

# FRIEZE



## The Best Shows to See in London During Frieze

From Tolia Astakhishvili's transformation of Shoreditch's oldest building at Emalin to Karimah Ashadu's study of bodybuilders in Lagos at Camden Art Centre



BY SEAN BURNS IN CRITIC'S GUIDES | 14 OCT 25



In 1777, Samuel Johnson famously declared: 'When a man is tired of London, he is tired of life.' Over the next week, there's little chance of such disillusionment – at least if contemporary art is your thing. The city is brimming with it, from unusual self-initiated projects in unexpected spaces to expansive exhibitions by some of the world's best-known artists. We've heard the naysayers, but the reality is that London always delivers. I've attempted to whittle this smorgasbord down to eight highlights.

**Grant Mooney** | Chisenhale Gallery | 26 September – 7 December



Grant Mooney, 'sphere music', 2025. installation view. Courtesy: Chisenhale Gallery, London, and Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach; photograph: Andy Keate

The Hertford Union Canal runs directly behind the building that houses Chisenhale Gallery, where artist Grant Mooney has removed the glass from the single-glazed, industrial windows, allowing the ambient sounds of the waterways – birds, boats, bikes – to drift into the spare room. Inside, a series of reverential objects resembling dismantled vehicle parts is arranged with quiet precision. Splayed across the floor, a set of metal blades lies stripped of function, almost anaesthetized – perhaps once intended to move air, now reimagined as minimal art objects to be looked at rather than mobilized (*Stalls [τ.]*, 2025). The careful deliberation evident in their placement draws the viewer's attention to their manufacture: are they bespoke craft or found, mass-produced components? A mechanic would never be so neat, surely?

**Marie-Claire Messouma Manlanbien** | Gasworks | 2 October – 14 December



Marie-Claire Messouma, 'Mémoires des corps' (Body Memories), 2025, installation view.  
 Courtesy: the artist and Gasworks, London; photograph: Peter Otto

A soft, herbal aroma percolates through the two sedate rooms of Gasworks, where Marie-Claire Messouma Manlanbien has suspended and arranged assortments of textiles, organic matter, tapestries, ceramics and liquid concoctions, creating the impression of entering a meditative site removed from the chaos of nearby Kennington Lane. Rather than discerning individual works, the viewer is invited to luxuriate in the embrace of an environment charged by a careful artist interested in the cosmos, femininity and the accoutrements of ritual. Twinkling chains of beads and shells, interrupted by small deities and chimes, form curtains that break the line of sight before a lustrous tapestry, at the centre of which is an incandescent womb set within a celestial network. The sum of these often-small parts is directed towards big knowledge.

