

# SOUTHERN GUILD

For immediate release:



**ZANELE MUHOLI**  
18 May – 13 July, 2024

**Southern Guild Los Angeles**  
747 N Western Avenue, Melrose Hill  
Los Angeles, California

Southern Guild Los Angeles is pleased to present *ZANELE MUHOLI*, an autobiographical panorama of the visual activist and artist as their creative practice evolves over time and across mediums. Provocative and perceptive, in this presentation Muholi encourages their audience to question the world around them—wielding artwork that re-imagines self and re-envision agency. What does it mean to exist in this time? How can individual and cultural trauma be recognized and transcended? In what ways can art serve as a catalyst for discussion of, education about, and advocacy for antiracism, gender expression, and reproductive health? In each portrait—literal or symbolic—they confront and celebrate their identification with Black and LGBTQIA communities in their native South Africa, empowering individuals from various geographies and generations to identify with and make space for presence, self-love, remembrance, and healing.

This exhibition features Muholi’s recent additions to their ongoing self-portrait series *Somnyama Ngonyama* alongside their newest work in bronze sculpture. Their artworks are inextricable from the specificity of their person—each series imprinting and asserting their ancestral history, personal experience, and individual trauma. Titled “Hail the Dark Lioness” in English, the photographs that comprise this body of work are a visual exploration of the Zulu term *Somnyama*, meaning Black, and *Ngonyama*, which is both the word for lion and their mother’s family name. These portraits are produced all around the world, where Muholi captures their form in complete

solitude. Wrapped in cloaks made from hotel bed sheets, adorned with crowns made from clothesline pins, decorated with lipstick made from toothpaste and Vaseline, these works serve as a simultaneous document and vision of self-embodiment—existing in and through the immediacy of the medium. In making themselves their subject, Muholi offers a parallax gaze, one that empowers, rather than objectifies, their chameleon physique. Honouring their mother tongue and matriarchal lineage, these portraits express a web of relations that frame Muholi as an individual, a child, a grandchild, a sibling, a lover, a mind, a body, and a creative—unrestrained and ever-evolving.

It is with this consciousness of biological origin that Muholi embarked on their sculpture works, creating visceral visualizations of their genitalia and reproductive organs. Existing in a nonbinary body, Muholi has experienced various conflicts in gynaecological medicine, and aims to expose the misinformation disseminated in South Africa's Black and Trans communities, which contributes to the perpetuation of taboos around subjects of gender and sexual variance. After being diagnosed with uterine fibroids, the artist reflected on the intersecting influences of their inherited genealogy and Catholic upbringing—considering how they were undereducated about pre-existing conditions and criticizing religion's condemnation of sexual pleasure and queer identity. Fabricated at a colossal scale, glistening bronze casts of their uterus and clitoris are juxtaposed with avatars of themselves in clerical robes—in one, bowing their head in solemn prayer, in another, reclining while stimulating their labia. In these works, sanctity is redefined—encouraging connection with and love for one's unique body, advocating for self-exploration, medical literacy, and LGBTQIA-sensitive healthcare. For Muholi, "The uterus is life's global signature, it is a passage that is common to all of us regardless of race, class, gender, sexual orientation and geographical location. It is a common space, it is like water – water is water, blood is blood, the womb is the womb, birth is birth..."

These works serve as a revolving portal between the artist, subject, and audience—an intimate communion with the inherent complexities of self, place, and body politic. Both through the vocabulary of black-and-white photography and bronze-cast sculpture, they have an ability to make the mundane regal, to make the anatomical monumental. With a practice that welcomes duality, shape-shifting, and subjectivity, their work has the ability to, at once, look back, stand present, and stride forward—conscious of a world that will only continue to provide new obstacles and inequalities to overcome, in their individual context and political consciousness. This exhibition offers a space where people of all ages can commune, observe, and share their impressions and experiences safely and without judgment—where each person is given space to uncover their particular resonance with Muholi's ambitious and expansive practice.

*ZANELE MUHOLI* will be accompanied by the release of an eponymous artist monograph published by Southern Guild, capturing the personal depth and communal impact of this body of work. This is the first publication that will document Muholi's sculptural oeuvre, featured alongside new and recent photography from their *Somnyama Ngonyama* series—in addition to seminal works from the artist's archive. The catalogue will include scholarly essays and interviews that offer insight into their practice, particularly exploring the shift from the lensing of others to the lensing of self. Muholi's own voice is a consistent presence in the monograph, offering intimate biographical accounts that have informed their creative journey and activist perspective.

