

HOLLYBUSH GARDENS IS DELIGHTED TO PRESENT:

THE TENDERNESS ONLY WE CAN SEE BY LUBAINA HIMID

Preview: 16 February, 6-8 pm

Exhibition: 17 February - 24 March

We are delighted to present *The Tenderness Only We Can See*, a new constellation of paintings by Lubaina Himid that moves across canvas and wood, in drawers and on case - one thing speaks to the next. For Himid "The paintings in the show are speaking different languages, to me and to each other; some of them are secret. Other lines of communication attempt to hold their inner narratives together, in the end old songs and other people's poems are all that is left."

Music has a profound influence on how Himid feels and connects to the world, and here she has used four music related objects to navigate the exhibition space. The phrases 'Rescued from the Dragons of Loneliness' quoted from an Essex Hemphill poem and 'The Sweet Sharp Taste of Limes', words by Audre Lorde, have been painted on the side of banjo cases. These texts evoke another ongoing body of work, Himid's Kanga series, which combine slogan and image. Here though the image has become an object, its furry inside suggests comfort brought by sound but also the material itself. However, as Himid reminds us, the meaning within the object's history becomes a narrative force in the exhibition; early forms of the banjo were made by African people (as many other objects and innovations) in America and were often played in minstrel shows in the 19th century.

The eponymous *The Tenderness Only We Can See* is a painting on a piano part. Like an altarpiece the picture surface is partitioned in three parts, at the centre a fish in yellow, brown and pink on a light yellow background is surrounded by baskets. *Chopin's Heart*, a piece of piano standing column-like, contrasts birds and patterns as if in a fabric sample book. Plants and animals, like patterns, traverse time and key into our register of recognition, assumption and place of cultural belonging. Painting British fish, for instance, is a strategy for recasting notions of the exotic, deconstructing that which is familiar, turning the everyday into 'other'. The fish is silent whereas the pattern speaks a secret language. The baskets are women's companions and familiars. The piano in contrast to a banjo is an instrument that straddles bourgeois drawing room entertainment, the concert hall, jazz club and more.

Another painting, *The Captain and the Mate* expands on a long-term interest in the work of James Tissot (1832 - 1902). Since the early 90s Himid has been recasting paintings from his period of painting fashionable women, replacing white figures with black figures, suggesting alternative stories that could have been concurrent, but that also operate in their own time space continuum. Whilst far removed from the original, the pulleys on the ship have been faithfully painted - the mechanisms in the painting asking for as much attention as the drama unfolding in front of us; oblivious of their audience, the figures are caught up with each other. If we think about the Tissot painting this might be a scene of adieu, an anxious moment of heightened emotional charge. Or it could be that the new pairings evoke another set of relations entirely, relationships that cross heteronormative pictorial space and gender identification. Like in previous bodies of work, the painting demonstrates a commitment to clothing and fashion; the protagonists are well dressed, either expensively or fashionably. A simple singular yellow stick held by the captain offers an aspect of theatre to the *mis en scène*, cutting through the picture plane, it seems both provocative and benign, emblematic of power or merely of dress.

In *Her Print on Me* the role of the audience has moved from curious observer to unwelcome visitor, bringing the fictional world of the painting into our reality. Interrupted, something falls from the hands of the foregrounded woman, the sketchy chair and the large windows serve to increase the feeling of vast space emoted by the wild sea that functions in opposition to the calm gaze of the women. The bodies of the women, separated by a long beam dividing the space, are poised as if in the middle of a task or a ritual. They face an unwelcome interlocutor in the form of our gaze set in their intimate scenario. This painting evokes a constant preoccupation of Himid's; the dialectic of safety and danger. As she would say "Somehow it's very challenging to tell the difference between the two."

A drawer, another found object that Himid returns to, provides a surface for two male portraits. Drawers act metaphorically perhaps, but also offer a performative aspect to the paintings, the placement of the drawer itself as well as the hiding and revealing of the body, and like Himid's earlier 'paintings on wood', these works offer the possibility of being looked at in different ways by placing the draw this way or that.

Gallery open: Wednesday - Friday 11 - 6 pm, Saturday 12 - 5 pm or by appointment

Lubaina Himid lives and works in Preston. Forthcoming solo exhibitions include Harris Museum, Preston, Musée régional d'art contemporain Occitanie / Pyrénées-Méditerranée, Sérignan, and Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem. Forthcoming group exhibitions include BALTIC, Gateshead and Glasgow International. Himid has held recent solo shows in a number of institutions such as Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe; Spike Island, Bristol; Modern Art Oxford, and been included in group exhibitions at South London Gallery; Nottingham Contemporary and Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool. Her work is held in several public collections, including National Museums Liverpool, Tate, Museum Ludwig, British Council, Arts Council Collections, UK Government Art Collection, Birmingham Museums, Rhode Island School of Design, Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, Victoria & Albert Museum and Wolverhampton Museum.

Himid is professor of Contemporary Art at the University of Central Lancashire, where she runs the Making Histories Visible archive and collection. She is the winner of the 2017 Turner Prize.

This is Lubaina Himid's second solo exhibition at the gallery. The first exhibition took place in October 2013.

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