

Press Release

Hello, this is a press announcement
for my fourth or fifth solo
show at Emalin gallery... It's
opening on Thursday May 28th... 6-8,
118 1/2 Shoreditch High Street, London.
My name is Kembra Pfahler. The
show is called "Hungry for trash". That
is a song title from an un-released
Voluptuous Horror of Karen Black album...

Here's the lyrics... (I'm hungry-I'm
hungry, I'm hungry for trash... No quality
sincerity, history spinach, I'm hungry
I'm hungry I'm hungry for trash)
Most of these drawings are what I
call "non fiction illustration" because
they are drawings of things that I do
in live performances. I use the body
paint from my band costume in the
drawings too. There's a lot I'd like
to speak about here but maybe
the new Rizolli book that's
available at the gallery now as well...
might fill in the blanks... Oh also
we are showing a short film by
friend, artist and collaborator
Isaiah Davis and I... We shot it
at Participant inc... a few short
years ago. We both will be
in London after June 28th.
Thankyou. Kembra Pfahler

EMALIN

4-8 Helmet Row
London EC1V 3QJ
www.emalin.co.uk

Hungry for Trash

Kembra Pfahler

29 May – 25 July 2026

What I do in my life is create a climate that allows me to be visited by my artistic muse. Your mood, if you're open to it, tells you what it wants you to be. Sometimes I just sit in a state of complete stillness and wait for my ideas to come through to me. Or when decorating my apartment – constantly redecorating and repainting is a huge part of my artistic practice. If I am getting ready for a new show, I'll repaint the walls tile red, scrub all the windows, and move all the objects from one side of the house to another. I'll spend eight hours a day in here excavating and reacclimating myself to the paper, getting all my materials ready like I am preparing for battle. I gather all my fetishes, all my war instruments together, polishing my guns, as it were.

– Kembra Pfahler, as told to Michael Bullock in *Kembra Pfahler* (Rizzoli, 2026)

Emalin is pleased to present *Hungry for Trash*, an exhibition of new works by American artist Kembra Pfahler (b. 1961, Hermosa Beach, US), the artist's fourth at the gallery and her first in the Clerk's House.

A foundational figure of New York's downtown underground, Pfahler has shaped the countercultural aesthetics of the Lower East Side since the 1980s through a practice spanning performance, film, music, drawing and sculpture. In 1990, she and Japanese artist and musician Samoa Moriki founded The Voluptuous Horror of Karen Black, a theatrical death-rock band whose legendary performances became the primary arena for the development of a visual and philosophical vocabulary through which art and life become inseparable.

Decoration, for Pfahler, is a radical act: since the early 1980s, she has maintained her East Village apartment painted entirely tile red, the colour of New York's brick buildings – every surface from floor to ceiling, its objects and furnishings included. The gesture gives material form to “availabism”, Pfahler's philosophy of making the best use of whatever is closest at hand, and carries a political dimension she shares with one of her early collaborators Jack Smith (1932–1989), whose utopian project transformed marginal and neglected spaces into sites of fantasy and collective inhabitation, proposing that to remake one's environment on one's own terms is to make a claim on what life could look like. The objects

Pfahler brings to the Clerk's House – all painted tile red – are the material embodiment of that proposition. Polaroids and new Femlin drawings extend her practice of radical self-portraiture, appropriating the hypersexualised Playboy cartoon as a vehicle for transgressive self-inscription. *Hungry for Trash*, a film by Isaiah Davis (b. 1992, Bronx), commissioned by Participant Inc., presents Pfahler in full Karen Black regalia: body paint, bouffant wig, blacked-out teeth, performing the monstrous femininity that has defined her practice across four decades.

Pfahler has developed the following philosophies, operative across her practice, to which she continues to devote herself:

Availabism

Making the best use of whatever is closest at hand, whether household objects or one's own body, as both medium and inspiration. Associated with punk and DIY movements, "availabism" is a celebration of abundance: the willingness to work across disciplines with whatever is present.

Anti-Naturalism

A discipline of the present, finding meaning and justification for beauty in things that are blighted, embracing radical artificiality and transgressive femininity over naturalistic standards. It neither mourns nature nor applauds its destruction, but calls out what is real.

Beautalism

The practice of making beauty out of brutal real-life circumstances, premised on the conviction that vanity is the enemy of interpretation. Beauty, in Pfahler's terms, is a site of transformation and transgression.

Yesterbating

Pfahler's critical term for nostalgia: the unproductive recycling of the past as a substitute for engagement with the present.

Gothletics

The practice of physical training in darkness, coined to describe Pfahler's nocturnal workout regimen in New York. It emphasises the freedom to engage in rigorous physical or artistic endeavours using only what is currently at hand – a corporeal extension of "availabism", the body itself becoming the available material.

