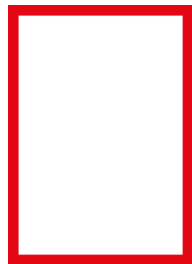


Zanele Muholi
26 November 2021 to 13 March 2022

- Press Release
- Biography Zanele Muholi
- Statement Stephanie Rosenthal and Q&A
- Questions to Zanele Muholi
- Further Information and Contact
- Funders, Partners and Media Partners



Berliner Festspiele
GROPIUS BAU

Press Release

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This November, Gropius Bau opens the first major survey in Germany of South African visual activist Zanele Muholi. Muholi came to prominence in the early 2000s with photographs that tell stories of Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, queer and intersex lives in South Africa and beyond. Presenting the full breadth of Muholi's career, the Gropius Bau survey brings together over 200 photographs: from their very first body of work, *Only Half the Picture*, to their ongoing series *Somnyama Ngonyama*. Muholi's work addresses sexual politics, racial violence, communal resistance and self-assertion, and inherently represents visibility, empowerment and social activism. It challenges dominant stereotypes and the heteronormative gaze while speaking to various forms of societal, communal and artistic autonomy.

During the 1990s, South Africa underwent major social and political change. The country's 1996 post-Apartheid constitution was the first in the world to outlaw discrimination based on sexual orientation; yet, today, the LGBTQIA+ community continues to experience widespread violence and persecution. In their early series *Only Half the Picture*, Muholi captures the complexity of experiences within the queer community: moments of love and intimacy are placed alongside images that allude to intense, traumatic events in the lives of the participants. Through photographs as well as additional documentation, the exhibition highlights Muholi's vital role as an activist-organiser engaged in collective action and media advocacy, inspiring younger generations along a path of resistance and persistence.

Stephanie Rosenthal, Director of the Gropius Bau, says: "Muholi's work is an important part of the Gropius Bau's programming grounded in expressions of healing and care, diverse artistic communities and socio-political change. Their work shows how healing, empathy and empowerment can persist despite collective trauma, and how photography can be a means for repair and activism alike. Amid the backdrop of post-Apartheid change and continued discrimination against the LGBTQIA+ community, Muholi celebrates an intersectional Blackness in the lives of gender non-conforming individuals."

One keystone of the exhibition is Muholi's visual archive of portraits, *Faces and Phases*, a major work which commemorates and celebrates Black lesbians, trans* people and gender nonconforming individuals. Each participant looks directly at the camera, challenging the viewer to hold their gaze, while individual testimonies capture stories and memorialise those who have passed away. Over 500 images and testimonies form a living and growing archive of this community in South Africa and further afield.

The exhibition includes several other key series: *Brave Beauties* celebrates empowered non-binary people and trans* women, many of whom have won Miss Gay beauty pageants. *Being* is a set of tender images of couples which affirms same-sex love, while challenging prevailing stereotypes and taboos. Photographs such as *Melissa Mbambo, Durban* likewise attempt to reclaim public spaces for Black and queer communities, such as a beach in Durban that was racially segregated during Apartheid. Within each of these series, Muholi

tells collective as well as individual stories of shared triumphs, kinship and mourning. The images challenge preconceived notions of deviance and victimhood, encouraging viewers to address their own misconceptions and creating a shared sense of understanding and solidarity.

In 2012, Muholi began their acclaimed series of dramatic self-portraits entitled *Somnyama Ngonyama* ("Hail the Dark Lioness" in isiZulu) where the artist adopts different poses, characters and archetypes to address issues of race and representation. From scouring pads and latex gloves to rubber tires and cable ties, everyday materials are transformed into politically loaded props and costumes. The resulting images explore themes of labour, racism, Eurocentrism and sexual politics, often commenting on events in South Africa's history and Muholi's experiences as a South African Black queer person traveling abroad. By enhancing the contrast in the photographs, Muholi also emphasises their skin tone, reclaiming their Blackness with pride and re-asserting its beauty while also speaking to race-based stigmas, paradoxes of invisibility and hypervisibility.

This survey of Zanele Muholi continues the Gropius Bau's history of staging exhibitions by significant 20th century and contemporary photographers, including Akinbode Akinbiyi, Lee Miller, Berenice Abbott, Robert Doisneau, Thomas Struth and Diane Arbus.

