

## Stephen Friedman Gallery

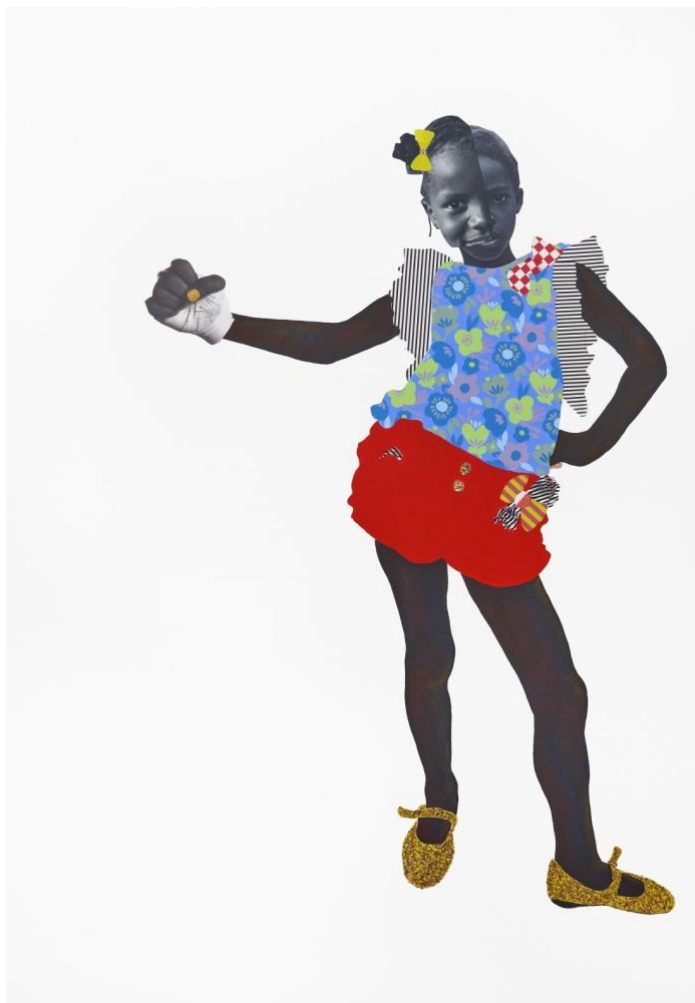
Creative Boom

Exploring themes of race, identity & gender politics: Deborah Roberts' first solo show in Europe

Katy Cown

16 May 2019

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*Copyright Deborah Roberts. Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London*

Combining collage with mixed media, Deborah Roberts' figurative works depict the complexity of black subjecthood and explore themes of race, identity and gender politics.

In a new exhibition at the Stephen Friedman Gallery in London this June, the American artist will present new works drawn from an open letter penned by James Baldwin to political activist Angela Davis during her incarceration in 1970. Its final sentence reads: "For, if they take you in the morning, they will be coming for us that night."

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Entitled 'If They Come', Roberts uses Baldwin's words to highlight the cross-generational struggle against racism and the socio-political parallels between 1970 and 2019. Continuing this call for solidarity, Roberts' use of collage speaks to the challenges encountered by young black children as they strive to build their identity, particularly as they respond to preconceived social constructs perpetuated by the black community, the white gaze and visual culture at large.

Combining a range of different facial features, skin tones, hairstyles and clothes, Roberts explains that "with collage, I can create a more expansive and inclusive view of the black cultural experience."



*Deborah Roberts, 'The burden', 2019. Mixed media collage on linen, 165 x 114.3cm (65 x 45in).*

*Copyright Deborah Roberts. Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London*

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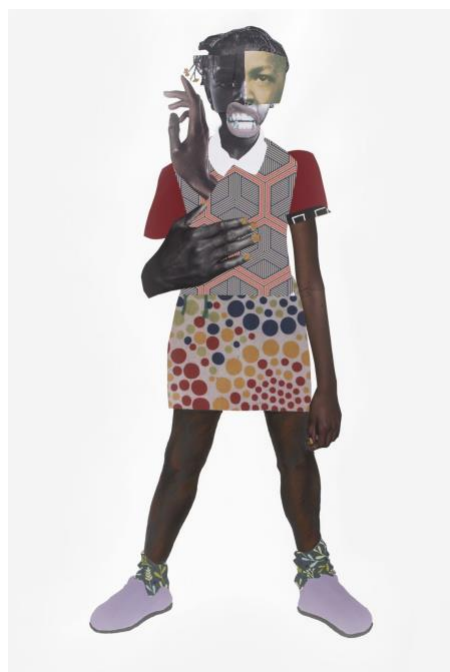
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Deborah Roberts, 'King me', 2019. Mixed media collage on canvas, 165 x 114.3cm (65 x 45in).  
Copyright Deborah Roberts. Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London



Deborah Roberts, 'The inbetween', 2019. Mixed media collage on paper, 111.8 x 81.3cm (44 x 32in).  
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The exhibition is accompanied by a new publication featuring an essay by Daniella Rose King, Whitney-Lauder Curatorial Fellow at the Institute of Contemporary Art,

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Philadelphia. In it, she writes: "Creating her subjects as composites of found images, imagined patterns, constructed postures and poetic titles, Roberts portrays a direct refutation and complication of the depictions of black bodies that have been circulating within the media since the dawn of the photographic era.

"Her project is one that simultaneously highlights, disavows and recreates the hierarchies, standards and narratives created and disseminated by institutions that have served the interests and sustainment of white supremacy. Throughout the new works shown in 'If they come', Roberts constructs new archetypes – images of fictional black boys and girls of ages 9 to 12 – who take on poses of strength and power at the same time as showing vulnerability and ambiguity."



*Deborah Roberts, 'When you see me', 2019. Mixed media collage on canvas, 165 x 304.8cm (65 x 120in). Copyright Deborah Roberts. Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London*

Rose King continues: "Challenging the criminalisation of black children, particularly boys, that is rampant globally, but nowhere more so than in the US, Roberts has her subjects stare defiantly at the viewer, elevated on metaphorical pedestals, clad in the regalia of pop culture's superheroes. Her visual counterpoints seek to subvert and challenge our dominant visual cultures.

"Yet, her subjects inhabit multiplicity and hybridity as various other subjects constitute them – including the faces of adults, and of individuals from different ethnicities – to suggest the constant, unfixed process of subject formation, particularly at this pivotal time in a person's development from child to adult."

Deborah Roberts will also have a major solo exhibition at The Contemporary Austin, Texas in September 2020. Discover more at [deborahrobertsart.com](http://deborahrobertsart.com).

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