

Andrew Kreps
Gallery

22 Cortlandt Alley,
New York, NY 10013

Tue–Sat, 10 am–6 pm
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Denzil Forrester

Two Islands, One World

Andrew Kreps Gallery, 22 Cortlandt Alley & 394 Broadway
Stephen Friedman Gallery, 54 Franklin Street
October 25 - December 18, 2024
Curated by Sheina Wagstaff

Andrew Kreps Gallery and Stephen Friedman Gallery present *Two Islands, One World*, a two-venue exhibition by Grenada-born, British artist Denzil Forrester. Curated by Sheena Wagstaff, Chair Emerita at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and former Chief Curator of Tate Modern, the show will bring together new and historical works spanning five decades of his career. This presentation follows institutional exhibitions in 2023 at the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City and ICA Miami.

The dual exhibition showcases Forrester's depictions of London's 1980s reggae and dub nightclub scene across both galleries. Each includes focused rooms dedicated to other significant bodies of work: Andrew Kreps Gallery highlights memories from the artist's childhood and adolescence, while Stephen Friedman Gallery presents three significant historical paintings depicting police brutality and the untimely death of his friend Winston Rose.

Forrester was born in Grenada in 1956 and moved to London in 1967. At this time, immigrants from the West Indies had arrived in the UK seeking opportunities and the promise of a new life. Against a backdrop of racial oppression and resistance, his formative years as an artist unfolded. Forrester's recent work reflects his memories of leaving Grenada and, on arriving in London, sewing shopping bags in their basement with his mother, to sell to support the family.

By the 1980s, Forrester, now a young adult, was frequenting London's dub and reggae clubs. Immersed in the clubs' vibrant energy, he would sketch the ecstatic dancers from behind the bar. In his North London studio the next morning, Forrester would transform these intimate drawings into paintings, using vibrant colors to mimic the pulsing lights that flooded the clubs. In early works like *The Cave* (1978), he constructs a dynamic, Cubist-like composition where geometric forms convey rhythmic movement. As Wagstaff describes, "To experience the vibrant sights and sounds lived by Forrester in his time is to celebrate his remarkable artistic skill, acute powers of observation, rich compositional rhythm – and courage."

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Forrester's practice also extends beyond the dancefloor to confront the racial and social injustices of the time. The artist exposes police brutality in several early works investigating the tragic death of Winston Rose, a close friend and neighbor. These are presented in one room of the show, enabling for a place of reflection. Describing the documentary power of Forrester's work, Wagstaff writes: "Each of Forrester's paintings has a profound sense of precision with which they speak to this historical moment. Their poignancy is enhanced through an exhilarating irradiation, fracturing, or evacuation of light, from the revelation of bodies massed and united in rhythm and movement, flashing glimpses of DJ's and dancers in darkened basements, to the somber scenes of the death of his friend Winston Rose in police custody."

Throughout the exhibition, images can be seen to repeat over the decades, much like the dub technique in music. Works such as *Jungleheart* (1995) and *DJ Mix* (1998) feature the same, distinctive character. Forrester continues to use drawings from the 1980s to inform his practice today, combining figures like London Dub DJ, Jah Shaka, with scenes of Cornish nightlife. Since moving to the coast in 2016, his palette has transformed – saturated with pink and purple hues, inspired by the brilliant light characteristic of Cornwall. *Tutti-Frutti* (2024) and *Jah Guide Shaka* (2023), some of the most recent paintings exhibited, are meditations on memories, reinterpreting decades' old iconography.

Speaking of Forrester's new work, artist Peter Doig reflects, "Denzil is one of the most important painters to come out of London in the early 1980s, and his early works remain as relevant and vital today as when they were first made. [...] However, a revelation for me has been seeing the recent work coming out of Denzil's studio. It has a subtlety and form that perhaps comes about because he is reflecting upon his past. These new paintings are dreamlike and emerge as much from his imagination as from his studies of real life."

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Forrester was born in Grenada in 1956, and he currently lives and works in Cornwall, United Kingdom. He moved to London in 1967 and attended the Central School of Art and Design and the Royal College of Art. His work has been exhibited in numerous institutions, including the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami; Kemper Museum, Kansas City; Hayward Gallery, London; Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; Whitechapel Gallery, London; Barbican Art Gallery, London; Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; and Tate St Ives, Cornwall. He participated in the 58th Carnegie International, Pittsburgh.