

ZEITZ MOCAA PRESENTS ONE THOUSAND VOICES, AN EXHIBITION BY OWANTO

Cape Town: On 6 February 2019, the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa (Zeitz MOCAA) opens an immersive sound installation by multicultural Gabonese artist, Owanto. The installation, titled *One Thousand Voices*, highlights gender inequality and the politics surrounding women's bodies.

The exhibition introduces audio testimonies from survivors of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and is curated by Gcotyelwa Mashiga and Sakhisizwe Gcina. Using various languages, the installation projects voices and stories of survival and resilience, with the voices weaving together to create one collective narrative.

"This exhibition confronts the stigma which prevents women from speaking out against the violation of their rights to decide how they want to exist in the world. It is our hope that *One Thousand Voices* is a declaration of women empowerment and instigates a conversation about the freedom of self-determination," says Gcina.

The piece is composed like a symphony — voices are recorded on a smartphone and sent via WhatsApp — with several movements, elements and choruses. The juxtaposition of analogue and digital works in the exhibition create a bridge between the past, present, and future — linking the archival images from Owanto's Flower series (2017) and an audio installation, *One Thousand Voices* (2018).

Mashiga further states, "through *One Thousand Voices* we hope to provide a space where people will reflect on the survivor's trauma and journey to find an alternative rite of passage. This exhibition attempts to acknowledge a multitude of stories, experiences and realities, particularly those of marginalised persons."

In addition to this transcultural narrative, it is important to merge the artistic and journalistic forms. "It all started with found photographs of a female circumcision ceremony hidden in a forgotten drawer. One of these photographs - *La Jeune Fille à La Fleur* from the Flower series — is part of the permanent collection at Zeitz MOCAA. It stands as a symbol for change," says Owanto.

The exhibition opens on the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation with a panel discussion. Statistics report 200 million girls and women alive today have undergone Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting—14 million are under the age of 15 years old. FGM/C is practiced in 30 countries in western, eastern, and north-eastern Africa, including parts of the Middle East and Asia. It is also prevalent within some immigrant communities in Europe, North America and Australia.

The panel discussion will be facilitated by Acting Chief Curator at Zeitz MOCAA, Azu Nwagbogu, artist Owanto, journalist/producer Katya Berger, and a guest activist Elizabeth Katamboi.

Exhibition title: *One Thousand Voices*
Venue: Level 2, Zeitz MOCAA, Silo District, V&A Waterfront
Run dates: 6 February – 30 May 2019
Exhibition curators: Gcotyelwa Mashiq and Sakhisizwe Gcina
Exhibiting artist: Owanto

ENDS

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Notes to editors:

About Owanto

Owanto had the honour of representing the Republic of Gabon at the 53rd International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale in 2009, with a solo show in the first ever Pavillon du Gabon, curated by Fernando Francés, Director of CAC Malaga, Spain. She was the first artist from sub-Saharan Africa to have a solo exhibition in a National Pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

About *One Thousand Voices*

One Thousand Voices is produced in collaboration with Katya Berger, journalist and documentary producer, and with contributions from the following NGOs, Schools, and Safe Houses:

Sahiyo (India), WeSpeakOut (India), CESVED (Nigeria), Africa Schools Kenya (Kenya), We Yone Child Foundation (Sierra Leone), AWARE (Singapore), Stop FGM Iran (Iran), The Crocodile Project (Germany), Kalyanamitra (Indonesia), Senegalese Committee on Traditional Practices (Senegal), Hope for Women and Girls (Tanzania), Masanga Centre (Tanzania), Yes We Can Foundation (Gambia), Think Young Women (Gambia), Women Solidarity (Liberia), Equipop (France), Women Safe (France), Maison des Femmes (France), Gams France (France), France Terre d'Asile (France), Nafis Network (Somaliland), Galyako Education Center for

Peace & Development (Somaliland), Voix de Femmes (Burkina Faso), Girl Generation (Burkina Faso), Portuguese Family Planning Association (Portugal), Medicos del Mundo (Spain), Ghana Association of Women Welfare (Ghana), and independent partners.

About the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa

Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa (Zeitz MOCAA) is a public not-for-profit contemporary art museum that collects, preserves, researches and exhibits 21st-century art from Africa and its diaspora; hosts international exhibitions; develops supporting educational and enrichment programmes; encourages intercultural understanding; and guarantees access for all. Galleries are dedicated to a large cutting-edge permanent collection; temporary exhibitions; and Centres for Art Education, Curatorial Training, Performative Practice, Photography, the Moving Image, and the Costume Institute.

Zeitz MOCAA was established through a partnership between the V&A Waterfront led by CEO David Green—acting on behalf of Growthpoint Properties Limited and the Government Employees Pension Fund (GEPF), represented by the Public Investment Corporation Limited (PIC)—and collector Jochen Zeitz. The building was reimagined through a design by the acclaimed London-based Heatherwick Studio.