On Tuesday, May 21, the gallery will host a panel discussion entitled "The Unflinching Gaze: The Image, the Archive, and the Aesthetics of Resistance" featuring Zanele Muholi in conversation with artist Catherine Opie and LACMA photography curator, Britt Salvesen. The event will also serve as a celebration for the launch of both Southern Guild's monograph and Aperture's recent release: Zanele Muholi, *Somnyama Ngonyama, Volume II*. The gallery will also host various

educational walkabouts with local youth groups and members of the LGBTQIA+ and Black communities over the course of the exhibition. Full details to be announced.

## **About Zanele Muholi**

Zanele Muholi is a visual activist, humanitarian and art practitioner who focuses on the documentation and celebration of the lives of South Africa's Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex communities. Born in Umlazi, Durban and now residing in Cape Town, Muholi currently works between Durban, Johannesburg and Cape Town. Between 2001 and 2003, they studied Advanced Photography at the Market Photo Workshop in Newtown, Johannesburg. They received an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Liège in Belgium (2023), were appointed Honorary Professor of video and photography at the University of the Arts/Hochschule für Künste in Bremen, Germany (2013), and completed an MFA in Documentary Media at Ryerson University, Toronto (2009).

Beginning in 2006, Muholi responded to the continuing discrimination and violence faced by the LGBTI community by photographing Black lesbian and transgender individuals, resulting in the ongoing portrait project, *Faces and Phases*. Their self-proclaimed mission is "to rewrite a Black queer and trans visual history of South Africa for the world to know of our resistance and existence at the height of hate crimes in SA and beyond." These arresting portraits are part of Muholi's contribution towards a more democratic and representative South African homosexual history. Through this positive imagery, Muholi hopes to offset the stigma and negativity attached to queer identity in African society.

The more recent series *Somnyama Ngonyama* (Hail the Dark Lioness) shifts the lens with Muholi becoming both participant and image-maker. Experimenting with different characters and archetypes, this ongoing series of self-portraits references specific events in South Africa's political history. By exaggerating the darkness of their skin tone, Muholi reclaims their Blackness, and offsets the culturally dominant images of Black women in the media today.

Muholi is invested in educational activism, community outreach and youth development. In 2009 they founded Inkanyiso ([www.inkanyiso.org](http://www.inkanyiso.org)), a forum for queer and visual (activist) media and in 2002 co-founded the Forum for Empowerment of Women (FEW). They facilitate access to art spaces for youth practitioners through projects such as Ikhono LaseNatali and continue to provide photography workshops for young women and in the townships through PhotoXP.

Awards and accolades received include the Image Arts Wall of Fame at Toronto Metropolitan University (2022); International Center of Photography's Spotlights (2022); Spectrum International Prize for Photography (2020); Lucie Award for Humanitarian Photography (2019); 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); Mbokodo Award in the category of Visual Arts (2017); ICP Infinity Award for Documentary and Photojournalism (2016); Africa'Sout! Courage and Creativity Award (2016); Outstanding International Alumni Award from Ryerson University (2016); Fine Prize for an emerging artist at the 2013 Carnegie International; Prince Claus Award (2013); Index on Censorship - Freedom of Expression art award (2013); and the Casa Africa Award for Best Female Photographer, and Fondation Blachère Award at Les Rencontres de Bamako Biennial of African Photography (2009).

Solo exhibitions of Muholi's work have taken place at institutions including Tate Modern, London, UK (2024 and 2020); SF Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, USA (2024); Maison

