

LISSON

LUBAINA HIMID & MAGDA STAWARSKA Zanzibar

PRESS RELEASE

EXHIBITION DATES:

4 JUNE – 22 AUGUST 2026
67 LISSON STREET, NW1 5DA

OPENING: 4 JUNE, 6 – 8PM

As part of the ongoing Lisson Street programme, the multidisciplinary artistic partnership of Lubaina Himid and Magda Stawarska present a new iteration of *Zanzibar* (1999-2023). Reflecting on themes of memory and movement, loss and belonging, this immersive and evocative mixed-media installation comprises nine diptychs painted by Himid in 1999, paired with a 38-minute multi-layered “libretto” composed by Stawarska in 2023.

This historical series of canvases floats throughout the gallery – anchored by colourful cuboid forms and recurring zigzag patterns. It represents an anomalous passage of abstract painting and a decisive break from Himid’s distinctly figurative, narrative-rich practice, being quite unlike “anything I made before or since,” as she has noted. Entitled *Zanzibar*, this major suite of diptychs was created as an homage to Himid’s East African birthplace and an evocation of memories associated with the archipelago. The paintings reference early events in her life that led up to her coming to London in 1954, hastened by her father’s untimely death aged just 33 (her mother was 26 at the time and Himid was just 3 months old). Subsequent trips back to Zanzibar undertaken by the artist are also suggested in depictions of fishing or mosquito nets, shells, tiles, closed shutters and dripping tears.

One pair of works, with the title *Never Harm a Clever Man*, seems to be a lament for the time lost with her father, while aesthetically suggesting a desert landscape or an architectonic aggregation of terracotta buildings. *Sprinkled Rosewater is Always Pink*, inspired by Himid’s recollection of a silver perfume dispenser, sees the surface of both paintings showered with blush petals and spatters of translucent rose-coloured acrylic. Many of the tessellating boxes in *Cloves Numbing Warming Soothing Strong* contains a single clove, also seemingly representing the smell emitting from a local industry, as much as any visual or symbolic memory.

The eight-channel collaged soundtrack of songs and voices, scored by Stawarska, is layered over and woven through the paintings in the same way as they have been hung throughout the space, in a freeform configuration. The sonic composition leads viewers through the installation and incorporates Taraab music from Zanzibar, snippets of opera, as well as narrated sections of a guidebook given to Himid’s mother by her father. Vignettes of life on the island and in the town of Zanzibar in east Africa are juxtaposed with archival BBC radio clips, orchestral music and Himid’s own voice. Describing her collagist style, Stawarska called the process ‘a meticulous choreography of technical layering, specifically of keeping time, to maintain the intimacy of emotion.’

Channelling both artists’ sense of relative belonging, displacement and loss from their native countries, the overall effect is of a multi-dimensional, fluctuating landscape that evokes past journeys, present desires and future possibilities, spanning more than one lifetime of thought and experience.

This installation mirrors the prolific and ongoing artistic partnership between Himid and Stawarska that is also in evidence throughout this summer at the British Pavilion of the 2026 Venice Biennale. Their almost two-decade working relationship and their ongoing artistic collaboration – combining elements of painting, sculpture, printing, photography and sound – was first realised in exhibition form in 2020 at WIELS in Brussels and has more recently been showcased at Tate Modern, London (2021); the Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne (2022); Sharjah Art Foundation (2023); Kettle’s Yard, Cambridge (2025); Mudam, Luxembourg (2025) and the UCCA Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing (2025).



ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Lubaina Himid CBE RA was born in Zanzibar in 1954, and now lives and works in the UK. For over four decades she has explored and expanded the possibilities of painting and storytelling to depict everyday life and to fill gaps in art history. Self-described as a painter, cultural activist, witness, storyteller, and historian, Himid was an influential figure within the British Black Arts Movement of the 1980s and has always been a champion of women artists in her role as a teacher, curator, critic, and organizer. In 2017, she won the Turner Prize, in 2023 the Maria Lassnig Art Prize, and the 2024 Suzanne Deal Booth / FLAG Art Foundation Prize. Himid has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions globally including a major 2021 survey at Tate Modern, as well as monographic presentations at UCCA, Beijing; Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts in Lausanne; New Museum; Modern Art Oxford; Spike Island, Bristol; Tate Britain, London, and has featured in the 14th and 15th Sharjah Biennials, the 12th Liverpool Biennial; the 10th Berlin Biennale and the 10th Gwangju Biennale. She is Professor Emeritus at the University of Lancashire. In 2026, Lubaina Himid is representing Great Britain at the 61st Venice Biennale. Himid is represented by Hollybush Gardens in London, and Greene Naftali in New York.

Born in Poland in 1976, Magda Stawarska's multi-disciplinary practice combines moving image, sound, silkscreen prints and painting. Her work often arches around her distinct practice of 'inner listening', through which she explores the connections between personal memory, place and sound, uncovering hidden and conflicting histories. Recent solo and group exhibitions include 'Another Chance Encounter', Kettle's Yard, Cambridge; Artist-to-Artist, Frieze, London; 'Drift', Yamamoto Keiko Rochaix, London; 'Plaited Time / Deep Water', Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah, UAE; 'A Fine Toothed Comb', HOME, Manchester; 'Rewinding Internationalism', Villa Arson, Nice, and Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven. Her work is in public collections including the Government Art Collection, London, the Arts Council Collection, London and the Sharjah Art Foundation Collection. She is a Research Fellow for Artlab Contemporary Print Studios at the University of Lancashire and lives and works in the UK. Stawarska is represented by Yamamoto Keiko Rochaix in London.

ABOUT LISSON

Lisson is a global gallery dedicated to shaping the art of today. Creating meaningful dialogues and robust markets between artists and audiences across six venues in the UK, US and China, Lisson exhibits the most engaging and challenging work, adding value and narrative through decades of experience and innovation.

Building significance and reputation with our artists, Lisson nurtures and amplifies their vision at every turn, supporting opportunities to show beyond the gallery's walls in museums, the public realm and through international partnerships. The gallery's heritage and its foundational role in contemporary art since 1967, allows for a deeper perspective and more thoughtful relationships when furthering the career and voice of an artist.