

Tom Friedman

*Detritus*

September 4 – October 18, 2025

New York



Tom Friedman, *Detritus*, 2025

Lehmann Maupin presents *Detritus*, an exhibition of new work by Tom Friedman, marking the artist's first major show in New York in almost 10 years. Over the course of his nearly-four-decade career, Friedman's oeuvre has explored materials and the object, photography and drawing, video exhibitions, and public sculptural installations, continuously pushing his work into new terrains. As critic Roberta Smith wrote in *The New York Times*, "the artist Tom Friedman tends to blow our minds and then move on, rarely repeating himself." In *Detritus*, Friedman makes his most drastic leap yet—into the world of traditional painting on canvas.

Painting is not entirely new to Friedman, who has investigated the medium in previous works and in non-traditional formats, such as painting on the floor, on sculptural elements, and through the use of trompe-l'oeil. In his 2014 series *Styrofoam and Paint*, he presented a series of wall works that resembled monochromatic Color Field paintings. Now, in *Detritus*, Friedman presents, as he states, "not painting on something else, over something else, or painting on paper or wood, but painting on canvas," allowing the works to enter an art historical lineage. His approach here is consistent with his practice overall—rooted in cycles of entropy, erosion, recycling, and review. The compositions on view in *Detritus* depict the exhibition's namesake: garbage scraps from the ground, fragments of previous sculptures, or discarded packaging, all sourced from the artist's own life.

To make these paintings, Friedman assembles and photographs still life arrangements, manipulates the images in Photoshop, and then renders them on canvas. He begins each composition with a palette of premixed and organized paint colors and a precise pencil drawing. He likens this to a musical score—the notes are there, the colors are prepared—but everything else is open to interpretation. This grants Friedman the ability to adapt varying painterly styles within each canvas, rendering certain aspects in great detail while others are left to dissolve into abstraction. Friedman, whose work is included in the permanent collections of major museums around the world, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, is well known for exploring the logic of scale in his work; previous art objects range from monumental, to miniscule, to entirely absent or conceptual. In *Detritus*, each composition is crafted to-scale, or life-sized, hung singularly on large walls with ample space around them. This gives the work a magnetic effect and draws viewers in, much like the vortexes seen across the exhibition, and the paintings become meditative objects.

The subject matter in the *Detritus* paintings falls roughly into three categories: singular objects, object groupings, and portraits. The paintings in the object groupings, including

*Yarn(Brain)* (2025), are executed realistically while allowing for abstract moments to emerge from the detail—an attribute Friedman likens to the work of portraitist and painter John Singer Sargent. For example, an empty and crushed plastic water bottle becomes a conduit for light and translucency, softening the object's edges, while a vibrant and tangled ball of yarn is at once a collection of hyper-individual threads and something else altogether—a metaverse or neural network. Remarkably, these works register on both macro and micro scales, rendering quotidian objects at once recognizable and foreign.

Meanwhile, works like the eponymous *Detritus* (2025) depict fields of discarded materials in varied configurations, akin to 19th century German naturalist Ernst Haecke's specimen prints, Manny Farber's tabletop still life paintings, or Daniel Spoerri's literal, wall-mounted tabletop works. In Friedman's paintings, the viewer's relationship to the object fields is always in flux, alternating between a focus on singular moments to a high-level, aerial view of the objects. Here, Friedman also includes references to his own oeuvre by depicting objects used in previous works, such as his oft used minced paper, a tennis ball with its fuzz removed, a tiny shoe made for another sculpture, or a photograph of a photogravure from his 2006 self-portrait *Vanishing Point*. In this way, Friedman brings his own studio practice into conversation with other quotidian materials, intertwining the two via the detritus of his own everyday life.

The new paintings also expand Friedman's unique interpretation of self-portraiture, which the artist has explored for decades in works including *Untitled* (1994), where his likeness is carved into an aspirin tablet, and most recently *Scribble Being* (2023), a human-shaped collage of scribbles cut from published writings and images of Friedman's artworks throughout the years. Friedman's painting *self-portrait* (2025) is perhaps the most realistic yet; the work depicts a meticulously rendered image of the artist's eyes, creased by an unseen smile, behind his glasses and against a plain white background. These disembodied eyes cast a shadow as they hover over the surface plane, positioning the artist as a magician who has disappeared the rest of his material self.

Finally, hanging high above the gallery is a small figure delicately balanced on a tightrope. Friedman first made a small wooden version of this work in 2014, but here, the welded metal tightrope walker crosses the expanse overhead. In many ways, this figure represents Friedman himself, asserting the artist's presence in the gallery and reminding those of us on the ground to look at everyday life from new heights, recontextualizing the material potentialities of the detritus around us and uncovering a sense of renewal amidst the mundane.

