

Stephen Friedman Gallery

ARTnews

The 10 Best Booths at Frieze London: From Boy-Band Personas to Audio-Visual Healing Environments and More

Elizabeth Fullerton

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10 Things to See at Frieze London 2021 The 10 Best Booths at Frieze London: From Boy-Band Personas to Audio-Visual Healing Environments and More



Image: The action at Frieze London 2021.
Photo By Linda Nyland/Courtesy Frieze

From established names to emerging galleries. Frieze London, the British capital's premier art fair, returned in-person on Wednesday after a pandemic-imposed break, and there was an air of excitement as people quaffed champagne and masks seemed to be optional. Many artists were present, some having crossed continents, adding to the sense of celebration. Several galleries reported brisk sales, with museums and private foundations snapping up Stephen Friedman's entire solo booth dedicated to Deborah Roberts at prices between \$125,000-\$150,000 and blue-chip galleries Hauser & Wirth, David Zwirner, White Cube, Thaddaeus Ropac, and others also placing top-tier works with collectors and museums.

While blue-chip galleries were out in force, young galleries brought some of the most exciting offerings, as reflected by Tate's acquisition of two works by Sung Tieu from Emalin and a photographic series by Rene Matić from Arcadia Missa. The promotion of emerging artists is a key objective, Frieze artistic director Eva Langret said in a publicity video: "After everything we've been through, it was really important for us to think about what the fair means as a platform and how it can contribute to elevating new voices."

Below is a look at some of the top picks of the fair, which runs through Sunday, September 17.

Sin Wai Kin at Blindspot Gallery



Image: Courtesy Blindspot Gallery

Hong Kong's Blindspot has an eye-catching booth featuring the work of London-based artist Sin Wai Kin (who had previously exhibited work as Victoria Sin) performing as four different boyband characters in a two-channel music video, plus pop-style posters and life-size cut-outs of the band members. This project, *It's Always You* (2021), marks Sin's return to their gender-neutral Cantonese birth name (Sin Wai Kin). Where Sin previously explored the social demands of femininity through their busy drag queen persona, here they play out fantasies of masculinity. Sin simultaneously plays a beefy heartthrob, Wai King, an elaborately made-up Cantonese opera warrior character called *The Universe*, the more mature band member known as *The Storyteller*, and *The One*, who is playful, face painted sky-blue with a naked women's silhouette running down nose and mouth. In the video, the pop idols dance, pose, and speak about the multiplicity of identity; it's done with charm and joy but Sin's underlying message is a rejection of artificial binaries: "one plus one is not two."

Sung Tieu at Emalin



Image: Theo Christelis/Courtesy the artist and Emalin, London

Known for her explorations of sonic warfare and the legacy of the Cold War, German-Vietnamese rising star Sung Tieu, the recipient of this year's Frieze Artist Award, has created a powerful display for the booth of London gallery Emalin that utilizes a sparse aesthetic in

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reference to the CIA's coopting of Minimalist and Modernist art as an ideological weapon during the Cold War. Within elegant minimalist arrangements she displays objects such as tampons and bedlinen that were produced by thousands of Vietnamese contract workers brought to communist East Germany as part of a 1980s "recruitment agreement" to resolve a labor shortage. Tieu's father was one of these workers who were forced to work under exploitative conditions. On the walls hang framed contracts and the harsh regulations for accommodation, which prohibit workers from becoming pregnant, for example.

Andrew Pierre Hart at Tiwani Contemporary



Image : Courtesy the artist and Tiwani Contemporary

British artist Andrew Pierre Hart, whose practice is concerned with the symbiosis of sound and painting, has constructed a luscious audio-visual environment for Tiwani Contemporary, which focuses on African and African diasporic artists. (The gallery announced a new Lagos location earlier this month.) Hart presents a chilled soundscape alongside a vertiginous black-and-white mural inspired by West African architecture and musical forms; fractal geometric patterns ricochet rhythmically between this abstract expanse and gorgeous, large-scale paintings that are dominated by velvety indigo and purple hues, created while listening to music at a "healing" frequency of between 60–80 Hz. Hart's richly layered canvases, which often include textual fragments, draw on references from the American scientist Valerie Thomas to imaginary deities or spirits of Black music.

Noémie Goudal at Edel Assanti



Image: ©Noémie Goudal/Courtesy the artist and Edel Assanti

French artist Noémie Goudal's immersive film installation *Below the Deep South* (2021) is a showstopper. It opens with shots of lush tropical foliage, accompanied by chirping jungle sounds, but suddenly the scene combusts. Viewers soon realize it was a trompe l'oeil photograph, behind which another natural environment is revealed. One by one these extraordinarily realistic scenes—there are 15 layers of landscape in all—go up in flames in a mesmerizing sequence that lasts 12 minutes and ends with a vacant industrial unit. The film inevitably prompts thoughts about environmental degradation and climate change but also the instability and flux of the Earth's geology going back millions of years through "deep time."

Deborah Roberts at Stephen Friedman

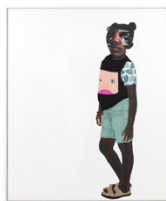


Image: Paul Bardargjy/©Deborah Roberts/Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London

At Stephen Friedman's booth I couldn't help but be drawn to the collaged images of Black children by the Austin-based artist Deborah Roberts. Innocent, winsome, hopeful, and defiant, these fragmented faces beseech us to allow them their childhood, which is often denied to so many Black children. In her compelling portraits Roberts draws on art history, pop culture and Black culture—the hands in one work are James Baldwin's, the pattern of a shirt appropriated from a Rauschenberg work; elsewhere Pokémon characters appear. Roberts, who was in town for the occasion, highlighted a work depicting a girl with Afro puffs and a smiling pig T-shirt, *The Innocent and the Damned* (2021), shown above. "This is one

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of my favourite ones I've ever done because it quietly speaks to the notion of violence against Black bodies without screaming it to you," she said. "She's open and welcome to the idea of protection but not to brutality."

