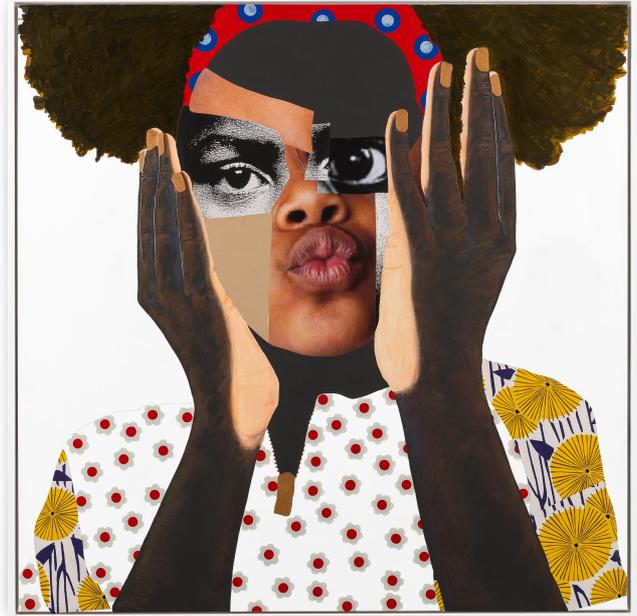


# Stephen Friedman Gallery

## Deborah Roberts: What about us?

November 3 – December 21, 2023

Opening: Thursday November 2, 6–8pm  
Book launch: Saturday November 4, 4–6pm



Stephen Friedman Gallery is pleased to announce the opening of its new gallery in Tribeca, New York with 'What about us?', a solo exhibition by Austin-based artist Deborah Roberts. This is Roberts' third exhibition with the gallery and her first in New York in over five years.

Roberts is celebrated for depicting Black children and adolescents dressed in bright colors and patterns against white or black backgrounds. Her fragmented figures appear in mid-movement as they gaze or beckon toward the viewer. Interweaving collage and painting, Roberts' multi-layered compositions offer a form of resistance as they explore the complexity of Black subjecthood in relation to race, identity, politics, and society.

Featuring some of the artist's largest works to date, the show continues Roberts' exploration of how systemic racism shapes the way Black children grow up in the world. The artist employs collage, a revolutionary medium used by artists since the early twentieth century, to reframe the inequities and prejudices of normative culture and to create alternative, more inclusive narratives. Composing works using found materials sourced from the internet, literature, and photographs, and juxtaposing these with hand-painted details, Roberts deconstructs stereotypes perpetuated by mainstream visual culture. Combining a range of skin tones, facial features, hairstyles, and clothing, she presents an expansive, multidimensional view of Blackness.

*Girl / woman forever a work in progress* (2023) is an homage to the medium of collage. It captures the perspective of the artist's cutting board – complete with trompe l'oeil masking tape – and demonstrates how Roberts uses the physical act of collage to weave together the complexity and fluidity of Black identity.

The painting not only speaks to the fractured nature of the psyche, but also its ability to evolve and change particularly as a child enters adolescence. This budding sense of self is perfectly captured by the monumental diptych *Tomorrow, tomorrow and tomorrow* (2023), which sees two identical boys face one another as if looking directly in a mirror.

The white background of Roberts' compositions previously emphasized the constant presence of the white gaze. At the same time, this absence of context created a place for her subjects to exist freely within a space devoid of history, prejudice, and monolithic ideas of the Black experience. In this new body of work, we see them own the space with greater confidence; close-crops and large-scale formats foreground their individuality and expressive gestures, reflecting a growing feeling of self-assurance.

Speaking of this shift, Roberts explains: "When we were in the midst of COVID, I noticed that the works were getting bigger, and it felt like there no longer needed to be the white to take up all the space. The bodies became bigger, heroic, stronger, able to lift their own voice without the white gaze – not only without it, they didn't care if it existed."

In *Self-titled* (2023), Roberts depicts a young adolescent with his arms crossed in a defiant stance, wearing a Captain America t-shirt in explicit reference to his growing sense of masculinity. A small, hand-painted Tweety Bird on his cap acts as a reminder that he is still a child. Similarly, in *Girl with the poofball hair and beautiful skin* (2023), Roberts depicts the child's hair with joyful, painterly strokes, celebrating the history of Black hair as a symbol of survival and resistance.

# Stephen Friedman Gallery

## Notes to editors

Deborah Roberts was born in Austin, Texas, USA in 1962 where she currently lives and works. Roberts was named 2023 Texas Medal of Arts Award Honoree for the Visual Arts. She was a finalist in the 2019 Outwin Boochever Portrait Competition and received the Anonymous Was a Woman Award in 2018.

She has exhibited internationally, with solo and two-person shows at institutions including SITE Santa Fe, New Mexico (2023); McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, Texas (2022) and The Bluecoat, Liverpool, UK (2021). Her major touring exhibition 'I'm' opened at The Contemporary Austin, Texas in 2021, traveling to Museum of Contemporary Art Denver, Colorado; Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens, Jacksonville, Florida and Art + Practice in collaboration with the California African American Museum, Los Angeles.

Major group exhibitions include those at Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Park, Washington DC (2022); Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas (2022); Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond (2021); Scottish National Galleries, Edinburgh (2021); Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams (2019); Somerset House, London, England (2019) and The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (2017).

Roberts' work is held in significant public collections including: Scottish National Galleries, Edinburgh, UK; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, California; He Art Museum, Guangdong, China; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington DC; Smithsonian National Museum, Washington DC; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

## Book launch

On Saturday 4 November, a book signing and In Conversation between the artist and Sarah Elizabeth Lewis took place at Stephen Friedman Gallery, New York to celebrate her new monograph '20 Years of Art/Work'. Published by Radius Books, the expansive monograph contains new texts by Dawoud Bey, Ekow Eshun, Carolyn Sarah Elizabeth Lewis and Jean Martin.

## Contact Us

For press enquiries please contact:  
[press@stephenfriedman.com](mailto:press@stephenfriedman.com)

For sales enquiries please contact:  
[sales@stephenfriedman.com](mailto:sales@stephenfriedman.com)

For further details please contact:  
[info@stephenfriedman.com](mailto:info@stephenfriedman.com)

## Social Media

Facebook: /Stephen-Friedman-Gallery

Instagram: @stephenfriedmangallery

Twitter: @SFGalleryLondon