Zanele Muholi is curated by Natasha Ginwala, Associate Curator, Gropius Bau; Yasufumi Nakamori, Senior Curator International Art (Photography), Tate Modern and Sarah Allen, former Assistant Curator, Tate Modern. The exhibition is organised by Tate Modern, London, in collaboration with Gropius Bau, Berlin; the Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris; Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, and Bildmuseet at Umeå University. It is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue by Tate Publishing and a public programme of talks, music and events supported by the Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation.

Biography

Zanele Muholi

Zanele Muholi was born in Umlazi, Durban, and lives in Umbumbulu. They studied at the Market Photo Workshop in Johannesburg, and Ryerson University, Toronto, Canada. Co-founder of the Forum for the Empowerment of Women, and founder of Inkanyiso, a forum for queer and visual media, Muholi is also an honorary professor at the University of the Arts Bremen, Germany. Solo exhibitions of Muholi's work have been hosted around the world, including at the Goethe-Institut, Johannesburg (2012); Brooklyn Museum, New York (2015); Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (2017); Autograph ABP, London (2017-) and Museo de Arte moderno de Buenos Aires (2018). Muholi has won numerous awards, including the Lucie Humanitarian Award (2019), the 2019 Best Photography Book Award by the Kraszna-Krausz Foundation for their book, *Somnyama Ngonyama: Hail the Dark Lioness* (Aperture), the Rees Visionary Award by Amref Health Africa (2019); a fellowship from the Royal Photographic Society, UK (2018); France's Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (2017); the Mbokodo Award in the category of Visual Arts (2017); the ICP Infinity Award for Documentary and Photojournalism (2016); the Fine Prize for an emerging artist at the Carnegie International (2013); a Prince Claus Award (2013); and both the Casa África award for best female photographer and a Fondation Blachère award at Les Rencontres de Bamako biennial of African photography (2009). *Somnyama Ngonyama* was shown at the 58th Venice Biennale (2019), while *Faces and Phases* was shown at dOCUMENTA 13 (2012) and the 55th Venice Biennale (2013) and shortlisted for the Deutsche Börse Photography Prize (2015).

Muholi's pronouns are they/them/theirs.

Statement Stephanie Rosenthal and Q&A

Statement Stephanie Rosenthal

"I am thrilled to welcome the visual activist and photographer Zanele Muholi to the Gropius Bau for their first major survey in Germany. Their exhibition is a meaningful continuation of our programme, emphasising a plurality of diverse representation and visual forms of empowerment and activism. At the core of Muholi's work is their practice within a community of participants from South Africa identifying as lesbian, trans* or non-binary. Muholi's work is a crucial demonstration of the role of photography in championing visibility and exposure for all bodies, as well as demonstrating the duty of community care amid our changing politics of sex, gender and identity." — Stephanie Rosenthal, Director of the Gropius Bau

Q&A

Who is Zanele Muholi?

Zanele Muholi is one of the most acclaimed photographers working today, and their work has been exhibited all over the world. Muholi describes themselves as a visual activist. From the early 2000s, they have documented and celebrated the lives of South Africa's Black lesbian, gay, trans*, queer and inter communities. Muholi participated in dOCUMENTA (13) and at the Biennale di Venezia in 2019. In 2015, they were shortlisted for the Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation award.

Zanele Muholi was born in Umlazi, Durban, and lives in Umbumbulu, South Africa. They studied at the Market Photo Workshop in Johannesburg, and Ryerson University, Toronto, Canada. Co-founder of the Forum for the Empowerment of Women, and founder of Inkanyiso, a forum for queer and visual media, Muholi is also an honorary professor at the University of the Arts Bremen, Germany.

What makes this show unique? Is it the same exhibition shown by Tate Modern?

The exhibition is the first major survey in Germany of South African visual activist Zanele Muholi. While it contains the same main series of works shown at Tate Modern, the Gropius Bau exhibition has a slightly modified curation to produce a viewing environment that accords with the larger space and architecture, with a resulting unique selection of individual photographs. Additionally, the wall texts for the Gropius Bau exhibition were recomposed in order to cater to Gropius Bau audiences. New video content, such as a curators' tour and a "Walk & Talk" video, will accompany a unique public programme series. And, finally, an updated timeline will provide contextual information on the history of sexuality and sexual violence, on Apartheid in South Africa, and on Muholi's life and activism.

What are the exhibition's main components?