Alberta Whittle at Copperfield



Image: Courtesy the artist and Copperfield, London

London-based gallery Copperfield has devoted its booth to Barbadian-Scottish artist Alberta Whittle, who will represent Scotland at next year's Venice Biennale. Whittle's multimedia display draws connections between language and knowledge systems, from mythology to weather patterns to cosmology to the racialized coding of the Black body. *Matrix Moves* (2019), a sculpture of a Black figure in colourful shaggy costume lying beside a fallen limbo pole, takes centre stage. Playing on Eurocentric tropes around the exotic, the piece recalls the horrors of the slave ship hull (from which the term "limbo" is believed to originate) yet offers a way to "reclaim pleasure, pleasure of movement, pleasure of carnival," according to Whittle who was present in the booth. The other works on view include a "deeply personal" film about longing, isolation, and togetherness as well as queer speculative futures, a wall dotted with bronze tongues cast from the artist's own like a constellation, and a mystical digital collage *Celestial Meditations V* (2018).

JTT



Image: Damian Griffiths

New York-based gallery JTT was another strong booth, varying in tempo between heavy and playful. Among the undoubted highlights were James Yaya Hough's intricate ballpoint pen drawings detailing the inhuman treatment of inmates through surreal compositions. (Hough himself was incarcerated for many years.) Relatedly, Sable Elyse Smith presents soft expanses of black suede framing photographs of inmates taken in visiting rooms where reunions are documented against idyllic painted scenes that the inmates are often forced to paint. Smith renders the figures unrecognizable by collaging actual photographs of such scenes onto their faces. Both artists feature in the lauded travelling U.S. exhibition "Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration" curated by Nicole R. Fleetwood. Also on view were Becky Kolsrud's two vibrant Pop-style paintings teasingly inverting art historical tropes of the nude female bather, one portraying a pink-faced skeleton in a bath, the other deconstructing the female figure into a series of disembodied parts. Cascading down the centre of the gallery, weighted in place by a sandbag, is Elaine Cameron-Weir's alluring sculpture *Snake 11* (2020), made with enamelled copper scales.

Mounira Al Solh, Walid Raad, and Marwan Rechmaoui at Galerie Sfeir-Semler



Image: Courtesy the artist and Galerie Sfeir-Semler

From an all-round terrific presentation by the Beirut- and Hamburg-based Galerie Sfeir-Semler, three works deserve special mention. A yellow embroidered tent by Mounira Al Solh immediately captures one's attention but unlike Tracey Emin's famous tent detailing everyone she ever slept with, Al Solh's tent bears sewn testimonies of abuse from Arab women interviewed by the artist. Along with these quotes of suffering, Al Solh has embroidered uteruses in a celebration of womanhood and female resilience. There's also a wonderful, compressed metal suitcase by

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Marwan Rechmaoui titled Gallery 6.08 (2020), made from metal girders recovery from the gallery's former Beirut building which was decimated in the 2020 explosion. Walid Raad's inkjet prints of birds You have never been so populated (1997/2021), shown above, tell a narrative about an attempt by Christian militias to use invasive bird species as a weapon against their enemies during the Lebanese civil war. Exhibited under the alias of The Atlas Group, these drawings, which also feature maps and charts, exemplify Raad's seamless blending of fact and fiction in his interrogation of the war and the unresolved trauma that remains its legacy.

Rindon Johnson, Jesse Darling, and Rene Matic at Arcadia Missa

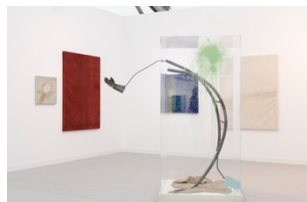


Image: ©2021 Tim Bowditch/Courtesy Arcadia Missa

Arcadia Missa's booth features pressing themes intriguingly presented. American artist Rindon Johnson presents dyed cowhides which he worked over with Vaseline and bleach and left outside to accrue dust particles and plant matter at the mercy of the elements. But these seductive objects have a darker undertone. Johnson draws a parallel between the skins, a by-product of industrial beef production, and the mass exploitation of human labour that built America's capitalist economy through the transatlantic slave trade. Alongside these thought-provoking works are an appealing anthropomorphic sculpture *The Road Extinct* (municipal fragment, 2020) by Berlin-based Jesse Darling made from a broken piece of rollercoaster track from which a glove tentatively proffers a plastic tree, perhaps in some kind of gesture of friendship, and photographs from Rene Matic's multi-layered series flags for countries that don't exist but bodies that do, which explores the intersection of Black, queer, and British identities.

Fanny Gicquel at Hua International



Image: Courtesy the artist and Hua International

On passing Hua International's booth I noticed a waxwork figure standing under a glass breathing apparatus, so I was disconcerted on my return to find the figure facing the wall and in fact alive. It turned out to be a duet performance by French artist Fanny Gicquel and Vinicius Davi activating a series of Gicquel's marine-inspired sculptural objects including a steel fan, a metal and rope net, a black bar with spikes, and serigraphs. The works in the booth deconstruct Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa's "Ode to Maritime" through engagement with semaphore, the visual signal system by which seafarers communicate using their arms and flags. The presentation is part of Cedric Fauq's curated section "Unworlding," centred on artists whose practices "undo" the world as it exists today, allowing for the potential rebuilding of a more hopeful environment.