

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Deborah Roberts

Combining collage with mixed media, Deborah Roberts' figurative works depict the complexity of Black subjecthood and explore themes of race, identity and gender politics.

Deborah Roberts was born in Austin, Texas, USA in 1962 where she continues to live and work.

Roberts' use of collage reflects the challenges encountered by young Black children as they strive to build their identity, particularly as they respond to preconceived social constructs perpetuated by the Black community, the white gaze and visual culture at large. Combining a range of different facial features, skin tones, hairstyles and clothes, Roberts explains that "with collage, I can create a more expansive and inclusive view of the Black cultural experience."

Roxana Marcoci, Senior Curator at MoMA, New York, writes: "In her mixed-media works, artist Deborah Roberts acknowledges the syncretic nature of Black female identity. Debunking societal definitions of ideal beauty and dress, as well as stereotypes of social media, she questions the construction of race and the racializing gaze endemic to Western culture. Her collages and text-based works not only articulate a critique of accepted typologies of the unified self but also affirm the untold value of difference."

Stephen Friedman Gallery opened a new gallery in Tribeca, New York in November 2023 with a solo exhibition by Roberts titled 'What about us?'. This coincided with the launch of her new monograph, '20 Years of Art/Work' published by Radius Books. Other recent solo and two-person exhibitions include those at SITE Santa Fe, New Mexico (2023); McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, Texas (2022) and The Bluecoat, Liverpool, UK (2021). The artist's major touring exhibition 'I'm' opened at The Contemporary Austin, Texas in January 2021, following the installation of her first outdoor public mural there in September 2020. The show travelled to Museum of Contemporary Art Denver, Colorado; Art + Practice in collaboration with California African American Museum, Los Angeles, California and Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens, Jacksonville, Florida (2021-22).

Her work featured in the touring exhibition 'Multiplicity: Blackness in Contemporary American Collage', which opened at Frist Art Museum, Nashville, Tennessee (2023). Other group projects include those at Dallas Museum of Art, Texas (2024); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, California (2024); Brooklyn Museum, New York (2024); Harvey B. Gantt Center for African American Arts + Culture, Charlotte, North Carolina (2024); Institute of Contemporary Art Boston, Massachusetts (2022); Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Park, Washington DC (2022); Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas (2022); Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Virginia (2021); Scottish National Galleries, Edinburgh, Scotland (2021); Van Every/ Smith Galleries, Davidson College, North Carolina (2020); Pérez Art Museum, Miami, Florida (2020); Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams, Massachusetts (2019); Somerset House, London, England (2019) and The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (2017).

Roberts was named 2023 Texas Medal of Arts Award Honoree for the Visual Arts. She was a finalist in the 2019 Outwin Boochever Portrait Competition and her work was exhibited in the accompanying show 'The Outwin 2019: American Portraiture Today', which toured from the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC (2019-2021). The Anonymous Was a Woman Award was presented to Roberts in December 2018, a prize granted each year to ten female artists over the age of 40 in the USA and at a critical juncture in their career. She was a recipient of the Pollock-Krasner Grant in 2016 and was an Artist in Residence at The Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, Florida in 2019.

Roberts' work is held in significant public collections including Scottish National Galleries, Edinburgh, UK; Brooklyn Museum, New York; Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas; Dallas Museum of Art, Texas; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, California; He Art Museum, Guangdong, China; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington DC; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, Massachusetts; Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, California; Smithsonian National Museum, Washington DC; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Virginia and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.