

gabrielle goliath
elegy

PRESS RELEASE

April 5 - June 30, 2024

What is required of us, now? In this long time of our undoing?

Christina Sharpe, Note 246, in *Ordinary Notes*, 2023, London: Daunt Books Originals

For her inaugural exhibition at Galleria Raffaella Cortese, Gabrielle Goliath unveils a lyrical work of remembrance, repair and black feminist love.

Initiated by the artist in 2015, *Elegy* is a long-term commemorative performance, staged in locations from Johannesburg to São Paulo, Paris, Basel, Munich and Amsterdam. Each performance gathers a group of seven female vocal performers who collectively enact a ritual of mourning, sustaining a single haunting tone over the course of an hour. Invoked in the ritual gesture of each performance is the absent presence of a named (and loved) woman or LGBTIQ+ individual raped and killed in South Africa. For those immersed in its sonic wake, *Elegy* is an opportunity not only to grapple with a normative crisis of patriarchal violence, but to reaffirm the fullness, beauty and insistence of black, brown, femme and queer lives.

For the exhibition, *Elegy*, a bespoke installation structure was conceived, weaving a nuanced score of videos, sound, texts and photographs through the three gallery spaces in Via Stradella. As the first showing of all ten filmed performances of *Elegy*, the exhibition marks a seminal moment in Goliath's artistic journey:

"This is to me a deeply gratifying recollection and celebration of *Elegy*, as a work that remains central to my practice and as urgent as ever in its political demand."

In an economy of differentially valued life, *Elegy* asserts conditions of hope and avowal, memorialising (as loveable and grievable) the lives of individuals lost to the physical, ontological and structural violence of rape culture and femicide in South Africa. Transnational in its reach, it calls for solidarity and relation without collapsing difference. And, of course, coming to the work here in Milan, we find ourselves implicated, for as Françoise Vergès makes clear in *A Decolonial Feminism* (2020), this violence is not limited to the 'abject' corners of Africa and the global south, but permeates the racial, gendered and sexualised hierarchies of Europe, and the modern/colonial world order it instituted.

Goliath's artistic gesture is one of care and transformation, eschewing spectacle and the

regular objectification of traumatized black, brown, femme and queer bodies. Turning to ritual, sound and a praxis of relationality, she offers a space for transformative empathic encounters in which grief collapses representation and loss presents an alternative site for community and imagination. In the paralinguistic flow of this sonic lament, she abandons melody, narrative and codified legibility, drawing participants into a more visceral, resonant aesthetic experience. And in the liminal space of this irresolution (rather than closure or catharsis), she asks us to collectively perform a political work of mourning.

Called to mind in this radical sociality is French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas' conception of the other as a boundary perpetually questioning us, of otherness as a fundamental condition of our being. This obligation and opportunity of 'the other' is traceable throughout the filaments of Goliath's installation – playing out in the contingent, ethical terms of difference and bearing. Reverberating in our spaces, hers is an intimate, urgent and enabling elegy, sounding forth the radical possibility of a world otherwise.

The expression introduced into the world by the face of the other does not challenge the weakness of my power, but my power of power

E. Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969-1979)

BIOGRAPHY

Gabrielle Goliath (b.1983 South Africa)

Through the ritual, sonic and social encounters of her art practice, Gabrielle Goliath attends (and tends) to histories and present-day conditions of differentially valued life, reaffirming ways in which black, brown, femme and queer practices of possibility perform the world differently. Each of her works convenes a coming-to – a tenuous community – collapsing the presumed remove and privileged subject position of representation (as white, male, heteronormative) and calling for meetings in and across difference, on terms of complicity, relation and love.

Goliath's immersive, often evolving installations have been exhibited throughout South Africa and internationally. She has received numerous awards, including the Future Generation Art Prize - Special Prize (2019), the Standard Bank Young Artist Award (2019), and the Institut Français, Afrique en Créations Prize at the Bamako Biennale (2017). Her work is featured in numerous public and private collections, including Kunsthalle Zürich, TATE Modern, Frac Bretagne, Iziko South African National Gallery, Johannesburg Art Gallery, and Wits Art Museum. Recent exhibitions include Chorus, Dallas Contemporary (2022), Dallas; This song is for..., Kunsthau Baselland, Basel (2022); The Normal, Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh (2021); This song is for..., Konsthall C, Stockholm (2021); Our Red Sky, Göteborgs Konsthall, Gothenburg (2020); and The Power of my Hands, Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris (2020). She participated in the Sharjah 15 Biennial (2023), Jaou Photo, Tunis (2022) the Kochi Muziris Biennale (2021) and the 60th International Art Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia.

Gabrielle Goliath lives and works in Johannesburg, South Africa.