Harminder Judge

Exhibition Duration
November 5 - December 5, 2026

Opening Hours
Tue - Fr 11am - 6pm
Sa 11 am - 4 pm

Hmm. A deep, deep, deep bass—a robotic hum that gradually slides downward in pitch. Everything in every direction glows—sssss—with a fiery, orange-white light. Light trapped, packed into a hot, dense soup of plasma, behaving like a Dutch pot of liquefied scotch bonnet—vast, continuous fluid. I look twice. My internal voice rings like a giant bell struck with a mallet, sending pressure waves rippling across the space in my head. This was the sound I heard in Untitled (lifting to chest), 2023. The sound is still here and keeps travelling. My dears, let's look again at what is hidden, like sound at 10^{-13} hertz, too low to hear but felt in the body: 'Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?'[1]

Pause.

Cool.

Slow.

Something aggressive pulls us in. An architectural intervention narrows the gallery's wide doorway, its two walls angling inwards in the direction we walk, so the passage tapers towards a gap ahead of us. The edges are rounded to the touch, but the geometry still channels the body forward. Ahead lies a mudslide that has come to rest, broad fields of pale plaster bruised with terracotta and grey. The same ground closes in. Both sides are etching closer before we have even entered. Once we are through, a wall of cast plaster extends five metres into each of the two galleries, with its seams filled so that the installation reads as a single slab. The entrance and the wall are made from the same plaster as Harminder Judge's polished panels. I wrote this before the walls went up, having met them only in pieces in his studio.

The architectural historian Mark Wigley has written about deconstructivist buildings that stay structurally sound while their geometry unsettles what we believe about their stability.[2] Judge's threshold is far smaller than those buildings, though the idea holds here. Walking through a doorway is usually so ordinary that it barely registers for non-disabled people, though for many disabled people every door or gate is already a negotiation. This entrance makes the act of passing through hard to ignore, because it narrows around us as we move, though what that asks of each body will differ. Judge describes the narrowing as an intimate crossing, intended to shift the body's attention.[3]

In the studio it already looked more forceful than that, or at the very least insistent. We have to pass through an entrance to reach what lies beyond, and architecture decides how much room each body is given, so the same space will not be experienced equally by everyone. He can decide how the walls meet, though he has little say over how it will feel to move between them. I dwell on the entrance because it is the exhibition's first gesture, and it conditions everything we meet afterwards. In his panels, too, the first layer he pours is the one that becomes the image.

I don't think Judge ever stopped performing. He once performed on a slowly turning sculpture in a pool of milk, while pigment shaken loose from sieves above drifted onto its surface. He still builds a clay wall around each of his casting tables, and in his words this makes it work 'like a tray, like the milk performance'.[4] His panels begin as pigment poured into plaster on those tables, and most are sanded afterwards until they shine. He works ahead of the beat. Every pour is done in one go, in the short window before the plaster sets, and he moves the tables from the outside, rarely putting his hands in the mixture. The image forms face down against the table, so he only sees it when the sheet is peeled away. After that come days of curing and hours with the sander, all hidden from us in the studio. Artist Nancy Spero once wrote of her own work that 'the body is present even if in disguise'.[5] Judge's performance has become private, and his movements survive as wraiths, disguised as plaster and pigment.

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[1] Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952; Vintage International, 1995), p. 581.

[2] Mark Wigley, 'Deconstructivist Architecture', in Philip Johnson and Mark Wigley, *Deconstructivist Architecture* (Museum of Modern Art, 1988), pp. 10–20 (pp. 16–19) <https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_1813_300062863.pdf> [accessed 22 October 2026].

[3] Harminder Judge, email to the author, 22 October 2026.

[4] Harminder Judge, interview with the author, 15 October 2026. Unless otherwise stated, quotations from Judge and details of his process are taken from this interview.

[5] Nancy Spero, 'Sky Goddess – Egyptian Acrobat', *Artforum*, 26.7 (1988), pp. 103–05, quoted in Joanna S. Walker, 'The Body is Present Even if in Disguise: Tracing the Trace in the Artwork of Nancy Spero and Ana Mendieta', *Tate Papers*, 11 (2009) <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/tate-papers/11/the-body-is-present-even-if-in-disguise-tracing-the-trace-in-the-artwork-of-nancy-spero-and-ana-mendieta> [accessed 22 October 2026].

Harminder[6] describes his process in conditionals: if he lifts one table one way, he lifts the other the opposite way, and if red goes in here, red goes in there. He has told me he is 'not doing anything asymmetrical' in his lifetime. The second gesture retraces the first, but the two halves never quite match. They behave like siblings, born of corresponding actions and never identical, each close enough to unsettle the other. In one of the new works first presented here in Vienna, red plaster poured from a height 'punched its way through' the surface in small dots, when he had expected broad blocks. Symmetry is a rule Harminder performs, and the plaster keeps returning something slightly different. The difference comes out of the method itself. He sets up the conditions for an image he cannot see and then finds out what those conditions have made. My own term for this is held articulation, which describes articulation that is prepared and present but does not arrive as intended.[7] The plaster does not give him back exactly what he asks for, and neither will a viewer. A viewer is different from plaster, of course, and brings memory and a body of their own, so the work goes on to have a further life in another person's imagination.

