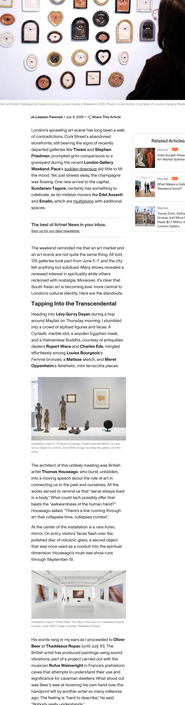
Galleries

London's Gallery Scene Is Full of Contradictions. Its Art Is, Too.

These are the shows worth seeing this summer.



Installation of Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery during London Gallery Weekend 2016. Photo: Linda Nylind. Courtesy of London Gallery Weekend.

Jo Lawson-Tancred • June 9, 2026 • ⏱ Share This Article

London's sprawling art scene has long been a web of contradictions. Cork Street's abandoned storefronts, still bearing the signs of recently departed blue-chip galleries, inspired artist **Jeremy Fredman**, prompted grim contemporary to a graveyard during the recent **London Gallery Weekend**. Pace's auction downpour did little to lift the mood. Yet, just streets away, the cityscape was flowering. One new artist in the capital, **Sundaram Tagore**, certainly has something to celebrate, as its midsize movers like **Edel Assanti** and **Emalin**, which are multiplying with additional spaces.

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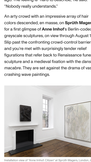
The weekend reminded me that an art market and an art scene are not quite the same thing. All told, 126 galleries took part from June 5–7, and the city felt anything but subdued. Many have revealed a renewed interest in spirituality while others reckoned with nostalgia. Moreover, it's clear that South Asian art is becoming ever more central to London's cultural identity. Here are the standouts.

Tapping Into the Transcendental

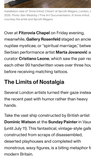
Heading into **Lévy-Dorvy Dover** during a hazy around Mayfair on Thursday morning, I stumbled into a crowd of stylized figures and faces. A Cycladic marble idol, a wooden Egyptian mask, and a Vietnamese Buddha, courtesy of antiquities dealers **Rupert Maas** and **Charles Ede**, mingled effortlessly among **Louise Bourgeois**'s personal textiles in **Mallorca** linen, and **Meret Oppenheim**'s fetishistic, mini terracotta pieces.



Installation view of "Thomas Houseago: Death's Beyond Mirror" at Lévy-Dorvy Dover in London, June 2026. Image courtesy the gallery and the artist.

The architect of this unlikely meeting was British artist **Thomas Houseago**, who burst, unbidden, into a moving speech about the role of art in connecting us to the past and ourselves. All the works served to remind us that "we're always lived in a body." What could both possibly offer that beats the "awkwardness of the human hands" Houseago asked. "There's a line running through art that collapses time, collapses context."

At the center of the installation is a rare Aztec mirror Oir entry, reticent faces flash over the polished disc of volcanic glass, a sacred object that was once used as a conduit into the spiritual dimension. Houseago's must see show runs through September 19.



Installation view of "Oliver Beer: The Pity In The Crack" at Thaddaeus Ropac London, June 2026. Image courtesy the artist.

His words rang in my ears as I proceeded to **Oliver Beer** at Thaddaeus Ropac (until July 25). The British artist has produced paintings using sound vibrations, part of a project carried out with the musician **Rufus Wainwright** in Francis's portraitists' caves that attempts to understand their use and significance for cavemen dwellers. What stood out was Beer's awe at hovering his bare hand over the handprint left by another artist so many millennia ago. The feeling is hard to describe; he said "Nobody really understands."

An arty crowd with an impressive array of hair colors descended, en masse, on **Spritti Magero** for a first glimpse of **Anne Imhof**'s Berlin-coded, greyscale sculptures, on view through August 1. Slip past the controlling crowd control barriers, and you're met with surprisingly tender relief figurations that refer back to Renaissance funerary sculpture and a medieval fixation with the dense mesalliance. They are set against the drama of vast, creaking wave paintings.

Installation view of "Anne Imhof: Citizen" at Spritti Magero, London, June 2026. Image courtesy the artist and Spritti Magero. Photo: Jonathan Ashby. Courtesy the artist and Spritti Magero.

Over at **Fitzrovia Chapel** on Friday evening, meanwhile, **Gallery Rosenfeld** staged an ancient reptile mystikos or "spiritual marriage," between Serbian performance artist **Marta Jovanović** and Cypriot-Canadian artist **Ariel Efrat**. The pair read each other Bible-inspired love notes over three hours before receiving matching tattoos.

The Limits of Nostalgia

Several London artists turned their gaze instead to the recent past with humor rather than heavy hands.

