

## Stephen Friedman Gallery

**Jonathan Baldock**  
***Personae***

27 September–9 November 2019

**Private View**  
Thursday 26 September, 6–8pm



Stephen Friedman Gallery is pleased to present its first exhibition with British artist Jonathan Baldock. This follows Baldock's solo show at Camden Arts Centre, London earlier this year and precedes a solo exhibition at Kunsthall Stavanger, Norway in May 2020. Baldock's work is saturated with humour and wit as well as an uncanny, macabre quality that channels the artist's longstanding interest in myth, folklore and narratives associated with 'outsider' practices.

Titled 'Personae', Baldock's exhibition at Stephen Friedman Gallery brings together a new series of ceramic masks that teem with bright colours and outlandish expressions. Ripples of clay allude to folds of skin whilst incisions and abstract protuberances reveal physiognomic features such as eyes, ears and nostrils. Here the artist toys with a cognitive process called pareidolia, a psychological phenomenon that causes people to see faces in inanimate objects. Whilst some masks mediate universal emotions such as happiness or sadness, others merely hint at figuration.

Variations in mood and personality are conveyed through Baldock's experimentation with ceramic techniques, using coloured clays, applying glazes, and firing the tablets at varying temperatures. Lustrous, painterly finishes emphasise the playfulness of certain expressions whilst earthen, pumice-like surfaces manifest feelings of melancholia. The artist employs seriality to emphasise these differences by hanging the works side by side and using an identical rectangular format.

# Stephen Friedman Gallery

## Gallery Hours

Tuesday to Friday, 10am–6pm  
and Saturday, 11am–5pm

## Social Media

Facebook: /Stephen-Friedman-Gallery

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As part of the Freelands Lomax Ceramics Fellowship in 2018, this new body of work stems from Baldock's residency and subsequent solo exhibition at Camden Arts Centre, London. Baldock's research took him to the British Museum to study their collection of Mesopotamian clay tablets which trace the linguistic evolution of pictograms into cuneiform script, the world's oldest writing system. Inspired by these ancient modes of communication, the artist plays with clay's potential to communicate forms of meaning that evade verbal articulation.

Baldock is also keen to explore the historical and symbolic function of masks in his work. Ceremonial objects have traditionally been used as a means for establishing communication between the sacred and the profane. Invested with spiritual values, one can imagine Baldock's masks being used as part of a pagan ritual. This performative quality is also manifested by the title of the exhibition. Derived from Latin, 'Personae' refers to a theatrical mask donned by an actor and also represents the multiple aspects of someone's personality. Baldock uses the mask as a means of exploring the psychological potency of hiding and revealing different facets of one's identity.

Coinciding with Frieze London and Frieze Masters, Stephen Friedman Gallery is also presenting a large-scale, interactive sculpture by Baldock in the intimate setting of Grade II\* listed Fitzrovia Chapel, London from 2 to 5 October 2019. 'My biggest fear is that someone will crawl into it' is a hand-embroidered, four-poster bed into which visitors can crawl, lie down, and listen to a personal narrative recorded by the artist's mother.

Jonathan Baldock (b. 1980, Kent, UK) works across multiple platforms including sculpture, installation and performance. He graduated from Winchester School of Art with a BA in Painting (2000-2003), followed by the Royal College of Art, London with an MA in Painting (2003-2005). With work often taking on a biographical form, Baldock addresses the trauma, stress, sensuality, mortality and spirituality around our relationship to the body and the space it inhabits. In the spring of 2019, Baldock had a solo exhibition at Camden Arts Centre, London which toured to Tramway, Glasgow in August 2019. He will have a solo exhibition at Kunsthall Stavanger, Norway in May 2020. Other notable solo and two-person exhibitions include those at De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill (2017); The Grundy Art Gallery, Blackpool (2017); Southwark Park Galleries, London (2017); PEER, London (2016); Chapter Gallery, Cardiff (2016) and Wysing Arts Centre, Cambridge (2013).

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