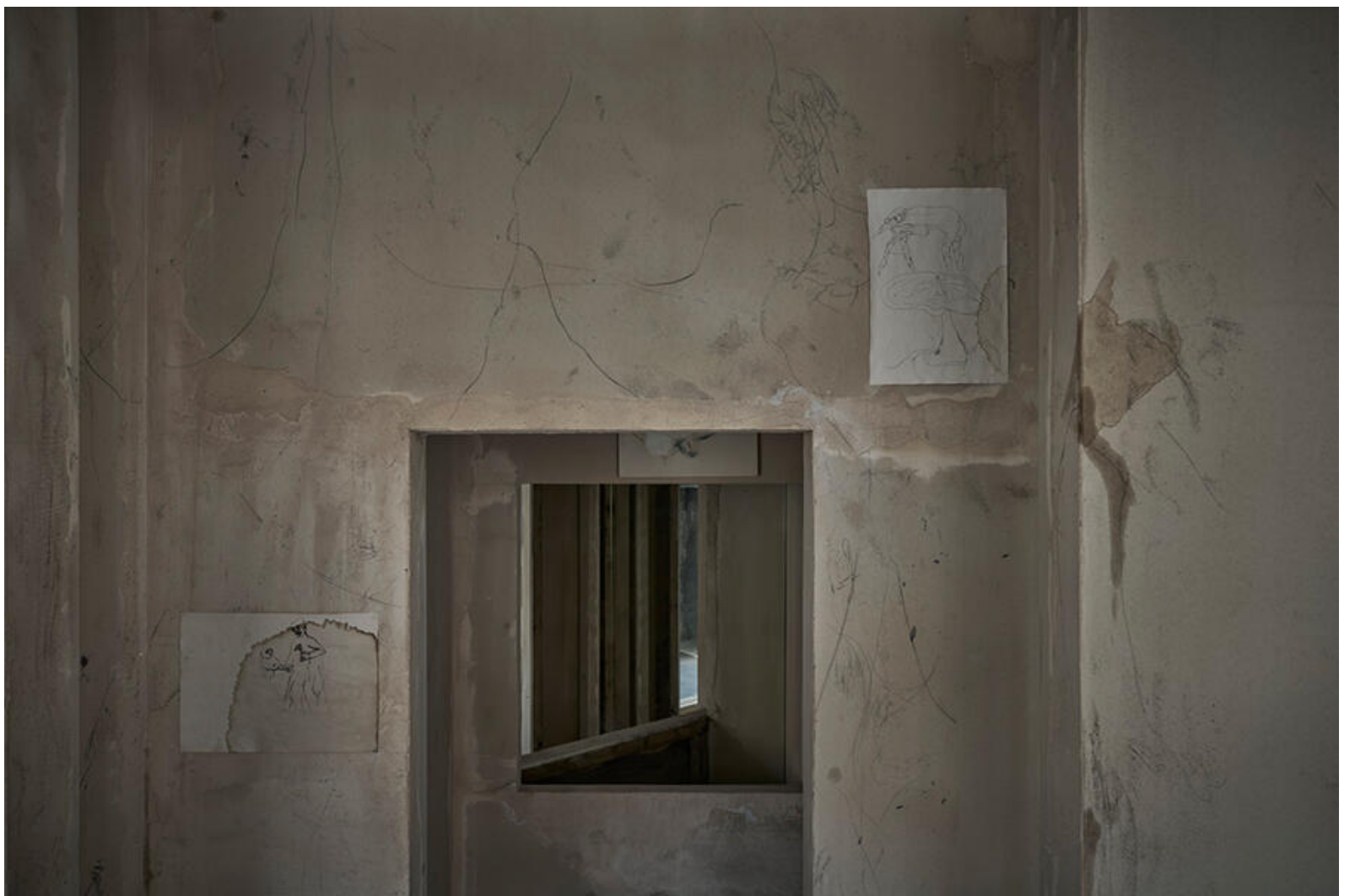
**Rebecca Ackroyd** | Ginny on Frederick | 20 September – 25 October



Rebecca Ackroyd, 'The Privy Window', 2025, installation view. Courtesy: the artist and Ginny on Frederick, London; photograph: Stephen James

Circularity – ranging from the slide carousels of the projectors to the images of the body and the earth they cast – is a central motif in Rebecca Akroyd's one-room show at Ginny on Frederick. Near the back, an image positioned low to the ground shows a single candle – the only consistently illuminated picture in the space. The light from the beam is surely burning the slide throughout the show's run, perhaps a reference to the flame itself. The aggregation of material – some personal, others drawn from art, cinema or television – gives the impression of a dynamic artist in the midst of figuring things out: reckoning with her own history and the interplay between her position in the world and the enormity of it all. Beeswax effigies are seated in shallow, antique ceramic chamber pots, pointing to a play between the divinely elevated and the resolutely earthbound.

**Tolia Astakhishvili** | Emalin, The Clerk's House | 3 October – 13 December



Tolia Astakhishvili, 'a wound on my plate', 2025, installation view. Courtesy: the artist; Emalin, London, and LC Queisser, Tbilisi; photograph: Tolia Astakhishvili Studio

The sense of inimical forces lurking just beneath the surface permeates Tolia Astakhishvili's intervention in The Clerk's House, Emalin's premises in the oldest structure in Shoreditch – a three-storey building that is creepy regardless. With Astakhishvili, gestures are never singular: agitated drawings and paintings are at once representational and dissolving; injected architectural follies, whimsical yet cumbersome, create a play of depth perception while condensing the overall space. The artist is one of the most fascinating of our time, toying with the very material of exhibition-making. It's a narrative environment in the vein of her former tutor Mike Nelson, but with an emotional and intimate bodily jolt that contradicts the muscularity of the building materials.

