

## LUBAINA HIMID

**PREVIEW: THURSDAY 10 OCTOBER 6 – 8 PM**

**EXHIBITION: 11 OCTOBER - 9 NOVEMBER 2013**

We are pleased to announce our inaugural exhibition at Warner Yard by Lubaina Himid.

Coming to prominence in the 1980s as a protagonist within the Black British Art Movement, Lubaina Himid has curated and taken part in pivotal exhibitions, research and writing. Since then, museum collections have held particular interest for Himid, as a space to address, reflect and challenge these containers of history, memory and hidden experiences.

Initially studying to become a theatre designer, the language of scenography is evident across Himid's work - from the seminal pieces such as *A Fashionable Marriage*, 1987 through to large scale installations *Naming the Money* (2004), a work comprising 100 cut out figures. Criss crossing a multitude of references, painting and installation have become Himid's preferred mediums to express questions around art, authorship, illusion and politics - often exploring issues surrounding Black identity. Conscious of the fact that painting has a history as adornment of architecture, homes, bodies and fabrics, often involving cultures and artists that are marginalised, Himid has situated her practice at the intersection between design and art and between Western and African artistic traditions. In her work she proposes historical narratives often excluded from mainstream accounts, giving names and voices to the unheard.

This exhibition will include *Carrot Piece*, 1985, a work initially exhibited in the 1980s at the ICA, London. The work, one of Himid's signature cutouts, depicts a scene of two figures that plays out cultural and racial hierarchies of the past and today. Works from the series *Kangas from the lost sample book*, 2011/2012 were made whilst working with the textile department at the Whitworth in Manchester. Here she examined the gallery's small group of 20th century East African kangas, taking photographs and making preparatory drawings. She has compared these with her own kanga collection, using the many patterns and motifs from both groups to make new work on paper. Referencing the Swahili sayings or slogans found on traditional kangas this series of large paper works uses invented texts that evoke a sense of impending danger coupled with our dogged desire to survive. *Tailor, Singer, Striker, Dandy*, 2011 reinterpret West African fabrics held by Manchester Museums to express contemporary and historic male identity through appearance and clothes. Alongside these works there will be new drawings on paper and paintings on wood.

Recent exhibitions include: *Keywords*, Iniva, London travelling to Tate Liverpool in 2014, *Moments That Matter*, Harris Museum & Art Gallery, *Cotton: Global Threads*, Whitworth Art Gallery Manchester 2012-2013, *Migrations*, Tate Britain London, 2012 and *Thin Black Line(s)* Tate Britain London 2011/12. Her work is held by museum collections such as Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, Tate, Victoria & Albert Museum, The Arts Council Collection and Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester. She is currently Professor of Contemporary Art at the University of Central Lancashire.

Contact Lisa Panting & Malin Ståhl for further information.

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

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Hollybush Gardens launches its new space with an exhibition by Lubaina Himid, a painter and installation artist who has dedicated much of her thirty-year long career to uncovering marginalised and silenced histories, figures and cultural moments. Born in Zanzibar, Lubaina Himid was then brought up in North London by her mother, a Royal College of Art educated textile designer whose keen interest in patterns inspired her to follow an artistic path. Himid first took a BA in Theatre Design at Wimbledon College of Art in the mid-1970s, choosing this discipline for the connections it bore with radical politics, and in particular Black politics. While studying Cultural History at the Royal College of Art six years later, and by then deeply engaged in a struggle against the absence of representation of Black and Asian women in the art world, Lubaina Himid became committed to showing the work of her contemporaries Sutapa Biswas, Sonia Boyce, Claudette Johnson, Ingrid Pollard, Veronica Ryan and Maud Sulter, alongside her own. She curated significant group exhibitions such as *Five Black Women* at the Africa Centre in 1983, *Black Women Time Now* at Battersea Arts Centre in 1983-84 and *The Thin Black Line* at the Institute for Contemporary Art in 1985, all of which were revisited in the temporary display *Thin Black Line(s)* at Tate Britain in 2011-12. In 1986, Himid exhibited her iconic installation *A Fashionable Marriage* at the Pentonville Gallery in London. Inspired by William Hogarth's *Marriage à-la-mode* (1743), a series of six paintings satirising an arranged marriage gone wrong, Himid's piece produced a biting critique of contemporary art and politics, and of their collusion. From theatre designer to militant artist and curator, Lubaina Himid then took a major turn in her life by moving to Yorkshire in the late 1980s and shortly after to Lancashire, where she still lives, leaving the London art scene behind. Her work has since continued to address her dual heritage and to be driven by two recurrent aspirations: to develop and sustain a conversation with an audience, and to valorise, as she puts it, "the contribution black people have made to cultural life in Europe for the past several hundred years."

