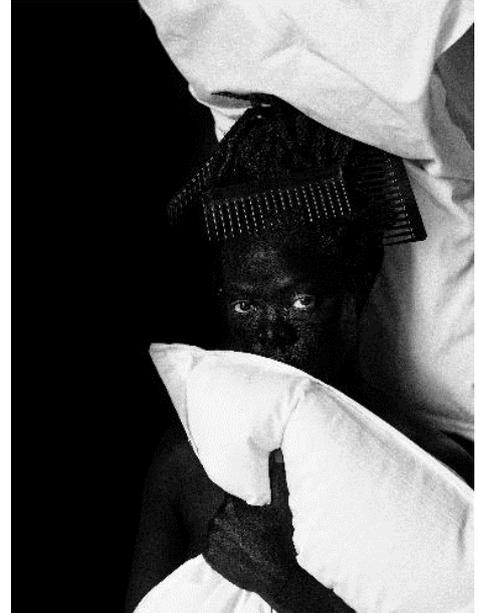


# FROM THE ARCHIVES

## ZANELE MUHOLI

Text by Dr. Renate Wiehager

The Mercedes-Benz Art Collection is among the world's most important corporate art collections. At regular intervals, Director Dr. Renate Wiehager presents highlights from its multifaceted archives. This time: Zanele Muholi, whose work looks at the lives of members of the Black LGBTQIA+ community in South Africa.



Zanele Muholi, *Sine II, Sheraton Hotel, Brooklyn, 2019* © Zanele Muholi, Courtesy Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town/Johannesburg.

Photography as a means of rendering political and cultural contexts visible—this is how Zanele Muholi's artistic practice can be summarized. Of particular importance are her photographs, unique in their power and immediacy, of people from the Black South African LGBTQIA+ community. Social injustices that Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual people face on a daily basis are captured by Muholi from a subjective perspective, building relationships with the people depicted.

The artist's co-founding of the Forum for the Empowerment of Women in 2002 illustrates the overarching goal that motivates Muholi's work: "I embarked on a journey of visual activism to ensure that there is Black lesbian and trans visibility, to showcase our existence and resistance in this democratic society, to present a positive image of Black lesbians."

In a recent series of photographs, which includes "Gamalakhe I" and "Sine II," self-portraiture is central: these works resolutely reflect on the genre itself and their own place in it. Art historical allusions appear again and again, as, for example, in "Gamalakhe I," which modifies Antoine Watteau's 1718–19 clown portrait "Pierrot," translating an androgynous figure from classical painting into a depiction of a non-binary person of our time. The photograph "Sine II, Sheraton Hotel, Brooklyn" may at first seem playful in its staging, but the gaze of the person in the photograph, fixed directly at the viewer, simultaneously exudes a deep seriousness.

The diverse collection of South African art in the Mercedes-Benz Art Collection, including three important photographs by Zanele Muholi, can be traced back to the Mercedes-Benz Award for South African Art and Culture. From 2001 until 2011, the award provided an international platform for numerous artists and cultural figures from South Africa.

Learn more about the Mercedes-Benz Art Collection and current exhibitions at: [mercedes-benz.art](https://www.mercedes-benz.art)