**Karimah Ashadu** | Camden Art Centre | 10 October 2025 – 22 March 2026



Karimah Ashadu, *MUSCLE*, 2025, film still. Courtesy: the artist; Camden Art Centre, London; Fondazione In Between Art Film; Sadie Coles HQ, London; and The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago

‘If you want to live in Lagos,’ a voice-over utters near the beginning of Karimah Ashadu’s new work, *MUSCLE* (2025), ‘you need to be rugged.’ In this 22-minute film, bodybuilding men in the slums of the Nigerian capital become a lens through which the artist examines broader ideas of masculinity, community, status and visibility. Through tightly framed shots of the athletes’ bodies and faces, Ashadu withholds any full, encompassing view of her subjects, prompting audiences to focus on the act itself – heaving enormous dumbbells and performing punishing bench presses – rather than on individual lives, which instead emerge through sensitive overlaid interviews. There’s a simplicity to this work that reveals an artist confident in the knowledge that careful observation and close listening are both political and powerful enough.

**Cosima von Bonin** | Raven Row | 9 October – 14 December



Cosima von Bonin, *Hermit Crab in Fake Royère*, 2010, steel, cotton, mohair, velour and felt, 1.2 × 1.2 × 1 m. Courtesy: the artist and Raven Row, London; photograph: Markus Tretter

A stoned-looking, crimson fabric cetacean slumps on a single suspended swing in the centre of Cosima von Bonin’s new multi-room exhibition, ‘Upstairs Downstairs’, donning several different types of neckwear: a pea-green toile number, a string of tiny jewels, a carrot-coloured scarf and a dogtooth one (*Mae Day VII*, 2024). It’s benevolent, undoubtedly chic (accompanied by a silver oyster clutch) and entirely at odds with the ballistic missile that divides the adjoining space, aimed into the fireplace – both too big for the quaint Georgian parlour and too small for combat (*Riley*, 2025). This show, which ‘samples’ from 35 years of practice, is a delightful bag of discordant signifiers (mushrooms, sharks, umbrellas) and materials, threaded together by a distinctive sensibility that spins the childlike with the profane, the quotidian with the hallucinogenic.

**Claire Fontaine** | Mimosa House | 10 October – 6 December



Claire Fontaine, *FATHERFUCKER*, 2025, installation view. Courtesy: the artist and Mimosa House, London; photograph: Christa Holka

Spreads from *The Guardian* coat the floors and stairs of Claire Fontaine's multi-room exhibition 'Show Less' at Mimosa House, curated by the brilliant Daria Khan, whose shows always demand deep engagement and never present neatly wrapped-up ideas. Claire Fontaine's exhibition is no different: twelve to-scale Chinese reproductions of Gustave Courbet's controversial *L'Origine du monde* (The Origin of the World, 1866) line the upstairs space, each vulva accented by the artist with differently coloured spray paint, some taking on bruise-like hues. At the entrance, a brick wrapped in the dust jacket of the illustrated book *Flowers of Palestine* (1870) signals how the war has profoundly affected all life there, not just human life. This is a conceptual collective unafraid of provocation, committed to probing the constituents of global injustice.

**Bob Thompson** | Maximillian William | 9 October – 13 December



Bob Thompson, *Abundance of the Four Elements*, 1964, oil on canvas, 1.2 × 1.5 m. Courtesy: © private collection; Maximilian William, London; and Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York; photograph: Ben Westoby / Fine Art Documentation

A smiling harpy with a circular yellow head, black wings and what appear to be two outstretched, mustard-coloured legs flies towards the viewer in Bob Thompson’s painting *Inferno* (1963) – the jewel of this one-room exhibition, which is the first in the UK dedicated to the American artist, who died prematurely in 1966 and has yet to fully receive his due outside his home country. ‘Measure of My Song’ will be a delight for painters, uniting six energetic works: four on canvas, one on board and another on a concertina of what look like cabinet doors. He was an exceptional colourist – look at the purple that seeps through the eyehole of the white, mask-like face of the dog creature in the same painting. Even 60 years on, these exquisite works remain amongst the most thrilling things I’ve seen in weeks: refreshingly unbridled, uncalculated and impassioned.

**Minor Attractions** also returns to The Mandrake from 14 to 18 October, with over 60 international galleries presenting shows in idiosyncratic hotel rooms. I also like the look of Hylton Nel’s ceramics at **Old and Interesting Art**, and Victor Man at **David Zwirner** and Kerry James Marshall at the **Royal Academy of Arts** are not to be missed.

*Main image: Karimah Ashadu, MUSCLE (detail), 2025, film still. Courtesy: the artist; Camden Art Centre, London; Fondazione In Between Art Film; Sadie Coles HQ, London; and The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago*



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