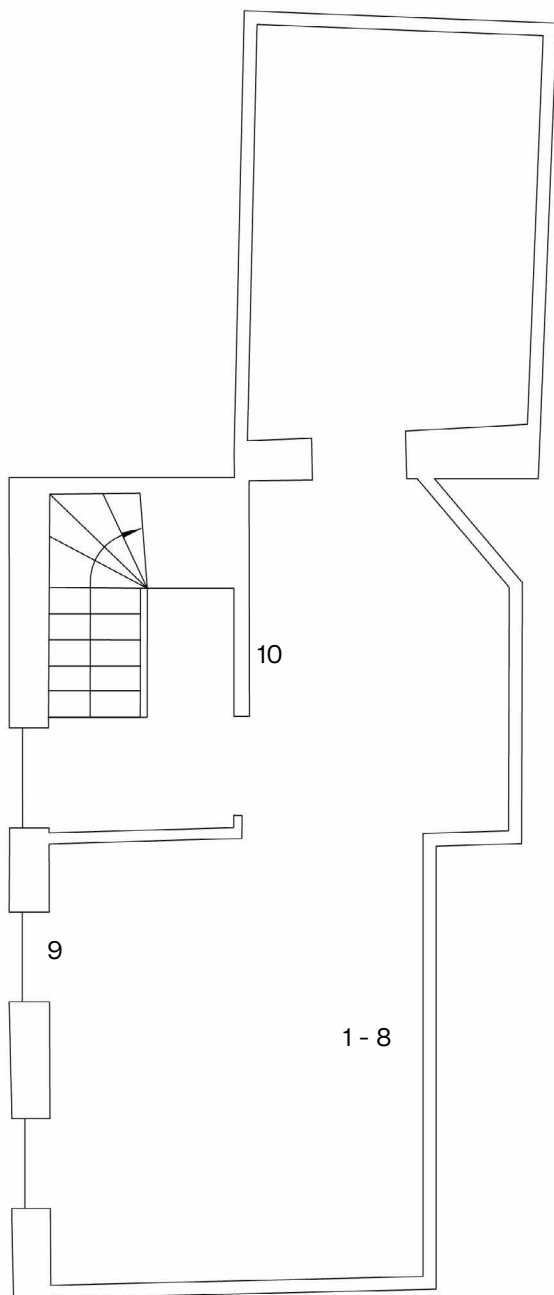
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Kembra Pfahler (b. 1961 Hermosa Beach, California) lives and works in New York City. She graduated with a BFA from the School of Visual Arts, New York in 1983. The daughter of legendary California surfer Freddy Pfahler, she came of age in the Los Angeles punk scene of the late 1970s before arriving in New York at eighteen, enrolling at the School of Visual Arts under Mary Heilmann and Lorraine O'Grady. Her formation coincided with the emergence of the Cinema of Transgression and the devastating sweep of the AIDS epidemic through her immediate community, both of which exerted lasting influence on a practice that has remained, across four decades, resolutely and consequentially radical. In 1990, Pfahler and Japanese artist and musician Samoa Moriki founded The Voluptuous Horror of Karen Black, a theatrical death-rock band drawing on Japanese Noh theatre, Viennese Actionism, and downtown transgressive femininity, whose legendary performances at the Limelight, the Pyramid Club, and CBGB became the primary arena for the development of a visual and philosophical vocabulary whose influence on countercultural aesthetics continues to be felt.

Pfahler's performances have been held at venues including MoMA PS1, New York; The Brooklyn Museum, New York; The Bowery Electric, New York; Pioneer Works, New York; Centre Pompidou, Paris; The Kitchen, New York; and Southbank Centre, London. Her work has been the subject of exhibitions at Emalin, London (2022; 2019; 2016); Deitch Projects, Los Angeles (2020); Hessel Museum of Art at Bard College, Hudson (2018); KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2012); Participant Inc., New York, US (2012; 2021); Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow (2011); Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2008); Park Avenue Armory, New York (2008); The Swiss Institute, New York (2007); American Fine Arts Company, New York (2002); and MoMA PS1, New York (2002). Her discography with The Voluptuous Horror of Karen Black includes *Black Date* (1998); *Anti-Naturalists* (1995); and *A National Healthcare* (1993). Her appearances in film include *The Misandrists*, dir. Bruce LaBruce (2016); *Surf Gang*, dir. Katrina del Mar (2006); *Sewing Circle*, dir. Richard Kern (1992); and *War is Menstrual Envy*, dir. Nick Zedd (1992).

Isaiah Davis (b. 1992, Bronx, NY) lives and works in New York. Davis received his MFA from Columbia School of the Arts (2025) and his BFA from The Cooper Union (2018). Solo exhibitions include King's Leap, NY (2025); Participant Inc., New York, US (2021); and Love Gallery, New York, US (2021). Selected group exhibitions include King's Leap, NY (2025); Kasmin for Artistic Noise: Benefit Auction, New York, US (2025); SK Gallery, New York, US, (2024); Wallach Art Gallery, New York, US, (2024); Gallery Albany, Albany, US, (2024); and Housing Gallery, New York, US, (2022). His film, *Marlow Fazon Featuring Yesterday*, debuted at MoMA Doc in 2025.

