

Stephen Friedman Gallery

**Caroline Coon features in
'Fear Gives Wings to
Courage', curated by Tarini
Malik**

**5-6 Cork Street
London, W1S 3LQ**

Friday 11 July –
Friday 25 July 2025

Gallery hours:
Tuesday–Friday, 10am–6pm
Saturday 11am–5pm



Women of Ladbroke Grove – Carnival, 1993

Contact Us

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Stephen Friedman Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of paintings and photographs by **Caroline Coon** in the gallery viewing room, alongside a selection of Jean Cocteau ceramics. The presentation is part of a Cork Street wide group exhibition, *Fear Gives Wings to Courage*, curated by **Tarini Malik** and celebrating a century of Cork Street.

Coon was central to London's nascent hippy and punk scenes, managing The Clash from 1978 to 1980. Her photographs from this time are widely celebrated and have been used on a variety of media including sleeves for singles such as The Police's 'Roxanne' and The Clash's 'White Riot'. They are also an important documentation of activism, depicting protests such as the first Rock Against Racism march in 1978.

Four photographs are presented in the exhibition, capturing iconic punk bands The Clash, The Slits and the Sex Pistols. In one work, members of The Clash, the Sex Pistols and Steel Pulse are photographed demonstrating outside neo-fascist National Front leader's headquarters in 1978. A detail of this image has also been made into a double-sided banner, exhibited over Cork Street.

Inspired by feminism and the politics of sexual liberation, Coon's unique paintings contest binary notions of gender and oppressive patriarchal values. In *Self Portrait with Model*, Coon depicts herself naked with paintbrush in hand, standing in front of her aroused male model. This work was painted in the same year as *Mr Olympia* – a large-scale nude in which Coon subverts **Édouard Manet's Olympia** (1863), replacing the naked white woman with a Black man, and the clothed Black servant girl with a naked white woman. Deemed offensively explicit, this work was pulled from an exhibition at Tate Liverpool for the presence of an 'ithyphallus'.

Women of Ladbroke Grove – Carnival is an ode to female friendship and Notting Hill carnival – London's "annual bacchanal", as the artist describes it, while *Cunt* is a richly symbolic tribute to **Pauline Boty** and a bold celebration of female sexuality. The paintings and photographs in the exhibition are united by Coon's unwavering rebellion against the status quo.

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Notes to editors

About Caroline Coon

Caroline Coon is a trailblazer of London's counterculture. She has campaigned for women's rights since the 1960s; co-founded Release in 1967, a legal-advice agency for young people charged with the possession of drugs that continues today; and was central to London's nascent hippy and punk scenes, managing The Clash from 1978 to 1980.

Coon studied Fine Art at Central Saint Martins in the mid-1960s, opting for a medium and subject deemed unfashionable at the time – figurative painting. Her distinctive style is characterised by crisp-edged lines, bright colours and hyperrealism redolent of **Paul Cadmus** and **Tamara de Lempicka**.

In 2018, at the age of 73, Coon had her first ever solo show at The Gallery Liverpool titled: 'The Great Offender'. This was followed by a solo exhibition at TRAMPS in London (2019) curated by **Peter Doig** and **Parinaz Magadassi**. In a review in The Art Newspaper, **Louisa Buck** writes: "Only now in her seventies is the importance of Coon's paintings being acknowledged... It seems that at last the self-styled 'great offender' is getting the favourable attention she richly deserves—and now on her own terms."

In the spirit of her activism, Coon's art breaks down social taboos and in turn challenges ideas of what a female artist should be. In her ongoing 'Brothel Series', Coon offers a rare perspective on the sex industry – drawing inspiration from her own experience as a sex worker – by depicting prostitutes through a feminist lens. Referring to canonical painters such as **Édouard Manet**, **Edgar Degas** and **Pablo Picasso** who historically painted such scenes, Coon says: "Those people were both the artists and the whore-fuckers. Well, I was the artist and also the whore." In these works, she destabilises the hierarchy between sex workers and their paying male customers, whilst also reclaiming a space traditionally depicted and inhabited by male artists.

A two-person exhibition with **Francesca DiMattio** opened at Stephen Friedman Gallery, New York in January 2025 and Coon's work was also highlighted in the group exhibition 'Women in Revolt!', which toured the UK from Tate Britain, London. Two paintings by the artist were recently added to Tate's permanent collection. Her work also featured in 'Mixing It Up: Painting Today' at the Hayward Gallery, London (2021).

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Stephen Friedman Gallery is a contemporary art gallery that was founded in 1995 with a focus on representing exceptional artists from around the world. Since its inauguration, the gallery has been based in Mayfair, London. In October 2023, the gallery expanded and relocated to Cork Street. In November 2023, the gallery opened its first location outside the UK at 54 Franklin Street in Tribeca, New York.