

Jury Statement**SPECTRUM – International Prize for Photography****Zanele Muholi**

The photographic works of Zanele Muholi are characterised by their great originality of pictorial language while at the same time taking a clear-cut position on pressing social issues. The artistic and political action strategies are closely linked.

Born in Umlazi, South Africa in 1972 and a graduate of the Market Photo Workshop at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg and Toronto's Ryerson University, the photographer has been working consistently for two decades on issues of the visual representation of LGBTQI+ people and politics in South Africa since the end of apartheid.

Portrait series, often conceived as long-term projects, are the focus of Muholi's artistic work. Not infrequently, the individual pictures are accompanied by narratives about their participants' everyday lives. Muholi documents hostility towards and attacks on lesbian and transgender individuals and enables people of different sexual preferences to create visual self-representations of great, sometimes deliberately challenging confidence. They gain their extraordinary presence from gestures, facial expressions and bearing. The poses in the series "Faces and Phases" (2006 - ongoing), often originating from the classical repertoire of studio photography, reinforce the impression of "naturalness", while dress and posture unmistakably refer to membership of the lesbian, queer and gay scene. This merging of naturalness with the socially discredited quality of the special is one of the strengths of these photographs.

On the other hand, Muholi's sometimes elaborately staged self-portraits of the series "Somnyama Ngonyama: Hail the Dark Lioness" (2012 - ongoing) seem at first glance to stress more strongly the formal uniqueness of the representation. Models from the history of painting and photography are reinterpreted in these "one image for every day on a year". Muholi often processes their own experiences, whereby here, too, the presented subject never appears as a victim, but as a confident figure claiming their space. Muholi succeeds in pushing clichéd conceptions of the exotic to extremes by adopting unusual accessories and hairstyles and satirising stereotypes. Subtle humour and profound earnest come together in the power of formal compositions. In this way, Muholi's photographs lend foreign attributions and staged self-assertion a force and beauty rarely encountered in contemporary photography.

Yilmaz Dziewior**Director of Museum Ludwig, Cologne, and jury member for the
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