

Stephen Friedman Gallery

The Mirror

Art gallery filled with 12,000 tennis balls branded 'dream room for dogs'

Bethan Shufflebotham

30 November 2021



Art gallery filled with 12,000 tennis balls branded 'dream room for dogs'

Visitors to the Mayfair Tennis Ball Exchange, by David Shrigley, are asked to swap their own tennis ball for a new one to contribute to the unique work of art.

A room filled with more than 12,000 tennis balls is actually London's newest art installation - and it's inspired by dogs.

David Shrigley, best known for his unusual paintings, has launched his eighth solo exhibition at the Stephen Friedman Gallery, in Mayfair, and will remain in the city until January 8.

The interactive artwork features 12,160 fuzzy green balls, and invites people to trade their old, battered tennis balls for a brand new one.

The unusual gallery was inspired by David's lovely dog, Inca - who loves nothing more than a game of fetch.

The 53-year-old artist said: "Tennis balls are objects that I seem to use a lot in my everyday life because I have a dog, and my dog loves tennis balls.

"I always wanted to make a work about dogs. The idea of the exchange did come from the interaction with my dog where the tennis balls get discarded and we lose a lot of tennis balls.

"On the other hand if another dog wants her tennis ball she's willing to fight."

David noticed that Inca's interest is more about the exchange of the ball, rather than the possession, inspiring the idea behind the new work of art. He added: "I wanted to make a show that was about audience interaction so that people who attend it can add meaning to it. In this case they are all invited to bring a tennis ball and exchange it with one of the tennis balls in the exhibition.

"Each visitor who performs that task will change the exhibition."

The evolving installation has been simply named the Mayfair Tennis Ball Exchange, where rows and rows of tennis balls line the walls. Eventually, they'll all be swapped out for half-chewed, misshapen, coloured in, or graffitied tennis balls, each with their own history and story behind them.

People who trade their old tennis ball with a new one will receive a pin badge from the artist to celebrate their participation.

The exhibition is also accompanied by a film narrated by David, which documents the installation of works in the gallery.

On Instagram, David has been filming some of the visitors carefully make their choices as to where to place their old ball, and which new one to take with them.

Fans have joked their dogs would love to attend the exhibition, with one writing: "I've got a spaniel that would love half an hour in there."

Another added: "Dream room for dogs."