4th Floor

Lubaina Himid Work from Underneath

A pioneer of the British Black Arts Movement of the 1980s and '90s, Turner Prize-winning artist Lubaina Himid (b. 1954, Zanzibar, Tanzania) has long championed marginalized histories. Throughout her over thirty-year career, Himid has created works in drawing, painting, sculpture, and textile that have critiqued the consequences of colonialism and questioned the invisibility of people of color in art as well as the media. While larger historical narratives are often the driving force behind her images and installations, Himid's works beckon the viewer with their attention to the unmonumental details of daily life. In many works, the presence of language and poetry—sometimes borrowed from writers such as Audre Lorde, Essex Hemphill, or James Baldwin—punctuate

installation that evokes a phantom shipyard or a ship caught mysteriously in the building's architecture. Adorned with cowry shells, a common form of currency in the transatlantic slave trade, the work speaks to the often invisible legacies of colonial exploitation that can remain inscribed in architecture or other physical spaces. In two large canvases, Six Tailors (2019) and *Three Architects* (2019), Himid juxtaposes clothing and architecture in scenes depicting male and female figures—women working industriously to design places of refuge and men gathered closely as they fashion garments to shelter the body. The artist's smaller-scale paintings, which share the title Metal Handkerchief (all 2019), depict tools and hardware such as pulleys, chisels, ladders, and hinges. These works draw from the style of her "kanga paintings," which are inspired by the designs of East African textiles, but play on the poetics of health and safety manuals, offering instructions for survival. In the gallery's rear stairwell and window bay, an audio composition featuring Himid's spoken ruminations amid a soundscape of tools joins the other works on view, collectively inviting visitors to reflect on creative action as a means of escape.

the silence of her images with commands, instructions, and utterances that are at once stark and tender. While Himid's practice is grounded in painting, she has also referred to herself as "a political strategist who uses a visual language to encourage conversation, argument, and change."

Himid's New Museum exhibition "Work from Underneath" debuts an entirely new body of work in sculpture, painting, and sound. The exhibition's title borrows from the dictums of health and safety manuals but doubles as a subversive proclamation. The works on view examine how language and architecture inform a sense of both danger and safety, fragility and stability. Comprising thirty-two painted wooden planks that lean against the wall at incremental angles, the show's

This exhibition is curated by Natalie Bell, Associate Curator.

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Listen to an audio guide for this exhibition in the Gesso Experiences app, downloadable on your iOS device from the App Store.

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