

# PRESS RELEASE

**MARY SIBANDE: I CAME APART AT THE SEAMS**  
3 October 2019 – 5 January 2020



**Part of the Charles Russell Speechlys Terrace Rooms Series**  
**Terrace Rooms, Somerset House, London**  
**Free**

This October, Somerset House and 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair are proud to present **Mary Sibande: I Came Apart at the Seams**, a free exhibition of new and selected works from one of **South Africa's most prominent contemporary artists, Mary Sibande**. In her **first solo exhibition in the UK**, Sibande presents a series of striking photographic and sculptural works exploring the power of imagined narratives in challenging stereotypical depictions of women and shaping post-colonial identities in South Africa today. The exhibition continues beyond 1-54 as a standalone show throughout Somerset House's winter season.

*I Came Apart at the Seams* follows the transformative journey of Sibande's avatar, Sophie. Featuring life-sized sculptural figures and photographs modelled on the artist herself, the exhibition brings together three defining series of works for the first time, *Long Live the Dead Queen* (2009-13), *The Purple Shall Govern* (2013-17) and *I Came Apart at the Seams* (2019-). Through each series, Sibande captures three stages of Sophie's transformation, from her beginnings as a domestic housemaid into myriad empowered characters, as she transcends histories of oppression to rewrite her position in both historical and contemporary narratives. Through Sophie, Sibande pays homage to the generations of women in her family's past who worked as domestic labourers, critiquing stereotypical depictions of the female body in South Africa.

With each sculpture dressed in elaborate handmade couture designs, Sibande uses vivid textiles to

## **MARY SIBANDE: I CAME APART AT THE SEAMS**

**3 October 2019 – 5 January 2020**

---

define the distinct phases of Sophie's transformative journey. With each room of the exhibition, Sophie's clothing transitions through three colour stages; blue, purple and red. With each colour, Sibande draws from three defining periods of South African history in which she seeks redress: the rise and rule of the Apartheid system: its subsequent fall: and the legacy of apartheid.

Upon entering the exhibition, visitors are introduced to Sophie in Sibande's first striking sculpture and tableaux photography series *Long Live the Dead Queen* (2009-13). Dressed in a blue maid's uniform, complete with a crisp white apron and bonnet, Sophie wears the clothing which Sibande's mother, grandmother and great-grandmother all would have worn, and been defined by, in their roles as domestic workers. With her eyes shut, Sophie's imagination allows her to break free of the constraints of her domestic uniform, taking the lead role in narratives which would have been denied to Sibande's ancestors, capturing Sophie as a bishop leading a congregation, a warrior and royalty.

The exhibition continues with Sibande's second series of works, *The Purple Shall Govern* (2013-17), in which the artist captures the next phase of Sophie's transformation in full effect, as she meets and confronts her future self. Drawing inspiration from Cape Town's 1989 Purple Rain Protest, which saw thousands of anti-apartheid protestors arrested after they were marked by police with purple dye, Sibande shifts the colour palette in the second room of the exhibition, enhancing the impact of her sculpture further with dream-like fabric creations. Through this series, Sibande explores the important, and often painful process, of looking back at one's past in order to move forward and make way for new ideas and identities.

Sophie's transformation is most strikingly encapsulated in the large-scale sculpture, *A Reversed Retrogress, Scene 1* (2013). Freed of her white apron and bonnet, Sophie is placed in-front of her future self. With both figures' arms raised in a charged dance, Sibande explores the relationship between confrontation and liberation when faced with change.

*I Came Apart at the Seams* will culminate in a new body of work by Sibande, of the same title. The series will debut sculptural and photographic works following Sophie's third stage of transformation. Through this latest body of work, Sibande explores the collective feeling of anger felt towards ongoing inequality in South Africa today, featuring Sibande's latest recurring motive of the red dog, a reference to a common Zulu expression - *ie ukwatile uphendukeinja ebomvu* - meaning, "he is angry, he turned into a red dog".

