the heretic as a transmitter of incendiary speech, opposition from within, and ostracisation.

Here, Collings-James's work performs sound without sound, and voice without voice, transferring sensory experiences across media and giving material shape to resonance and speech. Collings-James refigures ideas of visibility, frequency, and attunement to "the tempo and tenor of blackness" (see Tina Campt, *A Black Gaze: Artists Changing How We See*) out of film and moving image into the physical world and the slower speeds of sculpture.

Each of Collings-James's ceramic sculptures comprises a bell- or vessel-like form with protruding parts that look like craning necks, mouths, or pipes growing from their heads. Some show stitches, sutures, or binding lines up their spines, and some appear to have sagged or twisted under their own weight during firing, setting their apertures at off angles. These moments of collapse result from firing at high temperatures, a production decision that retains the energy of an ecstatic outburst and release in each work, in parallel with the somatic experience of the infidel. Collings-James explores across the series. Together these works appear cacophonous, as instruments playing themselves, heightened by the artist's inclusion of a brass tuba bell pocked with dents within their midst. At the same time, they are slightly anthropomorphic, to be read as figures singing or lamenting, and even zoomorphic, with swan-like necks tuning the viewer's speculation toward the half-trumpet, half-squawk of waterfowl calls. With these conflicting and simultaneous cues as to what a viewer might hear with their eyes, as it were, Collings-James establishes a "sonic bearing" (in the artist's words) of outsider speech: language or almost-language, noises that verge on words.

In contrast to such formal and sonic ambiguity, Collings-James' works are also imprinted with fragments of text, acting as rare bits of literal expression, suggestions, or language clues. These are sometimes hidden under layers of glaze and other times fully exposed: *belly/beast*, a kind of metaphysical yet fleshy geolocation; *Escuchad!*, invoking the survival and persistence through a bilingual tongue of New York City; and *Land Back*, an urgent refrain.

Embossing (as Collings-James does with bespoke roulettes), stamping, and inscription have long had important and varied functions in the history of craft, sometimes adding or removing layers of abstraction from utilitarian objects, and sometimes identifying or misdirecting authorship. Considered within the *Infidels*' broader exploration of outsider-versus-insider status, and inflected by decolonial and queer political positions, these techniques continue a relationship to varied historical and contemporary African and African diasporic techniques for the surface decoration of coil-built vessels. In dialogue with recent iterations on these traditions, one inscription on Collings-James' work reads *Out of Anarchy*, a reference to the sculptor Donald Locke (1930–2010), who worked between Guyana, Britain, and the United States.

In subtle reference to Doyle Lane (1923–2002), an artist associated (in retrospect) with an underexplored sensibility for queer Black art in postwar Los Angeles, Collings-James' exhibition also includes a few ceramic beads that call to Lane's small-scale weed pots and his own beads, which occupied his production for much of the final years of his life. Collings-James' beads appear almost as hidden as a tongue, a shim, or a minor organ in just a few works—continuing an exploration of expression and its suppression that implicates many speakers in conversation through time.



**Phoebe Collings-James**  
Infidel [KING], 2024  
Brass, glazed ceramic  
46 x 56 x 48 cm





**Phoebe Collings-James**  
Infidel [KING], 2024  
Brass, glazed ceramic  
46 x 56 x 48 cm





Phoebe Collings-James  
*Infidel [eye]*, 2024  
Glazed stoneware ceramic on a steel base  
59 x 39 x 42 cm



**Phoebe Collings-James**  
*Infidel [eye]*, 2024  
Glazed stoneware ceramic on a steel base  
59 x 39 x 42 cm





**Phoebe Collings-James**  
*The Infidel* 2023  
Stoneware slip ceramic on a steel base  
45 x 25 cm  
Stand: 18 x 18 cm





**Phoebe Collings-James**  
*The Infidel* 2023  
Stoneware slip ceramic on a steel base  
45 x 25 cm  
Stand: 18 x 18 cm

### The Guardian (horse head)

The anthology begins with a cast of six characters: The Infidel, The Dreamer, The Guardian, The Silo, The Cypher and The Preacher. Delving into the intricacies of these figures, all of whom are imbued with the potential for dissent, the show documents the artist's process of setting imperial wastelands on fire as the clay body travels through the kiln inferno. The figure of heretic is one that has historically been weaponized as outsider, truth-sayer and traitor. Yet the heretic can also be a symbol for revolt, a beacon around which collective action organises.