Take the vast ship constructed by British artist **Daniela Watson** at the **Sunday Painter** in Clapham (until July 17). This fantastical, vintage-style galleon, constructed from scraps of disassembled, deserted playhouses and completed with monstrous, wavy figures, is a biting metaphor for modern Britain.

Installation view of "Daniela Watson: Ship" at the Sunday Painter in London, June 2026. Photo: Orlin Hamnett, courtesy the gallery and the artist.

The technology that once allowed dominance lies obsolete, its creating fragility and decay poorly masked by a nostalgia that Watson sees as "juvenile and fantastical, like a fairytale." He added that, with fair plates, there's often a darker reality that we supercast for kids, which is why phrase "the world feels like it's being run by petulant children," who trade insults in lieu of dirt diplomacy.

The power of nostalgia is also at work in London artist **Alvaro Barrington**'s tribute to cineties New York at **Emalin** in Clerkenwell, running through August 15. Colorfully evocative installations per beauty and fashion items with boomboxes playing hip-hop—between crowd-pleasing pieces that engage and escapism during the era's devastating crack cocaine epidemic, which is alluded to throughout by piled stacks of white powder.

Installation view of "Alvaro Barrington: Ay Ah" at Emalin, Clerkenwell, London, June 2026. Photo: Stephen Weiss, courtesy of the artist and Emalin, London.

Masculinity, even up for scrutiny, is the subject of **Andrew Heward**'s exhaustive, Bacon-inspired new work at **Nicoletti** in Shoreditch (until July 4). His charmingly DIY, nearly Neo-Dada assemblages were made by sticking found objects like the boots, gloves, and splayed fans onto towering piles of taffy pull boxes. These were, in turn, painted over with newspaper clippings, but confusion abounds as buff jocks are stamped over Bacon-esque with labels reading "lower," "lower," or "sex." Old categories collapse and, throughout, conventional constructions of manhood slip into homoerotica.

Pin-ups also appear in the work of British post pop artist **Andrew Hearst**, whose long-forgotten paintings are being revived at **Amanda Wilkinson** in Farringdon (until August 8). In the early 1980s, we see him here turn queering the misty eyed mutts of the fifties and sixties. Tragically, following the death of Hearst's friend to AIDS-related illness, and in light of his own diagnosis, the artist's work takes a turn, grappling instead with the reality of inhabiting a societally stigmatized identity.

Andrew Hearst, I Want To Be Good (1980). Image courtesy Chris Kraft, Estate of Andrew Hearst.

South Asia in the Spotlight

There has been a surge of strong institutional outings for South Asian art across the British capital in recent years, including, currently, an unmissable **T. Venkanna** show at **Studio Voltaire** (until August 9). Coinciding with London Gallery Weekend, the Goan nonprofit **Serendipity Arts** held a two-day celebration of South Asian culture across South Kensington.

Meanwhile, **Kiran Nadar Museum**'s takeover of **Christie's**, linked to the return to the dedicated auction of South Asian art on June 11, is evidence enough that institutional backing has reliably led to a rush of commercial interest.

T. Venkanna, On the Road (2026). Image courtesy of the artist and Gallery Maskara, Mumbai.

"The city has a long history of engagement with South Asian culture," said Sundaram Tagore, whose group show featured Bangladeshi artist **Tayeba Begum Lipi**. Indian artist **Sohan Qadri**, and California-based **Nalini Malani** (until June 20). "It's not that London is suddenly hospitable for affluent Indian collectors or that the global South Asian diaspora, many of whom are diverse, increasingly active in the international art market."

Renowned collectors **Kiran Nadar**, **Rajesh Sarabhai**, and **Udit Bhandari** were the stars of a well-attended opening of **No. 9 Cork Street** on Thursday night, which was dedicated to the staple **Vadehra Art Gallery** (a presentation of paintings by the late great **S. Ramachandran**. The selection includes eccentric examples from his 1980s "Puppet Theatre" series and more decorationally mannered work like Girl on a Swing (2017). Mumbai's **Project 88**, meanwhile, took over the first floor with a group show that platformed more emerging names. Both tenancies last until July 4.

Installation view of S. Ramachandran, A Brilliant Moment (1980), at Vadehra Art Gallery, Lévy-Dorvy, Image: Peter Jones, courtesy Vadehra Art Gallery.

Over at **Victoria Miro**'s Wharf Road outpost, Indian artist **N.S. Harsha** and Pakistani-American **Shahzia Sikander** are both showing new work (until July 25). Sikander has used hand-painted imagery to animate Britain's cultivation and trade of opium in India and China. At **Stim Smith** in Cambertwell, Indian-American fab artist **Melissa Joseph** is presenting large and tiny pieces inspired by a recent trip to Scotland, until July 31.

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