

Stephen Friedman Gallery

The Art Newspaper
Our critic's choice of London Gallery Weekend shows: Central
Ben Luke
27 May 2021



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It's not just blue-chip galleries that have made our list of top exhibitions to see in central London where the city-wide event kicks off on 4 June

Remember when the demise of galleries in the West End and central London was widely predicted as they migrated East? It seems absurd now, as the greatest concentration of London's galleries remains in Mayfair and Fitzrovia. And it is not just blue-chip galleries. Arcadia Missa, one of the most radical of London's commercial art spaces, which currently has a solo show by the Canadian artist Rosa Aiello, moved "up west" from Peckham recently. But, of course, the mega-galleries are here, too, and their offerings, many of which opened in the weeks leading up to London Gallery Weekend, are among the best shows—Rachel Whiteread at Gagosian and Ellen Gallagher at Hauser & Wirth are particular highlights. But here is a selection of shows which open for, or close to, London Gallery Weekend, from still-blooming veterans and mid-career artists in full flow to radical young guns.

Larry Poons

3 June-31 July, Almine Rech, Grosvenor Hill, Broadbent House, W1K 3JH



Image: Larry Poons, Centaur, 2020 © Larry Poons, courtesy of Almine Rech

Larry Poons was the unlikely star of Nathaniel Kahn's art-market documentary *The Price of Everything*. He has been pictured as a beacon of authenticity, ignoring the money madness in pursuit of artistic experiment and integrity. Included in two seminal New York museum shows of the 1960s—the Museum of Modern Art's *The Responsive Eye* and the Metropolitan Museum's *New York Painting and Sculpture 1940-1970*—Poons fell out of critical and market favour before a recent resurgence of interest. This first London show of his work in 13 years is a concise survey of his paintings since that Met show, including new works that he painted in the round in his upstate New York studio and cropped into individual paintings.

Bridget Riley: Past Into Present

3 June-31 July, David Zwirner, 24 Grafton Street, W1S 4EZ

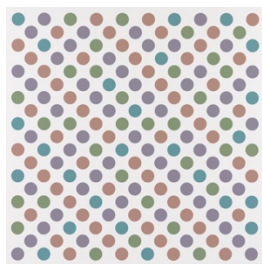


Image: Bridget Riley, Measure for Measure 45 (2020) © Bridget Riley Courtesy the artist and David Zwirner

Riley shows works from two ongoing series, *Measure for Measure* and *Intervals*: the first using circular forms; the latter, stripes. The show's title reflects the fact that these two bodies of work build on earlier paintings to create something new. And not just in the use of those geometric forms to which she has returned throughout her career, but in reference to a specific painting: both series began with the three colours—purple, ochre and green—that Riley used in a 1970s work titled *Vapour*. She has since added a fourth colour, turquoise, and the two series' effects are enormously different. In *Intervals*, white bands interrupt the coloured stripes creating a serene, musical spatial movement, while in *Measure for Measure*, Riley's varied arrangements of the circles lead to often mesmeric pulsing and resonant afterimages.

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Martine Syms: Soft

Until 3 July, Sadie Coles HQ, 8 Bury Street SW1Y



Image: Martine Syms Eventually, Finally (2021) © Martine Syms. Courtesy of Sadie Coles HQ, London, photo by Eva Herzog

Ahead of her appearance at the Glasgow International Festival, in which she's showing the latest in her ongoing sitcom-satire SHE MAD (2015-ongoing), in London, Syms is presenting photographs and, for the first time, drawings made in oil pastel. Both continue her distinctive, often autobiographical exploration of Black identity. The photographs are fragments with systematic yet intriguing titles that allude to their subject matter one includes the phrase "ode to my esteemed colleagues", for instance. The drawings are informal but powerful, again giving glimpses of scenarios, with allusive yet elusive titles: in Eventually, Finally (2021), a half-naked figure is upside down amid a field of bright red. Are we looking down on her from above or is she in descent?

Peter Fischli

3 June-31 July, Sprüth Magers, 7A Grafton Street, W1S 4EJ

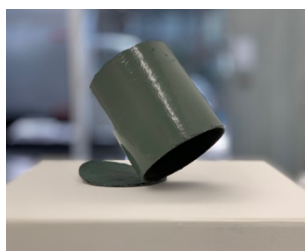


Image: Peter Fischli, Cans (2017-19) Courtesy of Sprüth Magers and House of Gaga. © Peter Fischli, Photo: Peter Fischli

Fischli continues the humorous yet profound ideas he developed in 30 years of collaboration with David Weiss, who died in 2012. This show relates closely to Fischli's recent major show at the Kunsthau Bregenz in Austria. Among the works is Professoren-Edition (The Phantom of the Authentic) a lithograph based on a watercolour Fischli made as a child featuring a monkey. Fischli used the image as a basis to cast several sculptures in polystyrene foam which he then carved by hand, to create distinctive, absurd reliefs. He also shows works from his Cans, Bags and Boxes series, which play on the abstract potential of humdrum containers and packaging.

Tala Madani: Skid Mark

4 June-10 July, Pilar Corrias Gallery, 54 Eastcastle Street, W1W 8EF



Image: A still from Tala Madani's Shit Mom animation (2019) © Tala Madani, courtesy of Pilar Corrias

Where the shit hits the fan in art: the Iranian-born, LA-based artist shows paintings and a new animation in her Shit Mom series and another group of paintings capturing ceiling fans, which Madani has long viewed as sinister, menacing forms. As Madani told our podcast A brush with..., the Shit Mom series emerged from resuming painting after the birth of her second child. Disgusted at her kitsch initial effort, she smeared the paint. "Luckily, I smeared the female figure first before the baby figure, otherwise I might have never seen the idea. So then there was a muddy figure with a pristine child and I thought: 'That's my mother and child. Why haven't I seen this before?'" In the animation, this faecal figure smears the titular skid marks across bourgeois interiors. Madani also shows paintings focusing on an adult Pinocchio sporting a wooden penis.

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Leilah Babirye: Ebika Bya ba Kuchu mu Buganda (Kuchu Clans of Buganda) II

4 June-31 July, Stephen Friedman Gallery, 25-28 Old Burlington St, W1S 3AN



Image: Leilah Babirye, Senga Muzanganda (Auntie Muzanganda, 2020) © Leilah Babirye. Courtesy of the artist; Stephen Friedman Gallery, London and Gordon Robichaux, New York. Photo by Gregory Carideo.

Babirye was effectively forced to leave her native Uganda in 2015 after she was outed in a local newspaper. She was later granted asylum in the US and now lives in Brooklyn, from where she confronts this history, exploring, as she describes it, “the realities of being gay in the context of Uganda and Africa in general”. Her figures, sculpted in ceramics and wood, and often on a large scale, attempt to reflect queer communities within the context of the ancestral clan system of Buganda, the kingdom in Ghana from which Babirye hails. Her artistic language is a fusion of tough, handmade forms and found objects: the ceramics are coiled and moulded before being fired and finished with dramatic, often expressive glazes; the wood pieces are carved and burned and embellished with nails and wire. The show at Stephen Friedman, her first in the UK and Europe, will spill out into the gallery’s garden, where Babirye shows her largest ever ceramic work.