

**At Peace exhibition at Gillian Jason Gallery:
new Soho space celebrates art by black
women**

The owners want to broaden the conversation about contemporary art
By Emma Loffhagen - 11 January 2022



For anyone looking to see, support or collect art from beyond the traditionally white male canon, London's newest art hotspot, the Gillian Jason Gallery, which has just opened in the heart of Soho, has launched a groundbreaking exhibition exclusively featuring art by black women.

At Peace is curated by Jade Foster, a British curator and artist of Jamaican and Saint Lucian heritage. The show features the work of five leading female black artists who are challenging and subverting the way black bodies are represented in art. The selected paintings are described as "unbound by prejudice; subverting and rethinking how Black women and figures have been regarded by Western naturalistic classical and modernist traditions within painting".

In a radical reclamation of this narrative, Miranda Forrester, Sahara Longe, Cece Philips, Alanis Forde and Emma Prempeh have created bold works imbued with agency and uninhibited by traditional stereotypes.

Although you could argue it's a work of art as a whole, each piece within the exhibition stands tall on its own -

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quite literally in the case of Sahara Longe's *The Date*. At almost two metres tall, the imposing canvas dominates the first room of the gallery. It embodies the clear intention of all the works here: to depict women and non-binary people in a way that defiantly rejects the male gaze.

"I presented paintings that describe the relationships currently attached to me," says Prempeh, a London-based artist with Ghanaian and Vincentian heritage. "[My painting] *Them* depicts a snapshot of a non-binary partnership in the present, portraying the importance of what allyship, solidarity and freedom to black queer, transgender and intersex people of colour means to me."

Prempeh's two works on display, *Them* and *De Speeltuim*, are a something of a dichotomy; the former an infectious portrayal of black joy, the latter a story of fragmentation, broken relationships and distance. Both feel deeply intimate, exploring the relationship between public and private space as reflected in *De Speeltuim*'s background, influenced by brick and industrial material and patterns from Caribbean front-room interiors.

Using a variety of media, each artist contributes in a unique way to the whole. Among the most arresting works on display is Barbadian artist Forde's *Destination Wedding*. Akin to the work of Caribbean contemporaries such as Ebony Patterson, the painting tells a story of blissful solitude on the islands where there are no more wedding packages and holidays hosted on former plantations. The landscape is now rich and able to flower and blossom.



The themes touched on by Forde are even more pertinent in the context of Barbados cutting ties with the British Monarchy after 396 years to become a Republic. Painted not long before the event, there is a moving sense in her work of something presented as a speculative fictional utopia gradually transitioning closer to reality.

Phillips's triptych of pink-suited figures also immediately draws the eye. The self-taught, London-based artist's current body of work "explores the relationships between women and power, thinking about how expressions of influence have historically been depicted through cultural signifiers and body language and how this can be reimagined," she tells me.

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In particular the second of the trilogy, *Walking Loud*, feels like an audacious homage to the oft-repeated exhortation to 'take up space'; loudly and proudly learning to reclaim your rightful place in the world .

“When we opened *At Peace* we wanted to focus upon the theme of the exhibition; finding a space whereby artists, collectors and art appreciators alike would feel welcome to learn, unlearn and perhaps reevaluate foregone ideas,” says Elli Jason Foster, the gallery’s managing director.

“We’re happy to have welcomed so many Londoners to the exhibition in the last ten days. Despite fears around Covid people have stepped out of their relative comfort zone to come and safely view the exhibition in the gallery.”

And the show has definitely hit its target, with plenty of positive feedback from visitors, “not only limited to the individual artworks but also how the narrative as curated by Jade Foster that has its themes in world history, our human social story and its relevance to the UK today,” she adds.

At Peace is a powerful celebration of black talent and a reminder of why spaces dedicated to showcasing black art are sorely needed. For anyone looking for new avenues to discover art Gillian Jason Gallery is an exciting new addition to the London cultural scene.

Gillian Jason Gallery, to January 30. [Book tickets here](#)