**Tom Friedman** (b. 1965, Saint Louis, MO; lives and works in Leverett, MA) is a conceptual artist known for his meticulously fabricated work, including sculpture, painting, drawing, video, and installation. Friedman investigates the concepts of perception, logic, and plausibility with a strong attention to detail. Since the early 1990s, Friedman has utilized an array of sophisticated processes to achieve a seemingly mass-produced appearance. His highly conceptual work engages both maximalist and minimalist aesthetics, as well as recalling those of Pop Art, and his practice is deeply engaged with the history of sculpture.

Friedman draws from personal experiences to recreate prosaic moments from everyday life. His work tends toward the darkly humorous, and his often sarcastic use of materials has distinguished his practice over the last 30 years. Made from a wide variety of unconventional materials, such as Styrofoam, foil, plastic, wire, paper, clay, and hair, Friedman's work often surprises the viewer. As Friedman explains, "Art, for me, is a context to slow the viewer's experience from their everyday life in order to think about things they haven't thought about, or to think in a new way."

Throughout his career, Friedman has developed an important body of outdoor and public sculptures. Most of these are cast from maquettes rendered out of aluminum roasting pans, further cementing the artist's alchemic ability to transform the everyday. In his celebrated large-scale sculpture *Looking Up* (2015), a figure looks to the sky, inviting viewers to stand at its base and do the same. *Looking Up* was installed at the entrance of Rockefeller Center's Channel Gardens in January 2021, and has previously been exhibited at Park Avenue, New York; South Lake Shore Drive, Chicago, Illinois; and the Contemporary Austin, Texas, among others.

Tom Friedman received a BFA in graphic illustration from Washington University in St. Louis in 1988 and an MFA in sculpture from the University of Illinois at Chicago in 1990.

Solo exhibitions of his work have been organized at Lehmann Maupin, New York, NY (2023), Palm Beach, FL (2023), Seoul (2022); Jeffrey Deitch, Los Angeles, CA (2023); Vistamare, Milan (2022); Stephen Friedman Gallery, London (2018, 2014 and 2012); Lühring Augustine, New York, NY (2017 and 2014); Magasin III, Stockholm (2010); Tomio Koyama Gallery, Kyoto (2009); Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Chicago, IL (2000); Saint Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, MO (1997); and the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY (1995). Friedman's work has also been included in major group exhibitions including *Supernatural America: The Paranormal in American Art*, Minneapolis Institute of Art (2022); Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, OH (2021); Speed Art Museum, Louisville, KY (2021); *100 Years*, Gagosian and Jeffrey Deitch, Miami FL (2022); *Digital Worlds: New Media from the Museum's Collection*, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX (2018); *Explode Every Day: An Inquiry into the Phenomena of Wonder*, Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA), North Adams, MA (2016); *Visual Deception II: Into the Future*, Bunkamura Museum of Art, Shibuya-ku (2014); Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art, Kobe (2014); Nagoya City Art Museum, Nagoya (2014); *After Photoshop*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY (2013); *Invisible*, Hayward Gallery, London (2013); *Artist's Choice: Vik Muniz, Rebus*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY (2008); *Shapes of Space*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY (2007); *Recent Acquisitions: Contemporary Sculpture*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY (2004); SITE Santa Fe, Santa Fe, NM (2004); *Self-Portraits from the Permanent Collection*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY (2000); *New Work: Drawing Today*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA (1997); and the São Paulo Biennial, São Paulo (1996). Friedman has received numerous awards, including an Academy Award in Art from the American Academy of Arts and Letters (1993), the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Award (1993), and a grant from the Joan Mitchell Foundation (2001). He was also a finalist for the Hugo Boss Prize in 2000. Friedman lives and works in Leverett, Massachusetts.





**Lehmann Maupin**

Rachel Lehmann and David Maupin co-founded Lehmann Maupin in 1996 in New York. Since inception, Lehmann Maupin has served as a leading contemporary art gallery with locations in the U.S., Europe, and Asia. For over 25 years, Lehmann Maupin has been instrumental in introducing international artists in new geographies and building long-lasting curatorial relationships. Known for championing diverse voices, the gallery's program proudly features artists whose work challenges notions of identity and shapes international culture. Today, the gallery has permanent locations in New York, Seoul, and London, as well as team members throughout Asia and Europe.

**New York**

501 W 24th Street  
New York, NY 10011  
+1 212 255 2923  
[newyork@lehmannmaupin.com](mailto:newyork@lehmannmaupin.com)

**Contact**

Julie Niemi  
Associate Director of Public Relations  
[julie@lehmannmaupin.com](mailto:julie@lehmannmaupin.com)

McKenna Quatro Johnson  
Communications Manager  
[mckenna@lehmannmaupin.com](mailto:mckenna@lehmannmaupin.com)