

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Denzil Forrester

Denzil Forrester's vibrant works immortalise the dynamic energy of the London reggae and dub nightclub scene during the early 1980s, a subject that has endured throughout four decades of his practice.

Born in Grenada in 1956, Denzil Forrester moved to London in 1967. He now lives and works in Cornwall, UK. Forrester received a BA in Fine Art from the Central School of Art, London in 1979 and an MA in Fine Art from the Royal College of Art, London in 1983. He was awarded the decoration of Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire or MBE in December 2020. Forrester received the Morley Fellowship from Morley College, London in 2019; a Harkness Fellowship in New York in 1986-88; and a scholarship by the British School at Rome in 1983-85.

Pulsating with rhythm, the artist's expressive depictions of dance halls and clubs capture crowds of people moving in unison with the beat of the music. Flashes of vivid colour, gestural brushstrokes and frenetic compositions characterise his work. Forrester explains: "I just wanted to draw movement, action and expression. I was interested in the energy of the crowd, particular dance movements and what the clubbers wore. In these clubs, city life is recreated in essence: sounds, lights, police sirens, bodies pushing and swaying in a smoke-filled room."

In his recent work, Forrester's scenes of urban dancehalls are juxtaposed with themes of social injustice, vivid recollections from his childhood and contemporary views of Cornwall. Peter Doig notes that these "dreamlike" works "emerge as much from [the artist's] imagination as from his studies of real life" and possess "a subtlety and form that has perhaps come about because he is reflecting upon his past."

Forrester's work is currently exhibited in the National Portrait Gallery, London touring group show 'The Time is Always Now: Artists Reframe the Black Figure'. Major solo exhibitions opened at Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, Missouri and Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami, Florida in 2023. Forrester was awarded the 2021 South Bank Sky Arts Award for his solo show 'Itchin & Scratchin', presented at Nottingham Contemporary and Spike Island, Bristol (2020–2021). A large-scale public artwork for Brixton Underground Station was unveiled by Transport for London in September 2019.

Stephen Friedman Gallery and Andrew Kreps collaborated to present a solo exhibition by Forrester in October 2024. Bringing together new paintings with historical works, the show spanned their two spaces in New York. Stephen Friedman Gallery has previously exhibited solo projects by Forrester in London (2023, 2019) and for Frieze Masters (2020). His work was the focus of three solo shows curated by Peter Doig and Matthew Higgs at White Columns, New York (2016); Tramps, London (2016) and Jackson Foundation, St Just, Cornwall (2018).

Notable group exhibitions include 'Beyond the Bassline: 500 Years of Black British Music', British Library, London (2024); 'Thin Skin', Monash University Museum of Art, Cauldfield East, Australia (2023); 'Is it morning for you yet? 58th Carnegie International', Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (2022); 'Forecast Form: Art in the Caribbean Diaspora, 1990s-today', Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Illinois (2022); 'Life Between Islands: Caribbean–British Art 50s – Now', Tate Britain, London (2021); 'Mixing It Up: Painting Today', Hayward Gallery, London (2021) and 'Get Up, Stand Up Now: Generations of Black Creative Pioneers', Somerset House, London (2019).

Forrester's works can be found in the collections of Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami, Florida; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Tate, UK; Arts Council Collection, UK; Government Art Collection, UK, Studio Museum in Harlem, New York and Long Museum, Shanghai, amongst many others.