

Soft Opening,

Joanne Burke,
A Boat Fish

13–17 May, 2026

Frieze New York

Stand F2

The Shed

British artist Joanne Burke’s process begins with an adoption of a forbidden 17th century divination practice known as “Hydromancy”, involving the dispersal of molten wax into bodies of cold water, allowing unpredictable shapes and textures to form and be formed by their liquid surroundings. The artist views water as an infinite element: a mercurial, nonphysical essence that resists representation or definition, which Burke arrived at via ongoing research into hydrofeminism. This theoretical framework and posthuman feminist phenomenology understands the body as essentially linked to the natural world, but more specifically reconceptualises individuals as interconnected “bodies of water” rather than isolated, independent subjects.

Burke’s initial water casts invariably become the starting point for her metallic sculptures, which appropriate and combine historical craft techniques including model-making, carpentry, costuming, weaving, basketry and jewellery-making. Moulding her intricate and precarious wax forms using these techniques prior to casting in bronze and aluminium, Burke excavates and utilises processes and approaches from the past for their simplicity and primitive logic.

Burke’s material transformations—from wax to water, to fire and finally to metal—recall the transmutations of matter associated with alchemical processes, a medieval chemistry often associated with sorcery and magical practices. For the artist, sculpture itself is a kind of alchemy, a divination of sorts, wherein material curiosity leads to a process of divining an object or form into being. Collaging elements together intuitively into surreal compositions, in these new works, Burke seeks to abstract any recognisable forms: a boat suddenly resembles a garden pond, a human organ transforms into a blossoming flower, an oyster becomes a shining Brancusi head and a fallen branch across a riverbank, twists into a delicate stem. For the artist, forms in the world around us constantly relate, conflate and converge in a perpetual state of movement and flux. Burke’s decision to resist, undo and abstract recognisability within her forms, renders them intangible and untameable, much like the water they were first imagined within.

Existing in this uncanny space between unfamiliarity and the literal representation of an object, Burke’s sculptures locate between past and future, becoming relics at once placeless and timeless. Displayed in vitrines - within reach but protected - with *A Boat Fish*, Burke continues her ongoing engagement with the methodologies of display. By referencing museological or spiritual contexts, the artist charges her objects with an innate devotionality, preserved within a shimmering reliquary. These works offer the artist a way to express the interconnectedness of all things: not only people and nature, but similarly fullness and emptiness, the visible and invisible, light and darkness.

Burke’s (b. 1982, United Kingdom) past exhibitions include ADZ Gallery, Lisbon (2025, 2023 - solo); Marfa’, Beirut (2025); Francois Ghebaly, Los Angeles (2025); Soft Opening, London (2025 - solo); ADZ Gallery, Lisbon (2025 - solo); Ermes Ermes, Rome (2025); Bernheim, Zürich (2024); Bibeau Kreuger, New York (2023); Space K Seoul (2023; Fitzpatrick Gallery, Los Angeles (2022); Fisher Parrish, New York (2020); Operativa Arte Rome, Rome (2019); and at Swiss Institute Rome, Rome (2019). The artist lives and works in London.

Soft Opening, 6 Minerva Street, London E2 9EH, +44 20 3876 0270, info@softopening.london

Soft Opening,

List of Works



Joanne Burke
Divers Arms, 2026
Bronze
13 × 6 × 4 cm (5 1/8 × 2 3/8 × 1 5/8 in)



Joanne Burke
Gift of Winter, 2026
Bronze and aluminium
17 × 5 × 7 cm (6 3/4 × 2 × 2 3/4 in)



Joanne Burke
Chirp of the Canary, 2026
Bronze
22 × 8 × 7 cm (8 5/8 × 3 1/8 × 2 3/4 in)



Joanne Burke
Eve's Compass, 2026
Bronze and aluminium
5 × 18 × 8 cm (2 × 7 1/8 × 3 1/8 in)



Joanne Burke
Starrchamber, 2026
Bronze and aluminium
13 × 6 × 5 cm (5 1/8 × 2 3/8 × 2 in)



Joanne Burke
Gift of Girls, 2026
Bronze
9 × 18 × 15 cm (3 1/2 × 7 1/8 × 5 7/8 in)



Joanne Burke
Festival 7, 2025
Bronze
22 × 17 × 9 cm (8 5/8 × 6 3/4 × 3 1/2 in)



Joanne Burke
Festival 8, 2026
Bronze
17 × 25 × 20 cm (6 3/4 × 9 7/8 × 7 7/8 in)



Joanne Burke
Fear Infinity, 2026
Aluminium
31.5 × 67.5 × 5 cm (12 3/8 × 26 5/8 × 2 in)