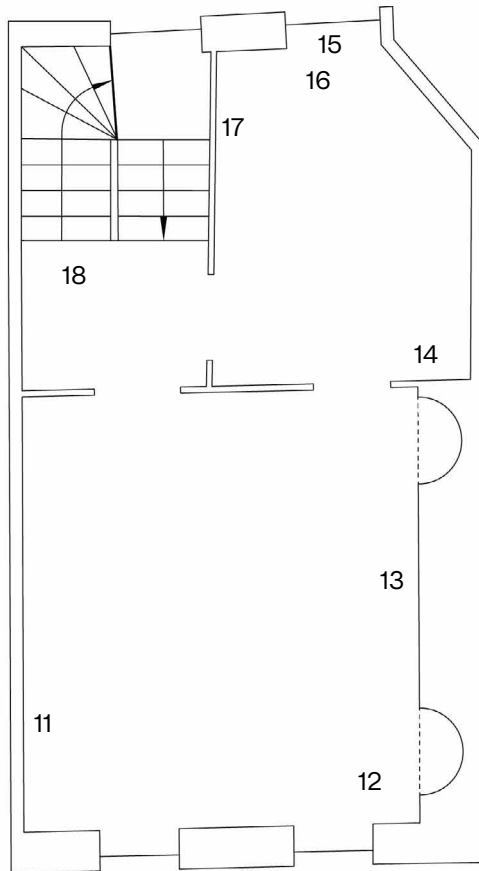


GROUND FLOOR

1 - 8 clockwise from top left

1. Kembra Pfahler
Surf Selfportait, 2026
acrylic house paint, pen, Sharpie marker, glitter on paper, tulipwood frame
42.5 × 35 × 3 cm (framed)
2. Kembra Pfahler
The Voluptuous Horror of Karen Black Costume Drawings I, 2023
paint, pen and ink on paper, tulipwood frame
42.5 × 35 × 3 cm (framed)
3. Kembra Pfahler
TVHKB in shark performance with extra shark, 2025
acrylic house paint, liquid body paint, Sharpie marker, whiteout, glitter, pen on paper, tulipwood frame
35 × 42.5 × 3 cm (framed)
4. Kembra Pfahler
TVHKB in shark performance, 2025
acrylic house paint, liquid body paint, pen, Sharpie marker, glitter on paper, tulipwood frame
35 × 42.5 × 3 cm (framed)
5. Kembra Pfahler
TVHKB with balloons, 2026
liquid body paint, acrylic house paint, pen, whiteout, glitter on paper, tulipwood frame
70 × 50 × 3 cm (framed)
6. Kembra Pfahler
abra kedavour costume and flyer for a show at the HOLE gallery during the pandemic years, 2026
pen, Sharpie marker, acrylic house paint, glitter, whiteout on paper, tulipwood frame
50 × 70 × 3 cm (framed)
7. Kembra Pfahler
Women of TVHKB on balls, 2026
acrylic house paint, pen, Sharpie marker, whiteout, glitter on paper, tulipwood frame
50 × 70 × 3 cm (framed)
8. Kembra Pfahler
Composing in the bath, 2026
acrylic house paint, liquid body paint, glitter, whiteout, pen on paper, tulipwood frame
35 × 42.5 × 3 cm framed)
9. Kembra Pfahler
Karen Black children, 2026
acrylic paint, paper mache, mixed media
55.9 × 30.5 x 33 cm
10. Kembra Pfahler
Studio document, 2020-2026
unique Polaroid prints, tulipwood frame
28.6 × 38.1 × 3 cm (framed)

FIRST FLOOR



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| <p>11. Kembra Pfahler
<i>Composing in the bath</i>, 2026
acrylic house paint, liquid body paint,
glitter, whiteout, pen on paper,
tulipwood frame
42.5 × 35 × 3 cm (framed)</p> <p>12. Isaiah Davis
<i>Hungry for Trash</i>, 2023
video
5 min, looped</p> <p>13. Kembra Pfahler
<i>GOKB in hand costume</i>, 2026
acrylic house paint, Sharpie marker,
pen, glitter, vinyl on paper, tulipwood
frame
50 × 70 × 3 cm (framed)</p> <p>14. Kembra Pfahler
<i>Studio document</i>, 2020-2026
unique Polaroid prints, tulipwood
frame
28.6 × 38.1 × 3 cm (framed)</p> <p>15. Kembra Pfahler
<i>Necessary bow</i>, 2017-2026
paint, wood
21 × 25 × 6 cm</p> <p>16. Kembra Pfahler
<i>Black Statue of Liberty</i>, 2016
spray paint, plastic, foam board, felt
33 × 8 × 8 cm</p> | <p>17. Kembra Pfahler
<i>Decorative shoes</i>, 2026
acrylic house paint, wood
10 × 30 × 35 cm</p> <p>18. Kembra Pfahler
<i>Karen Black children</i>, 2026
acrylic paint, paper mache, mixed
media
50.8 × 44.7 × 40.6 cm</p> |
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