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LUBAINA HIMID: WATER HAS A PERFECT MEMORY

Preview: Thursday, 3 March, 17:00 - 20:00

Exhibition: 4 March - 30 April 2022

Hollybush Gardens is pleased to present an exhibition of new paintings by Lubaina Himid. Across varied materials, Himid addresses Black experience in its fullness, dealing with subject matters such as desire and love, endurance and belonging, everyday exchange and transformation. *Water Has a Perfect Memory* traces progress, or its lack thereof, in 2021 – a year in which questions of time, as Himid expresses, ‘its shape, its colour and its passing’, were left unanswered. This exhibition attempts to address time’s heterogeneity by recalling or reimagining variations of writing, including diary entries, quotidian note-taking or invented sentences from long letters. By resurrecting text through painted composition, Himid evokes the passage of time and its numerous, resonating pasts.

Paintings such as *Bittersweet* (2022) and *The Next Dance* (2021) depict subjects in deliberation. The fruit stall of *Bittersweet* creates a partial frame for two expressively dressed figures who regard a situation out of view. While working, a woman gestures to the man beside her to wait as she evaluates the disturbance. The man, protesting in response, is keen to mediate or interject. Between these reactive frictions, Himid leaves room for the viewer to hypothetically occupy the scene and consider how one might influence the course of action. In *Accidental Encounter* (2021), a lone figure walks across a deserted beach having voluntarily retrieved a piece of driftwood, unaware of its manifestation as sorrow. Over time, even the sighting of a phoenix cannot free the figure of his unforeseen burden. *Walking Back* (2022) depicts a man appearing to traverse a boundary within a scene decorated by isolated flowers. Himid’s title troubles the impression of the subject who seems to walk forward, to suggest that what is lost or fleeting can endure through reflection and remembrance. Himid’s *H.M.S. Calcutta* (2021) references James Tissot’s (1836-1902) painting, *The Gallery of HMS Calcutta (Portsmouth)* (1897). In a tease of Victorian propriety, Tissot’s work depicts the flirtation between a naval officer and young woman who, interposed by her chaperone, conceals her enjoyment behind her fan. In Himid’s painting, two women occupy the ship, appearing contemplative and mindful of the sea before them. A woman holds an open fan over her left ear in a gesture that means: *do not betray our secret*, while the other’s skirt slips over the edge of the deck, its colour resurfacing in the water.

Water Has a Perfect Memory includes four new works from Himid’s ongoing series: *Men in Drawers*. These meditative portraits use found wooden drawers as a framing device, integrating the individual within a system of personal and tangible longevity. Each drawer is a vessel which accumulates clothing or accessories – socks, cufflinks, pyjamas – which might be variously worn, removed or merely stored. The drawer is a place of ordinary familiarity, but it is also a source of surprise, as Himid notes, the drawer is ‘the epitome of the chance encounter’ – bringing to light objects or items of clothing previously forgotten. By painting such portraits within these vessels, Himid redoubles their use as a repository, providing space for an identity to be preserved and an invitation for the viewer to imagine a life. *Under the Table* (2021) furthers Himid’s negotiation of placement and orientation, utilising a wooden tabletop as a surface for painting and installed as a floor sculpture within the gallery. Himid’s tabletop is layered in latticework and details an electric fan in sheer and delicate form, allowing pattern and object to interfuse.

Relating colour, memory and music, the upstairs gallery features *Airmail Letter: Notes on a Blue Grid Test* (2022), a sixteen-piece silkscreen print by Magda Stawarska-Beavan. The work serves as a continuation from the sound and painted installation, *Blue Grid Test* (2020), originally shown at WIELS, Brussels (2020) and currently on view at Tate Modern, London (2021). The *Blue Grid Test* was conceived as a conversation between Himid and Stawarska-Beavan to approach language, memory and pattern through aural, material and visual evocations on the spectrum of blue. Here, the transcription of phrases and tones related to the colour blue are arranged across prints structured as musical scores. Transcribing the relation between sound, colour and spoken word, the prints create a poetic structure to express the depth and complexity a colour can invoke. The sequencing of text and colour within the score creates its own visual pattern and internal rhythm, further exemplified by the work’s scale. In its entirety, *Airmail Letter: Notes on a Blue Grid Test* (2022) accounts for the spectrum of blue and its permeable associations, transcribing both difference and continuity.

Throughout *Water Has a Perfect Memory*, Himid considers time's legacies, serendipities and obscurities, negotiating both an embodied present and equally felt, inherited pasts.

Lubaina Himid (b. 1954, Zanzibar) lives and works in Preston, UK, and is Professor of Contemporary Art at the University of Central Lancashire. She is the winner of the 2017 Turner Prize.

Himid has exhibited extensively in the UK and abroad. Significant solo exhibitions include *Water Has a Perfect Memory*, Hollybush Gardens, London (2022); *Lubaina Himid*, Tate Modern, London (2021); *Spotlights*, Tate Britain, London (2019); *The Grab Test*, Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem, The Netherlands (2019); *Lubaina Himid*, CAPC Bordeaux, France (2019); *Work From Underneath*, New Museum, New York (2019); *Gifts to Kings*, MRAC Languedoc Roussillon Midi-Pyrénées, Sérignan (2018); *Our Kisses are Petals*, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead (2018); *The Truth Is Never Watertight*, Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe (2017); *Navigation Charts*, Spike Island, Bristol (2017); and *Invisible Strategies*, Modern Art Oxford (2017).

Selected group exhibitions include *Mixing It Up: Painting Today*, Hayward Gallery, London; *Lubaina Himid - Lost Threads*, The British Textile Biennial, The Great Barn, Gawthorpe Hall, Padiham, Burnley, UK; *Life Between Islands: Caribbean-British Art 50s-Now*, Tate Britain, London; *Relations: Diaspora and Painting*, Esker Foundation, Calgary, Canada; *Invisible Narratives 2*, Yamamoto Keiko Rochaix, London; *Unsettled Objects*, Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah (all 2021); *Frieze Sculpture*, London; *Risquons-Tout*, WIELS, Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels; *Slow Painting*, Hayward Touring UK travelling exhibition (all 2020); *En Plein Air*, The High Line, New York (2019-2020); Sharjah Biennial 14, UAE (2019); Glasgow International (2018); Berlin Biennale (2018); *The Place is Here*, Nottingham Contemporary, UK (2017); *Keywords*, Tate Liverpool (2014); and *Burning Down the House*, Gwangju Biennale (2014). Her work is held in various museum and public collections, including Tate; British Council Collection; Arts Council Collection; UK Government Art Collection; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Victoria & Albert Museum, London; National Museums Liverpool; Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; and Rhode Island School of Design, Providence.

Magda Stawarska-Beavan is a multi-disciplinary artist working predominantly with sound, moving image and print. Her work examines the layering of a city's unresolved present upon its past and the narratives that unfold within it. Her installations combine moving image, soundscape and, importantly, traditionally made silkscreen prints and paintings on paper; work that draws on her desire to prompt us to remember what we thought, and perhaps hoped, we had forgotten.

For press enquiries and further information, please contact: alex@hollybushgardens.co.uk

Gallery Hours: Wednesday - Saturday, 11am - 6pm; or by appointment.