The exhibition proceeds over four main projects by Muholi. First is Muholi's series *Being* (2006–ongoing), a set of tender images of same-sex couples. Curator Natasha Ginwala writes that *Being* "recognises the need for protection and recovery through

communal love, especially for queer and gender non-conforming people living under the pressures of heteronormative society.”

Next is Muholi’s first-ever body of work, *Only Half the Picture* (2002–2006). In this early series, Muholi captures the complexity of experiences within the queer community: moments of love and intimacy are placed alongside images that allude to intense, traumatic events in the lives of the participants. Curator Natasha Ginwala writes that these early photographs “bring forth biographical and communal encounters”. “It documents survivors of hate crimes living across South Africa and its townships. Under Apartheid, townships were established as residential areas for those who had been evicted from places designated as ‘white only’. Muholi uses image-making as a way of bearing witness to such collective pain.”

Another major body of work is *Somnyama Ngonyama* (2012–ongoing), which means “Hail the Dark Lioness” in isiZulu. This is an epic series of self-portraits made in different locations around the world corresponding with Muholi’s journeys, personal memories, experiences of racial profiling and political events. As Ginwala writes: “These photographs are indicative of a sense of place, denouncing the erasure of racism, manifesting in queer itinerancy and a defiant Blackness. They make use of ubiquitous materials that signal schemes of authenticity, grieving and transformation.”

Faces and Phases (2006–ongoing) is described by Muholi as “an archive of Black lesbian, transgender and non-confirming individuals”. These images and the accompanying testimonies form a growing archive of a community of people who are risking their lives by living authentically in the face of oppression and discrimination. Muholi writes that “after fourteen years, *Faces and Phases* is an archive numbering several hundred portraits documenting the Black LGBTQIA+ community in order to positively affect the politics of visibility in South Africa, and beyond.”

Other key series of works include *Brave Beauties* (2014–ongoing), which celebrates empowered non-binary people and trans* women, many of whom have won Miss Gay beauty pageants. These powerful and reflective images explore themes including labour, racism, Eurocentrism and sexual politics.

Additionally, the large colour-photographs in the series *Queering Public Space* (2006–2010) are a collection of images of lesbian, gay, trans*, queer and gender non-confirming individuals in public spaces, several of which are personally or historically significant: some images are taken in Constitutional Hill, a key site for South Africa’s democratic transition, or Durban Beach, close to Muholi’s birthplace of Umlazi.

Finally, in addition to photographs, the survey includes videos, testimonies and documents from the various organisations Muholi has worked with or participated in. The room entitled *Context and Collectivity* includes photographs in connection with Inkanyiso, pride marches, protests, funerals and civil unions of same-sex and trans* couples.

What kinds of activism does Muholi undertake?

Muholi describes themselves as a visual activist. From the outset, they have commemorated same-sex practices to reveal the depths of intimacy and mutual respect while documenting gender-based violence and racial dynamics, especially hate crimes and survivors’ testimonies, as ways of witnessing. Muholi is co-founder of the Forum for the Empowerment of Women (in 2002), and founder of Inkanyiso, a forum for queer and visual media (in 2009). They are currently in the process of founding a new organisation geared towards supporting children

and youth. Muholi writes: "Over the years, I have supported participants in my series to attend classes at Market Photo Workshop, if they are interested. This is one way of me giving back to the community that shapes my career. I have founded mobile schools of photography – part of an ongoing collaborative educational project called Photo xp – to equip younger generations with photographic skills and the tools to help them feel comfortable with documenting their own lives as well as those around them."

Why does Muholi term their collaborators "participants"?

Muholi has worked with a wide circle of individuals, often over a long period of time, and prefers the word "participants". They write: "People in my projects are individuals I am familiar with; they form part of my wider community; many are friends, or friends of friends. They are participants because they partake in the process of creating these portraits. We each contribute differently to the process, but we are in this process together. I do not like, and have never used or related to, the term 'subject'."

How does the exhibition *Zanele Muholi* fit into the Gropius Bau's programme?

Under the programme of Director Stephanie Rosenthal – focused often on ideas of caring, repairing and healing – the Gropius Bau has hosted a number of large-scale exhibitions by BIPOC artists, including Otobong Nkanga (2020), Theaster Gates (2019), Bani Abidi (2019) and Akinbode Akinbiyi (2020), emphasising a plurality of diverse representation and visual forms of empowerment and activism. Additionally, this exhibition continues the Gropius Bau's history of staging exhibitions by significant 20th century and contemporary photographers, including Akinbode Akinbiyi, Lee Miller, Berenice Abbott, Robert Doisneau, Thomas Struth and Diane Arbus.