The Guardian considers the many layered references we have for the horse, thinking about the 4 horsemen of the apocalypse as conduits for mans wickedness. My little pony, black beauty, cowgirls and westerns.

Using sgraffito techniques Collings-James' sculptures contain a symbolic language (visible, partially visible and concealed) that has developed over years. Hand carved roulettes (referencing various African pottery traditions) are rolled across the clay's surface creating repeat patterns and words. Fingers and tools produce further text, imagery and patterns, in oxide colours and tin glazes, punctuating the surface of purple-hue fired red and black clays. Clay-as-language, or even hearsay, has been inspired by cuneiform clay tablets of Babylonian and Sumerian origin, forming a direct link to the earliest known forms of communication, and providing another route for thinking about truth. This show considers linguistic representation as something embodied, experienced, passed down and subject to shifts over time. Through the material itself, along with the processes and modifications made by Collings-James, these works call into question euro-centric modes of knowledge building and epistemologies.

Echoing Collings-James' wider practice, the parade of characters that line the centre of the gallery, focus on various portals of divination, dialogue and anarchy. The works are seeking routes for mystic support systems, deepening connections to intuition and resistance to capitalist modes of reason. Inscriptions include the quote Blood earth, Brother earth, Blood brother earth by Aime Cesaire and lyrics from Black Roses by Barrington Levy, 'Black, black roses in my garden...you got to water it...you got to tend to it' as well as the incitements of 'fire' and 'flood'. Acknowledgement of Caribbean resistance and consciousness is vital for this new body of work, as is an ongoing desire to understand the materiality of clay—part of the artist's reckoning with how to live in the mundane yet licking flames of the metropolis.



Phoebe Collings-James  
*The Guardian*, 2023  
Stoneware glazed ceramic  
51 x 58.5 cm



Phoebe Collings-James  
*The Guardian*, 2023  
Stoneware glazed ceramic  
51 x 58.5 cm



## PHOEBE COLLINGS-JAMES

b. 1987, London (UK)

Phoebe Collings-James' (b.1987 London, UK) works function as "emotional detritus"; speaking of knowledges of feelings, the debris of violence, language, and desire which are inherent to living and surviving within hostile environments. Her work spans across sculpture, sound, performance and installation, and unpacks the object as subject by giving life and tension to ceramic forms.

Colling-James' musical alias, young nettle, creates sound design for original music productions and is a member of B.O.S.S., a QTIBIPOC sound system based in South London.

Collings-James also runs Mudbelly, a ceramics studio, shop and teaching facility offering free ceramics courses for Black people in London, taught by Black ceramicists.

Recent solo exhibitions include In Practice, SculptureCenter, New York, US (2024); bun babylon; a heretics anthology, Arcadia Missa, London, UK (2023); A Scratch! A Scratch!, Camden Art Centre, London, UK (2021); Relative Strength, Arcadia Missa, London, UK (2018), Expensive Shit, 315 Gallery, New York, US (2017), ATROPHILIA (with Jesse Darling) and Company, New York, UK (2016). Recent group exhibitions include Self Made: Reshaping Identities, Foundling Museum, London, UK (2024); Conversations, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, UK (2024); In and Out of Place. Land after Information 1992-2024, Kunstverein Hamburg, Hamburg, DE (2024); Oh téléphone, oracle noir (...), Le Magasin CNAC, Grenoble, FR (2023); Phantom Sculpture, Mead Gallery, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, UK (2023); Unearthing: Memory, Land, Materiality, The Courtauld Gallery, London, UK (2023); Body Vessel Clay, Two Temple Place, London (2022); York Art Gallery, York (2022); Produktive Bildstörung. Sigmar Polke und aktuelle künstlerische Positionen, Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Düsseldorf (2021); You Feel Me, FACT Liverpool, Liverpool (2019), In Whose Eyes, Beaconsfield Gallery, London (2018), Okey Dokey, Galerie Max Mayer, Düsseldorf (2017) and Bust Wide Open, Harlem Postcards, Studio Museum Harlem (2017). Phoebe's works are in major public collections including Arts Council of England, London (UK); Kadist Foundation, Paris (FR); York Art Gallery, York (UK); Southampton City Art Gallery, Southampton (UK). Performances and screenings include Getty Museum, LA (2019), Sonic Acts, Amsterdam (2019), Café Oto, London (2019) and Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2018).



Photography: Bernice Mulenga.  
Courtesy the Artist and Arcadia Missa, London.