If the entrance and wall are mud, his new unpolished two-panel work is dust. The work reads more like a chalk drawing than a painting. Fleshy pastel tones rest on the plaster the way pigment rests on paper, barely entering it, and even the deeper colours look dry and powdery. The polished panels are very different. Their surfaces open into a watery depth where colour recedes and folds in on itself like a collapsing star. Behind each image is a core of polystyrene sealed in plaster, built on the same principle as a building panel. I kept calling these surfaces 'insulated' before I knew this. The depth comes from hours of sanding, which removes material until the colour underneath emerges, so a great deal of physical labour has gone into making the image seem to retreat. The threshold does something similar in space, where its tapering walls exaggerate the depth of a short passage.

He has called these works portals, and their depth 'the void'.[8] What I sense there instead is a low-frequency presence, one I would call sovereign. By that I mean a presence that cannot be possessed through looking or exhausted through explanation, which is held articulation met from the viewer's side. The early universe was opaque because it was so dense that light could not travel freely through it, and the darkness in these paintings is crowded in a similar way. Forms gather without settling into figures. Colour seems to come forward and retreat at the same time, as if something is happening within the plaster that looking cannot quite reach. Cultural theorist Tina Campt listens to vernacular photographs of Black subjects, many made for the state or the archive rather than for the people in them, and hears in their quiet a presence the camera could not fully claim. She describes stasis as 'tensions produced by holding a complex set of forces in suspension'.[9] Judge's panels come out of a different history and a different material, and I don't want to fold one into the other. Nothing here feels entirely still, even though the plaster hardened long ago. These works ask for that kind of listening too.

Perhaps I have been looking for the 'void' in the wrong place. Judge describes the depth of his paintings as somewhere we might enter, but I am more interested in the distance between what he intends and what finally appears in front of us. That distance first opens when he lifts a casting table and the plaster goes its own way. The distance grows when a carefully polished surface produces something he could not have anticipated, or when an entrance he conceived as intimate presses on someone else's intimate space. This distance between intention and perception is the true 'void' in Judge's practice, and it is crowded with everything that happens to the work beyond his control. The world he is preparing for Vienna is so productively … off. A surface made through tender actions can still look wounded, and the finished work rarely shows how much went into its making.

Artist Ana Mendieta worked with another kind of bodily absence. In her Siluetas (1973–80) she pressed the shape of her body into mud and earth, leaving impressions that could remain after she had gone.[10] Judge's wall also begins with an impression. He presses his fingers and arms into a bed of clay and pours plaster into the hollows, then pulls the clay away in clumps and excavates what remains with small tools. The surfaces are left like raw, picked skin, messed with and indented. An impression holds less of the touch than it appears to. The clay takes his touch, and the plaster takes the shape left in the clay, so the action has been translated twice by the time we see its trace. The cast shows where a body has been without giving back the body or the moment of contact. His hand is everywhere in this room, and it messes with us too.

At the opening and closing of the exhibition, two performers will climb the wall and wash it with wet rags, and Judge has asked them to caress the surface. He connects this to the washing of the body of the man he called Baba. In the funeral rite the body is washed before the fire.[11] The association is a tender one, though it cannot decide what the performance will become. The porous plaster absorbs the water, which picks up the chalky drawing and redistributes it as

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[6] I move between Harminder and Judge deliberately, following the first-name terms of our studio conversations.

[7] See *Voice ≠ Speech*, 1 (2026) <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21411987>.

[8] Susanna Davies-Crook, 'Monument & Void', in *Harminder Judge: A Ghost Dance*, exhibition text (Matt's Gallery and The Sunday Painter, 2024).

[9] Tina M. Campt, *Listening to Images* (Duke University Press, 2017), p. 51.

[10] Walker, 'The Body is Present Even if in Disguise'.

[11] Judge, interview with the author; Judge, email to the author.

the performers move. What first looked like sediment turns back into a mudslide. The wall keeps its shape while the drawing travels. The performers' actions are part of the making, and Judge cannot fully determine what the water will leave behind. As the work passes through other people's hands, their gestures change the impressions left by his. I keep wondering what here can hold for a gesture that never quite gets there.

- Text by Jade Foster

About the artist:

Harminder Judge b.1982 Rotherham, UK/ Lives and works in London, UK. He graduated from the Royal Academy Schools, London in 2021.

Imbued with an indelible vibrancy and depth, Harminder Judge makes transportive sculptural works that simultaneously reference Indian neo-tantric painting, as well as the abstract expressionist and colourfield movements of the 20th century. His alchemical process involves layering pigments into pools of wet plaster followed by prolonged periods of excavation; sanding, polishing and oiling. Culminating in expansive modular panels, and ineffable shapes which seem to hover off the wall, colour, forms, and compositions are allowed to reveal themselves and intensify over time.

This all results in a gleaming, vibrating surface where monolithic forms, seething horizons, and emanations of colour rise up from the solid granite-like depth beneath. The interplay between the granular and cosmic playout here and there is a real sense of a material phenomenon taking place, the remnants of which appear both crystallised and in a state of flux. The works as such exist in the present moment; Harminder has referred to them not as paintings but portals that offer us a wide plane to look through, allowing for broader contemplation to take place.

Over the last few years Harminder's titles often serve as reference points to a pivotal and formative moment in his teenage years. Arriving in Amritsar, Punjab at the age of 15, Harminder made the journey to his family's village in Attowal where he took part in the funeral rites of his Grandfather who had recently passed away. This involved intimate rituals such as undressing and washing the body, preparing the cremation pyre on the family sugarcane farm, tending the burning pyre throughout the night under a blanket of stars, and collecting his Grandfather's ashes, bone fragments and jewellery in the hazy morning sun. This physical and spiritual transformation of body becoming ash, of material becoming immaterial, physical becoming metaphysical, are concepts that tacitly underpin his practice.