*I Came Apart at the Seams* will be the next exhibition in the Charles Russell Speechlys Terrace Room Series, an ongoing partnership with the leading law firm to present a wide range of free exhibitions reflecting the broad interests of both organisations.

# MARY SIBANDE: I CAME APART AT THE SEAMS

## 3 October 2019 – 5 January 2020

---

**FOR PRESS ENQUIRIES, PLEASE CONTACT:**  
[press@somersethouse.org.uk](mailto:press@somersethouse.org.uk)/0207 845 4624

### ADDITIONAL LISTINGS INFORMATION

**Address:** Somerset House, Strand, London, WC2R 1LA  
**Transport:** Underground: Temple, Embankment / Rail:  
Charing Cross, Waterloo, Blackfriars  
**Website:** [www.somersethouse.org.uk](http://www.somersethouse.org.uk)

### Somerset House Facebook:

[www.facebook.com/SomersetHouse](http://www.facebook.com/SomersetHouse)

**Somerset House Twitter:** @SomersetHouse

**Somerset House Instagram:** @SomersetHouse

**Hashtag:** #MarySibande

### NOTES TO EDITORS

#### ABOUT SOMERSET HOUSE

*Inspiring contemporary culture*

One of the city's most spectacular and well-loved spaces, Somerset House is a new kind of arts centre in the heart of London, designed for today's audiences, artists and creatives – an inspirational community where contemporary culture is imagined, created and experienced.

From its 18th Century origins, Somerset House has played a central role in our society as a place where our culture and collective understanding of the world is shaped and defined. In 2000, it began its reinvention as a cultural powerhouse and home for arts and culture today, creating unique and stimulating experiences for the public, bringing them into direct contact with ideas from the greatest artists, makers and thinkers of our time. Our distinctive and dynamic year-round programme spans the contemporary arts in all its forms, from cutting-edge exhibitions and installations to annual festivals, seasonal events in the courtyard including Film4 Summer Screen, Summer Series and Skate, and an extensive learning and engagement programme.

As well as welcoming over 3million visitors annually, Somerset House houses the largest and most diverse creative communities in the country – from one-person start-ups to successful creative enterprises including British Fashion Council, Dance Umbrella, Improbable Theatre, Hofesh Shechter Company, and Dartmouth Films. In 2016 we launched Somerset House Studios – a new experimental workspace connecting artists, makers and thinkers with audiences. Currently housing over 80 artists and Makerversity (a community of over 250 emergent makers), the Studios are a platform for the development of new creative projects and collaboration, promoting work that pushes bold ideas, engages with urgent issues and pioneers new technologies. [www.somersethouse.org.uk](http://www.somersethouse.org.uk)

#### ABOUT 1-54 CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN ART FAIR

With annual editions in London, New York and Marrakech, 1-54 is the leading international art fair dedicated to contemporary art from Africa and its diaspora. Drawing reference to the fifty-four countries that constitute the African continent, 1-54 is a sustainable and dynamic platform that is engaged in contemporary dialogue and exchange.

Initiated by Touria El Glaoui in 2013, October 2019 will mark its seventh consecutive edition at Somerset House, London, having returned from its fifth New York edition in May 2019. The fair was launched in Marrakech, Morocco, in February 2018.

#### ABOUT CHARLES RUSSELL SPEECHLYS

Charles Russell Speechlys works with clients in the UK and throughout the world. Our lawyers are based in 11 locations across the UK, Europe, Asia and the Middle East and through each of these locations clients are able to access the full range of the firm's skills and expertise.

We have a broad range of skills and experience across the full spectrum of business and personal needs. This gives us a wider perspective, clear insight and a strongly commercial long-term view.

## **MARY SIBANDE: I CAME APART AT THE SEAMS**

### **3 October 2019 – 5 January 2020**

---

It has made us a leader in the world of dynamic growth and family businesses, and among the world's leading creators and owners of private wealth and their families. Major corporates and institutions find our more considered and personal approach a refreshing alternative to conventional business law firms. [www.charlesrussellspeechlys.com](http://www.charlesrussellspeechlys.com)