

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Art in Print
Sarah Ball
Kevin
March–April 2019

Art in Print

Sarah Ball

Edition Review

Sarah Ball, *Untitled* (2018)

Six polymer etchings, 30 x 23 cm (paper), 18 x 12 cm (image). Edition of 25. Printed and published by Paupers Press, London.

Untitled (2018)

Two polymer etchings, 43.5 x 34 cm (paper), 32 x 24 cm (image). Printed and published by Paupers Press, London.



Image: Sarah Ball, one of six from *Untitled* (2018)

In the context of the contemporary artwork, Sarah Ball has made a number of unfashionable choices: she lives and works in the country (near Penzance in Cornwall); her artworks are usually small; and her subjects are human faces. The faces are those of real people, photographed and archived by various branches of officialdom—mug shots, immigration documents, government-issued IDs.

The format is consistent: a single head, almost always facing the viewer, against a flat background; just enough of the shoulders and chest to give an indication of clothing or accommodate an identifying placard. The smallness of the images is an invitation to intimacy. Ball takes some liberties with her source material—adjusting facial hair or garments, smoothing skin to a marble-like solidity. The result is stylistically modern, streamlined, quietly abstracted. But rather than robbing her subjects of their humanity (in the manner of, say, Philip Pearlstein), Ball's pictures seem to trim away everything but that.



Image: Sarah Ball, one of two from *Untitled* (2018)

Ball's new polymer etchings with Paupers Press employ the monochromatic nuance of her graphite drawings; only the clothing is given color. The first six are not much larger than snapshots, but packed with interpersonal fascination: there is a middle-aged black woman in pointy glasses; a young, round-faced brunette with bobbed hair; a shock-haired man with the sun-creased skin of a sailor; a bearded bloke who could be a Civil War recruit or a Brooklyn hipster. The last two prints are larger, and the heads—both of young dark-skinned people—fill much more of the image. While the first set of subjects seem bemused, or lost, or resigned, these two stare forward with a slightly stropic stoicism.

In her paintings, Ball has often used titles that give clues to the subject's biography (the 2012 painting *Conspirator*, for example, is clearly Ethel Rosenberg), but these prints are all untitled, as are the related paintings. We don't know who these people are, or how they ended up in the grip of the system that took their likeness and filed it under "Romanian" or "prostitute," or whatever. We can make guesses about the time period from accessories like pointy glasses; we can try to intuit character from the tilt of a lip or the droop of an eyelid. But the original institutional photographs were purposefully stripped of passing distractions such as smiles, and of course are looking at an artist's recasting, not at those photographs themselves, so the forensics are complicated.

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Art in Print
Sarah Ball
Kevin
March–April 2019

Ball entices us into looking, and in that looking to consider the clues and assumptions we use to categorize the people around us, which is to say, to make sense of the world. The slower we look, the more we see, not just in the image, but in ourselves.