

GREENE NAFTALI

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Lubaina Himid *Street Sellers*

May 2 – June 15, 2024
Ground Floor

Greene Naftali is pleased to announce *Street Sellers*, the gallery's inaugural exhibition with Lubaina Himid. A pioneer of the Black Arts Movement in the 1980s, Himid is among the most celebrated British artists working today. Her expansive painting practice operates in the gaps of the historical record, lending lush visibility to issues of labor, migration, and the human toll of empire.

Himid's latest cycle of paintings affirms the dignity of work through depictions of vendors who ply their wares, elegantly dressed and equipped with the tools of their particular trade. The figures emerge from a rich blend of temporalities and points of reference: from the hawkers that remain street-level fixtures of urban life, to popular prints of merchants and peddlers dating back to 17th-century London as rare documents of the working class. The genre of the full-length portrait—linked to aristocrats and monarchs—is also recast with new protagonists, shown on a grand scale and fully at one with their respective *métiers*. Asserting the centrality of Black subjects to art historical arenas long denied them, Himid frees herself to invent what the archive lacks: "I paint it into existence."

Each canvas is paired with a work on paper ingeniously printed to mimic a cardboard sign, embellished with painted motifs and phonetic letters that induce the viewer to read aloud—uttering the sales pitch to lend the exhibition an informal soundtrack. The prints are double-sided, with the backs revealing the sellers' true thoughts that go unsaid. Often romantic or wistful, those inner monologues betray their attachment to the goods they carry, which Himid renders with lapidary attention to an egg's speckled surface, the weave of chair caning, the ribbed interior of a cowrie shell. Objects here are charged like talismans—vectors of connection that are meant to change hands.

That intimacy extends to Himid's paintings on domestic objects: from portrait heads on discarded dresser drawers to miniature vignettes on found crockery. Opening a drawer is an everyday revelation, an airing out of hidden depths, and Himid has described it as an ideal container for "lost or forgotten lives"—a compartment to hold the "memories of people whose names no one had bothered to write down." China plates and platters are likewise tied to acts of routine encounter, which Himid overpaints with subtle disruptions to their polite decorum. One thrifted ceramic sports a tongue, another a single molar—the first pieces of a planned *New York Dinner Service* the artist will source locally over time, then emblazon with every part of the human body as seen from inside. Faintly troubling yet also convivial in their nods to communal space and shared endeavor, the works extend Himid's career-long project of "interrogating narratives about the desire to belong."

Lubaina Himid (b. Zanzibar, 1954) lives and works in Preston, England. A Commander of the British Empire, she is an emeritus professor at the University of Central Lancashire. Himid is currently the subject of a solo exhibition at The Contemporary Austin (traveling to the FLAG Art Foundation, New York in September). She is the 2024 recipient of

the Suzanne Deal Booth / FLAG Art Foundation Prize, and was also awarded the Maria Lassnig Prize in 2023, with a related upcoming exhibition at UCCA Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, in 2025.

Himid received Britain's Turner Prize in 2017 and was the subject of a major survey at Tate Modern, London in 2021–22. Other recent solo and two-person exhibitions include Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah UAE (2023–24), Glyndebourne Opera Festival, East Sussex, UK (2023); Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne, Switzerland (2022); Tate Britain, London (2019); Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem, The Netherlands (2019); CAPC Bordeaux, France (2019); New Museum, New York (2019); Spike Island, Bristol, UK (2017); and Modern Art Oxford (2017). Her work is in the collections of the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Hessel Museum of Art, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; National Museums, Liverpool; Rhode Island School of Design, Providence; Royal Academy, London; Tate, London; and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, among others.