

Detail Image: Kate Williams, *The Cruel Optimists* (2026)

SLQS Gallery is pleased to present ***Our Own Device***, the first solo exhibition by **Kate Williams**.

In *Our Own Device*, Kate Williams presents a new series of wall-based textile artworks alongside her first site-specific installation, *The Cruel Optimists*. This major new installation brings together two earlier bodies of work: *Pool* (2024) developed perspective as a form of illusion, while *Soft* (2025) explored material seduction. Here, these concerns come together in a single environment where architecture becomes body-like and softness becomes spatial.

Suspended at the centre of the gallery and held aloft by decorative ribbons, the padded structure appears simultaneously theatrical, protective and improbable. An exaggerated perspective draws the viewer towards a quilted trompe-l'œil landscape at its far end, so that one constructed world gives way to another. The installation leaves open whether this distant view offers an escape or a further layer of seduction.

Through a decorative language of rococo inflections and theatrical excess, the work revels in its own constructedness. Pleasure comes not despite artifice, but because of it, and the viewer is invited to participate in its play.

The surrounding wall works develop this language of seduction and delight, tinged with unease. A form that might be ice cream or something less wholesome ruptures a pillowy frame, and fantasy architectural views are subverted: obelisks preside implacably over an empty pool; a vaulted portico is supported by a yielding padded wall; the shadow of a drone crosses a luxury landscape.

The title of the central installation alludes playfully to Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism*, which proposed that desire itself might simultaneously sustain and defeat us. Where does the cruelty lie, it wonders - in those who construct seductive worlds or those who are drawn to them? In the conditions that shape our desires - or perhaps in the teasing ambiguity of the title itself?

Across the exhibition, Williams considers the pleasures of both artifice and its boundaries. At a moment when we increasingly encounter images - and one another - through immersive artificial environments whose limits are becoming harder to discern, Our Own Device argues for the value of forms that openly declare themselves to be constructed. When artifice is visible, so too is its frame, allowing us to enter and withdraw, to move between immersion and critical distance.

Rather than resolving the tension between delight and unease, comfort and dependence, or artifice and artificiality, Williams asks what particular kinds of pleasure, reflection and shared experience become possible when we can still recognise this frame - and what may be lost when we no longer can.

Kate Williams is a London-based artist working across textile sculpture and installation. Using quilting to construct both images and environments, her practice encompasses two interconnected bodies of work: Pool, concerned with artifice and illusion, and Soft, which explores comfort and self-soothing. Both engage with questions of self-estrangement.

Drawing on traditions of trompe-l'œil and decorative architecture, she explores the pleasures and ambiguities of artifice. Her work is informed by her experience of a Kleinian psychoanalysis and an enduring interest in visual culture, particularly the relationship between seduction and spectatorship.

Self-taught, Williams previously worked as a filmmaker, producing visual essays on pornography, surveillance, consumption and representation before establishing her current practice.

Selected exhibitions: Make Do / Make Space, Hypha South Bank, (2026); Table Manners, Barbati Gallery, Venice (2025); felt, expressed, chosen, SLQS Gallery, London (2025); Mega Art Fair with SLQS Gallery, Milan (2025); Something Quickening, Panrucker, London (2024); Permission to Touch, Dot Projects, London (2024); Pourquoi London?, Gertrude x Canopy Collections, London (2024). Selected Residencies: Artist Roundtable, led by Pia Biasi, Director of Victoria Miro Venice (2025).



Artist Portait

SLQS Gallery is a contemporary art gallery committed to platforming women and queer artists across generations. Founded by Sarah Le Quang Sang, SLQS Gallery emerges at a pivotal cultural moment when the need for unapologetic spaces for women and queer voices has never been more urgent. Through a considered and targeted programme, SLQS Gallery aims to foster an inclusive and intentional ethos. The gallery looks to disrupt outdated frameworks, such as neatly defined industry classifications "emerging" and "mid-career", which often exclude artists balancing caregiving responsibilities or working outside conventional timelines.

ENQUIRIES
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