

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Frieze London

Sarah Ball
Booth B14
15 – 19 October 2025



For Frieze London 2025, Stephen Friedman Gallery is pleased to exhibit a solo presentation of new portraits by British artist **Sarah Ball**. Bringing together large and small-scale paintings alongside a series of 20 works on paper, the presentation continues Ball's sensitive exploration of the human condition and how it is outwardly conveyed through physiognomy, hairstyles, clothes, jewellery and make-up. This coincides with Ball's major institutional exhibition at Longlati Foundation, Shanghai, which opened in August 2025.

Ball explores modes of self-expression through the genre of portraiture. **Philomena Epps** writes that Ball's inspiration comes from the artist's "own teenage experiences, coming of age listening to records made by musicians like Pauline Black, David Bowie, Chrissie Hynde, Siouxsie Sioux and Poly Styrene – music she still plays in her studio today. These confident and innovative figures were her role models, and by extension Ball was influenced by how they experimented with their gender expression and revelled in their difference." Today, Ball experiences this spirit of non-conformity through the lens of her queer daughter, Edie, and her friends.

For Ball, identity is not a static concept but something that can be continuously constructed and deconstructed. *Emma F* (2025) is a striking homage to fellow artist Emma Fineman and her distinctive, carefully composed appearance; this is how she wants to be seen in the world. Literally larger than life, the three-quarter length portrait is based on a specially staged photograph and incorporates a variety of painterly techniques: the oversized green bow is rendered with thin, expressive washes of oil; the facial features are depicted with precise brushstrokes; and the hands, minimal and barely demarcated, reveal the raw canvas underneath. In turn, these different stylistic components become symbolic of the multifaceted nature of human identity. A tiny portrait capturing Emma in a starkly different get-up, now donning a vibrantly patterned headscarf, further emphasises this complexity.

The presentation also sees Ball paint a double portrait for the first time, the biggest painting the artist has made to date. *Anthony and Mr Young McNair* (2025) immortalises a queer couple, both adorned with exuberant clothing and handmade jewellery in various shades of pink. The painting is inspired by a work titled *Sir Thomas Mansel of Margam and his wife, Jane* from the 17th century, which Ball frequently visited at the National Museum Cardiff when she lived in Wales. Despite the work's formality, the artist was drawn to its unorthodox tenderness; husband and wife can be seen holding hands, which would be incredibly unusual in a portrait from this period. This subtle intimacy is reflected in Ball's own portrait, with both men depicted in a relaxed embrace. Using a traditional genre once associated with social status, wealth and heteronormative values, Ball instead implements the historic format to celebrate queer love on an epic scale.

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A new series of small works on paper feature heavily cropped drawings of friends and fellow creators, highlighting physical attributes and material adornments that reveal their idiosyncrasies. These extreme and detailed close-ups, amplifying the works' psychological intensity, speak to Ball's longstanding interest in film. The British New Wave, a particular inspiration for the artist, was a cinematic movement in the UK during the late 1950s and 1960s characterised by its focus on realism and social commentary. This intimate observation of the human condition is mirrored in Ball's own investigation of what makes us visually unique.

Other paintings in the presentation demonstrate Ball's longstanding practice of using images found on Instagram, looking at the ways in which we create and curate versions of ourselves online. Miniature in scale, *Petros* (2025) is seen wearing a large geometric earring and a hat adorned with trimmed ostrich feathers. Here, Ball resists the quick-paced nature in which we consume images on social media by instead inviting close observation.

The exhibition is accompanied by a newly commissioned essay by author and award-winning arts critic **Chloë Ashby**.

Notes to editors

Sarah Ball was born in Yorkshire, UK in 1965. She currently lives and works in Cornwall, UK. Ball studied at Newport Art College in the early 1980s and completed an MFA at Bath Spa University in 2005. Profiles on the artist have been published by The New York Times, Artsy, House & Garden, and The Art Newspaper.

Ball's major solo exhibition *Oh! You Pretty Things* at Longlati Foundation, Shanghai, China, is open until 25 October 2025. In February 2024, Ball had a solo presentation of new paintings at Stephen Friedman Gallery, New York, USA. The gallery presented its first major show of Ball's work at Frieze New York in May 2021 and her first solo exhibition in London in January 2022, accompanied by an illustrated catalogue.

Ball's works are included in the permanent collections of the British Museum, London, UK; Grace Museum, Abilene, Texas, USA; Hepworth Wakefield, West Yorkshire, UK; Kistefos Museum, Jevnaker, Norway; Kunstmuseum Bonn, Germany; Long Museum, Shanghai, China; Pond Society, Shanghai, China; Rachofsky Collection, Dallas, Texas, USA; University of Glamorgan, Pontypridd, Wales, UK and Xiao Museum of Contemporary Art, Rizhao City, China.

Stephen Friedman Gallery is a contemporary art gallery that was founded in 1995 with a focus on representing exceptional artists from around the world. Since its inauguration, the gallery has been based in Mayfair, London. In October 2023, the gallery expanded and relocated to Cork Street. In November 2023, the gallery opened its first location outside the UK at 54 Franklin Street in Tribeca, New York.

Image:

Sarah Ball, *Emma F*, 2025. Oil on canvas, 250 x 200cm (98 3/8 x 78 3/4in). Copyright Sarah Ball. Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London and New York. Photo by Todd-White Art Photography.