Will Muholi be attending the opening?

Muholi will not be attending the opening. There have been ongoing uncertainties regarding travel restrictions. Muholi's activities have been interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. They're currently invested in continuing their activism in South Africa working on BaMu, their new organisation for youth and children, which focuses on education, advocacy and youth development.

What is the public programme for the exhibition?

The public programme *Forms of Insistence, Tenderness and Refuge* accompanies the survey exhibition of Zanele Muholi at the Gropius Bau. It includes conversations with Dr Emilia Roig, Tina Campt and Renée Mussai, a preview screening and discussion of the documentary *AB HEUTE: Der lange Weg zum eigenen Namen*, special tours by Berlin-based cultural practitioners including photographer David Uzochukwu and curator Övül Ö. Durmusoglu, and a poetry convening led by The Poetry Meets Series (hosted by Jumoke Adeyanju) as well as a finissage. This programme is supported by the Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation.

Content Guidance

This exhibition contains themes related to gender and sexuality-based discrimination, hate crimes, rape and racism. It also contains sexual images.

Questions to Zanele Muholi (November 2021)

What kind of camera do you use? What is your choice of apparatus for ongoing series?

Though my very first camera was a Pentax P30T, the camera that I made my earliest series with is a Pentax K1000. Over the past few years I've used a Canon 60D, 6D and 5D Mark IV, plus a Canon R6 which is mirrorless. With these I use a Manfrotto tripod which is stable enough for heavy lenses, as well as ricebags. I use all these simultaneously since I capture video and still images at the same time. In addition, I'll set up an iPhone with a stand so I can share moments with my followers quickly. My dream, however, is to get married to a Leica with an 85mm lens for my new portrait series.

Is there a specific reason why part of the photos in *Only Half the Picture* are made in colour while most are black and white?

I'm trained in black and white and my understanding of images, especially with darkroom processes, is tied to black and white. When I was editing the images in the darkroom and conferring with my team I saw that some images were stronger in colour and some were better served by black and white. The priority is that the message comes across in the clearest way. Some images, such as *Independent*, *What Don't You See When You Look At Me I* and *II*, and the works on menstrual blood were made more impactful and more direct through the use of colour. It locates the moment captured in the present without any sense of abstraction. The use of black and white works in the reverse. *Hate Crime Survivor*, *ID Crisis* and *Bra*, being in black and white, are not easily reduced to a specific time and place, making them more universally suggestive and better able to show that the pictured identities and events live historically and into perpetuity.

Earlier the title of *Somnyama Ngonyama* appears with the English title, but in the case of the Tate and the Gropius Bau, it is not translated from isiZulu. Was there a specific reason for that?

This was more a curatorial decision than anything else, the English translation was never a fixed part of the title. Those who have seen the early shows and have engaged with the original book know the translation, but the key point is the name itself, which is in my mother tongue and is one of my family's clan names. It is enough to centre this.

Could we hear a little more about the current status of Inkanyiso since the last blog entry was made a while ago, and their work as part of BaMu?

Inkanyiso is named after and motivated by my nephew who committed suicide in 2006, 15 years ago. Since then I've had many relationships form and fade, both personal and professional. Two years ago I moved back home to Durban, so when I go home I see the place he hung himself. With this shift in my life there came a shift in focus. I co-founded BaMu with my partner and we focus on education, advocacy and youth development. Over this course of 15 years the young people – who were Nkanyiso's contemporaries – that I worked with at the time, have also grown to focus on other things. It is all a part of a journey.

Further Information and Contact

Press Images

A selection of high resolution images are available in our press section (gropiusbau.de/press). For media coverage of the exhibition *Zanele Muholi* (26 November 2021 to 13 March 2022) the images may be downloaded and used without license to announce the exhibition prior to and during the exhibition period. Please note that images may not be cropped, overprinted or manipulated.

Please note that only installation views may be photographed in the exhibition. If you plan to take individual photographs of works, including close-ups, they must be approved by the artwork's rights holders.

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Press Contact

Birgit Schapow

presse@gropiusbau.de

Gropius Bau

+49 30 254 86 384

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Open on public holidays

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Open on Tuesday, 28.12.21, 10:00–19:00

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