



FIRST NIGHT

Lubaina Himid with Magda Stawarska review — a playful collaboration

This exhibition, made in response to the house and galleries of Kettle's Yard in Cambridge, is all about the felicity of chance encounters

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Detail from *Flying Carpet* (2025), by Lubaina Himid
HOLLYBUSH GARDENS AND GREENE NAMALI

Terrifying, is how Lubaina Himid describes the tiny probability of having met her partner, Magda Stawarska. Himid was born in Zanzibar, her mother was from Blackpool; Stawarska is Polish, and grew up in Poland before moving to the UK.

They ended up in Preston, Lancashire, and the life-altering possibilities of being in the same place at the same time is part of what the pair explore in this playful collaborative exhibition, made in response to Kettle's Yard in Cambridge. Spanning both the house (the former home of collectors Jim and Helen Ede) and the exhibition galleries, it also touches on Himid's longstanding interest in the bits of stories left untold.

Their interventions in the house set the tone — chance encounters you could miss if you don't look, or listen, carefully. As well as a large painting by Himid, small works by both artists have been installed in drawers, on a shelf and in a cupboard. The door to the kitchen, usually closed, remains ajar for Stawarska's sound piece, of flowers being trimmed, food being prepared and a recitation, by Himid, of a poem by Audre Lorde — if you catch it.

HOLLYBUSH GARDENS



Favours For Years To Come (2025), by Lubaina Himid
HOLLYBUSH GARDENS AND GREENE NAMALI

Many threads stretch between the disparate works. One gallery houses *How May I Help You?*, a suite of vivid, atmospheric paintings by Himid that imagine encounters between shoppers and vendors that the Edes may have met during their time in Tangier, from 1936 to 1952. She evokes the disconnect that can occur in communication with short scripts that imagine what the figures depicted are saying and thinking.

In the other gallery is a collaborative installation by the couple, entitled *Slightly Bitter* and inspired by the surviving correspondence between the Polish poet Sophie Brzeska and Welsh artist Nina Hamnett. Jim Ede championed the work of Brzeska's life partner Henri Gaudier-Brzeska; Hamnett was the artist's lover and the model for his 1913 sculptures *Torso* and *Dancer*, on display in the house. The two women had an awkward relationship, but they seem to have liked each other and worked together to promote Gaudier-Brzeska's work after his death in 1915.

HOLLYBUSH GARDENS

The postcards that adorn the walls of *Slightly Bitter* (referring to the lemon that adorns a pewter platter in the house and to Brzeska and Hamnett, often overlooked for their own work) relate to Kettle's Yard as both public and private, and to the correspondence between the two pairs of women.

They're accompanied by a sound installation based on that correspondence, that features Stawarska teaching Himid Polish pronunciation. Playing on four channels in three languages, it requires concentration to catch snatches of it – more chance encounters. But if, as a whole, the show is a bit of a jumble, it's still enjoyable to seek out connections.

★★★★☆

To Nov 2, kettlesyard.cam.ac.uk