Lubaina Himid has a long-standing interest in the representation of the Black body, both in art history and the media, and in its subjugation in history at large. Early in her practice, she elected history painting as her medium through which to deconstruct the Western myth of Africa and to insert the previously absent and stereotyped Black body in art and its debates. The subjects of her works have included figures ranging from the leader of the Haitian revolution Toussaint L'Ouverture, to anonymous one-day heroes and villains featured in the Guardian between 2007 and 2009 (*Negative Positives / Guardian Paperworks*). Formally speaking, her paintings have extended to brightly coloured cut-out figures and to domestic objects such as dinner services, which she has used as surfaces to paint on. The resulting works often borrow from the pictorial vocabulary of 18th century political and social satires by the likes of William Hogarth, James Gillray and George Cruickshank. In *The Carrot Piece* (1985), one of Lubaina Himid's earlier works, two cut-out figures appear like a magnified and modernized detail from one such political cartoon. On the left, a white man perched on a unicycle holds a stick with a carrot dangling at the end. Standing to his right, a black woman walks away from him and looks back in distrust. If turning power dynamics upside down has long been a leitmotiv in Lubaina Himid's practice, this piece, together with *A Fashionable Marriage*, marked the start of a series of jocular, but no less astute works that have enabled the artist to engage museum viewers in conversations about gender and racial oppression, and colonial trauma.

As containers of histories and spaces of remembrance, museums and in particular regional museums have a particular appeal for Lubaina Himid. In Lancashire more than anywhere else, museums' buildings and collections are closely connected to the textile industry. Often founded at the end of the 19th century by philanthropists who made their money from more or less direct interactions with the production and trade of textile, the collections attest to the cities' past wealth, artistic and entrepreneurial talents, and ways of living. What is notable in a lot of the North Western public museums' collections (which I have had the chance to research to a certain extent) is the quasi-systematic obliteration of the deep connection between the textile industry and slavery. Given Lubaina Himid's artistic influences and preoccupations, such museums are an ever-fertile terrain of investigation and have indeed become key resources for the production and exhibition of her work in the last decade or so. Himid's particular interest lies in making visible lesser known connections and narratives, and in revisiting neglected fragments and objects contained in public collections and archives. While the series of 100 black and white paintings of patterns entitled *Cotton.Com* (2002) imagined possible dialogues between cotton fields slaves in South Carolina and mill workers in Manchester, *Kangas from the Lost Sample Book* (2011) took as a starting point the historical links between Manchester textile designers and East African kanga manufacturers. Drawing from the textile collection of the Whitworth Gallery, as well as from her own, the artist developed a series of paintings and of collaged portraits. Constituting the core of the work, the paintings borrow the structure and patterns of a few never exhibited kangas and include text invented by the artist, referencing the Swahili sayings or slogans imprinted on the fabric. "Is forgiveness a cousin to freedom" and "Allow your friends to meet your enemies" are some of the textual interventions used by Lubaina Himid to openly give, as she puts it, "disparate audiences the opportunity to construct their own scenario". Charged with allusions to trauma and revenge, two recurrent themes in the artist's practice, *Kangas from the Lost Sample Book* further address the movements of cultures and commodities, as well as the construction of collective memory.

Seen in today's context, Lubaina Himid's work feels as relevant as yesterday and the sheer number of artists, both black and non-black, committed to exploring colonial archives and museums' histories today gives hope for a continued impartial reappraisal of history.