Européenne de la Photographie (MEP), Paris (2023); Museo delle Culture (MUDEC) Photo, Milan (2023); National Gallery of Iceland (2022); Kunstforeningen GI Strand, Denmark (2022); Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, Spain (2022); Fotografihuset, Norway (2022); the Finnish Museum of Photography (2022); the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, USA (2022); Bildmuseet, Umeå, Sweden (2021); Gropius Bau, Berlin, Germany (2021); Sprengel Museum, Hannover, Germany (2021); Cummer Museum, Florida, USA (2021); Norval Foundation, Cape Town, South Africa (2020); Ethelbert Cooper Gallery of African and African American Art at Harvard University, USA (2020); Seattle Art Museum, USA (2019); Colby Museum, Maine, USA (2019); Spelman College Museum of Fine Art, Georgia, USA (2018); New Art Exchange, Nottingham, UK (2018); Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires, Argentina (2018); LUMA Westbau, Zurich, Switzerland (2018); Fotografiska, Stockholm, Sweden (2018); Durban Art Gallery: a survey exhibition conceptualised as a homecoming, Kwazulu Natal, South Africa (2017); Market Photo Workshop, Johannesburg, South Africa (2017); Glasgow School of Art, Scotland (2017); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands (2017); Autograph ABP, London, UK (2017); Maitland Institute, Cape Town, South Africa (2017); North Carolina Museum of Art, USA (2016); Standard Bank Gallery, Makhanda, South Africa (2016); Gallatin Galleries, New York, USA (2016); Open Eye Gallery, Liverpool, UK (2015); Brooklyn Museum, New York, USA (2015); Akershus Kunstsenter, Norway (2015); Einsteinhaus, Ulm, Germany (2014); Schwules Museum, Berlin, Germany (2014); Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, USA (2014); and Casa Africa, Las Palmas, Spain (2011). The Faces and Phases series has been shown at the South African Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale (2013); dOCUMENTA 13 (2012), and the 29th São Paulo Biennial (2010).

Muholi exhibited in *May You Live in Interesting Times*, the 58th Venice Biennale (2019), produced a city-wide project titled *Masihambisane - on Visual Activism for Performa 17*, New York, USA (2017) and featured in the inaugural exhibitions at the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa, Cape Town, South Africa.

Muholi has exhibited extensively in group shows across the globe, including at the 22nd Sydney Biennale; Fotografiska, New York, US; Guggenheim, New York, US; Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Canada; Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago, US; National Gallery of Victoria Triennial, Melbourne, Australia; Guggenheim Bilbao, Spain; LUMA, Arles, France; S.M.A.K Ghent, Belgium; Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris, France; Kulturhistorisk Museum, Oslo, Norway; The Walther Collection, Ulm, Germany; and Museo Amparo, Mexico, among others.

Publications include *Somnyama Ngonyama: Hail the Dark Lioness* (Aperture, 2018), which won the 2019 Best Photography Book Award from the Kraszna-Krausz Foundation, and the follow-up *Somnyama Ngonyama: Hail the Dark Lioness, Volume II* (Aperture, 2024); *Zanele Muholi, Faces and Phases 2006-14* (Steidl and The Walther Collection, 2014); *Zanele Muholi: African Women Photographers #1* (Casa Africa and La Fábrica, 2011); *Faces and Phases* (Prestel, 2010); and *Only half the picture* (Stevenson, 2006).

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For hi-res images and media enquiries, please email ALMA Communications at [hannah@almacommunications.co](mailto:hannah@almacommunications.co)

## COMING UP AT SOUTHERN GUILD

### Cape Town Gallery

Madoda Fani: Solo, 6 June – 22 August 2024

Adam Birch: Solo, 6 June – 22 August 2024  
King Houndekpinkou: Solo, 6 June – 22 August 2024

### **Los Angeles Gallery**

Terence Maluleke: Solo, 20 July – 5 September 2024  
Wycliffe Mundopa: Solo, 20 July – 5 September 2024

### **New York (Galerie56)**

Porcky Hefer: *no bats, no chocolates*, 30 April – 26 August 2024

### **Fairs**

Design Miami Los Angeles, 16-19 May 2024  
The Armory New York, 6-8 September 2024

### **ABOUT SOUTHERN GUILD**

Established in 2008 by Trevyn and Julian McGowan, Southern Guild represents contemporary artists from Africa and its diaspora. With a focus on Africa's rich tradition of utilitarian and ritualistic art, the gallery's programme furthers the continent's contribution to global art movements. Southern Guild's artists explore the preservation of culture, spirituality, identity, ancestral knowledge, and ecology within our current landscape. Their work has been acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, LACMA, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pérez Art Museum, Mint Museum, Harn Museum, Denver Art Museum, Vitra Museum, Design Museum Gent and National Gallery of Victoria. Based in Cape Town, Southern Guild's 5,000 sq ft space in Melrose Hill, Los Angeles marks its first gallery in the US.

<https://southernguild.com>