



## PRESS RELEASE: Grada Kilomba: *O Barco/The Boat*

**29 September – 20 October 2022**

**Performances:**

**13 October 5-6pm**

**14 October 1-2pm**

**Free**

**Edmond J. Safra Fountain Court**

Interdisciplinary artist **Grada Kilomba** brings her critically acclaimed installation ***O Barco/The Boat***, to Somerset House this Autumn. Displayed in the UK for the first time, the large-scale installation and performance is specially presented by **Somerset House** on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the **1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair**.



Grada Kilomba, *O Barco/The Boat*, 2021. Performance and Installation view at MAAT Lisbon for BoCA, 2021. Photo by Bruno Simão, courtesy of the Artist

Displayed within the centre of Somerset House's main courtyard, the striking 32-metre-long installation is composed of 140 wood blocks, the configuration of which outlines the 'hold' of a historical European slave ship. The blocks have been individually charred by the artist, granting each piece of wood making up *O Barco/The Boat* a powerful materiality that speaks to the traumas of colonial history.

Poems translated into several African languages, including Yoruba, Kimbundu, and Creole from Cabo Verde, as well as Portuguese, English and Arabic, are intricately inscribed into the textured surfaces of several of the blocks. Together, the rectangular and uniform shapes engraved with poems, act as metaphorical tombs, giving a place of recognition and rest to the millions of African people enslaved. As visitors bend to read the inscriptions, they bow, evoking a sign of respect.

*O Barco/The Boat* invites visitors to challenge the ideas and imagery often associated with a boat, which, particularly in the West, may evoke images of glory, freedom and maritime 'discoveries'; a false narrative that Somerset House's own history as the home of the Navy Board contributed to. For Kilomba, it holds different meaning – just as, **'A country with millions of people cannot be discovered'**, neither **'one of the longest, most horrible chapters of the history of humanity – slavery – can be erased'**. The distance between the blocks creates entrances to, and endless paths within, the installation, enabling the public to enter and walk inside of 'the boat', creating a space for contemplation of the forgotten stories and identities of those who were enslaved and suffered during European maritime expansion and colonisation.



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The installation will be activated by two live performances on the **13 and 14 October**, designed and directed by the artist, with musical production by award-winning writer and musician **Kalaf Epalanga**. Through live music, song, and dance, an ensemble of different generations of artists of African descent act as central interpreters of the work, both acknowledging the memories of the past and looking toward the future. The hour-long performance encompasses movement, poetry and songs of lamentation, with the ensemble of performers becoming the voice, body and storyteller of forgotten histories.

### **EVENTS**

On **Wednesday 19 October** Somerset House presents its third **Morgan Stanley Lates at Somerset House with The Courtauld** to mark *O Barco/The Boat*'s closing. Visitors to the evening will receive after-hours access to Somerset House, including **Serafine1369's** *We can no longer deny ourselves* and Somerset House's new commission sponsored by *Morgan Stanley* from interdisciplinary artist **Amba Sayal-Bennett** as well as *The Courtauld Gallery*, with free events and activities taking place drawing inspiration from the themes of the installation.

*Kindly supported by Goodman Gallery*

*With additional support from Lonti Ebers and Mercedes Vilardell*

*O Barco / The Boat was commissioned by BoCA - Biennial of Contemporary Arts, Lisbon, and co-produced with MAAT Lisbon and Kunsthalle Baden Baden*

### **NOTES TO EDITORS**

#### **ABOUT GRADA KILOMBA**

Grada Kilomba is a Portuguese Berlin-based transdisciplinary artist whose work draws on memory, trauma, gender and postcolonialism, interrogating concepts of knowledge, power and violence. After studying Freudian Psychoanalysis at the Lisbon Institute of Applied Psychology she worked with war survivors from Angola and Mozambique to treat post-traumatic stress disorder. In addition, she holds a distinguished Doctorate in Philosophy from the Freie Universität Berlin and has lectured at several other universities internationally. Originally a writer before expanding into other mediums, she is the author of the acclaimed **'Plantation Memories'** a compilation of episodes of everyday racism written in the form of short psychoanalytical stories, that has been translated into several languages. Her work continues to give body, voice and form to her own critical writings, utilizing performance, staged reading, video, photography and installation for her unique practice of storytelling.

#### **ABOUT SOMERSET HOUSE**

Somerset House is London's working arts centre and home to the UK's largest creative community. Built on historic foundations, we are situated in the very heart of the capital.



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Dedicated to backing progress, championing openness, nurturing creativity and empowering ideas, our cultural programme is ambitious in scope. We insist on relevance, but aren't afraid of irreverence, and are as keen on entertainment as enrichment. We embrace the biggest issues of our times and are committed to oxygenating new work by emerging artists. Where else can you spend an hour ice-skating while listening to a specially commissioned sound piece by a cutting-edge artist? It is this creative tension—the way we harness our heritage, put the too-often overlooked on our central stage and use our neo-classical backdrop to showcase ground-breaking contemporary culture—that inspires our programme. Old and new, history and disruption, art and entertainment, high-tech and homemade, combined with the fact that we are home to a constantly shape-shifting working creative community: this is our point of difference. It is what we are proud of. And it is what makes the experience of visiting or working in Somerset House inspiring and energizing, urgent and exciting.

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

With annual editions in London, Marrakech, New York, and Paris, 1-54 is the leading international art fair dedicated to contemporary art from Africa and its diaspora. Drawing reference to the 54 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 2022 will mark the fair's 10th anniversary celebrations in London with its flagship fair at Somerset House, London.

In partnership with **Christie's**, *1-54 London* will host an international line-up of galleries from across Africa and Europe, with works by established and emerging artists on view.

The fair will be accompanied by *1-54 Forum*, a multi-disciplinary programme of talks, screenings, performances, workshops, and readings, bringing together diverse perspectives from a group of thought leaders engaged in the African contemporary art scene.

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