



Zanele Muholi, *Bester II*, Paris, 2014. © Zanele Muholi. Courtesy of the artist, Yancey Richardson Gallery, New York and Stevenson, Cape Town/Johannesburg

## **ZANELE MUHOLI: PERSONAE**

NATIONAL UNDERGROUND RAILROAD FREEDOM CENTER  
October 1, 2016–January 23, 2017

## ZANELE MUHOLI: PERSONAE

### FACES AND PHASES



Zanele Muholi, Vredehoek, Cape Town, 2011. Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches

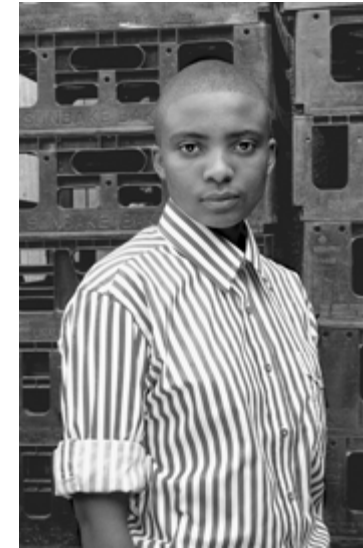
South African artist Zanele Muholi (b. 1972) was an activist before she became a photographer. In 2002, she co-founded the Forum for Empowerment of Women (FEW) and, in 2009, Inkanyiso (which means, “the one who brings to light”), a media collective devoted to confronting discrimination by documenting black queer life. Muholi describes her artistic work as “visual activism.”

Although South Africa has one of the most progressive constitutions in the world—being among the first countries to legalize same-sex marriage, in 2005—hate crimes against homosexuals are widespread. Black lesbians and transgender men are particularly vulnerable. It is estimated that each year in South Africa, 500 lesbians are victims of violence and “corrective” rape, a form of sexual assault intended to “fix” them for their nonconforming sexuality. While the South African constitution prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation, South Africa presently has no legislation offering retribution for such crimes.

Muholi’s series *Faces and Phases* began in 2006, when the artist photographed a 25-year old friend named Busi Sigasa, a poet and activist. Sigasa had been subjected to “corrective rape” and, as a result, was infected with HIV; she died within a year. Muholi’s portrait of Sigasa became the conscious starting point

of a series that both “mourns and celebrates”: it is a collective portrait of resistance, documenting the pain and losses suffered by members of the LGBTI communities (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex) while also serving as, in the artist’s words, a positive record of “these beautiful beings.” Participants’ visibility both in the portraits and on the streets of their communities is itself an act of political activism. Muholi explains, “As black lesbian women and gay men today we are resisting homophobia...simply by living our lives. We put ourselves at risk in the townships by coming out and being seen, but we refuse to comply and to deny our own existence.”

“Faces” refers to the individual participants, many of whom have been photographed repeatedly over the past ten years. “Phases” acknowledges the transitions occurring both in society and in the evolving identities of participants over time. While phases might be seen to carry negative connotations, as in “fashionable” or “just a phase,” in Muholi’s use, the word acknowledges the evolving and multi-faceted nature of identity, and self-invention as a willful act of defiance and creative freedom.



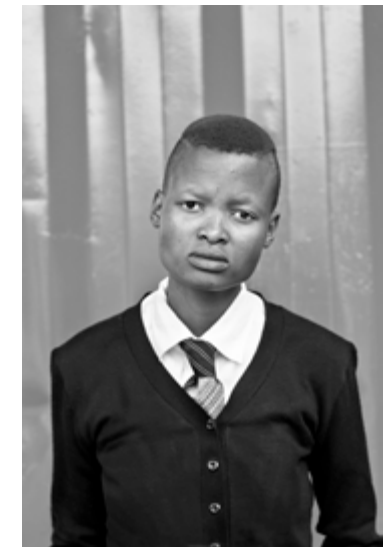
Lerato Dumse, KwaThema, Springs, Johannesburg, 2010  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



Lerato Dumse, Parktown, Johannesburg, 2013  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



Vuyelwa Vuvu Makubetse, Daveyton, Johannesburg, 2011  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



Vuyelwa Makubetse, KwaThema Community Hall, Springs, Johannesburg, 2011  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Xana Nyilenda, Newtown, Johannesburg, 2011*  
Gelatin silver print  
32 x 24 inches



*Xana Nyilenda, Los Angeles, 2013*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Tumi Nkopane, KwaThema, Johannesburg, 2010*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Tumi Nkopane, KwaThema, Johannesburg, 2013*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Nhlanhla Esther Mofokeng, Thokoza, Johannesburg, 2010*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Nhlanhla Mofokeng, Katlehong, Johannesburg, 2012*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Charmain Carrol, Parktown, Johannesburg, 2013*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Charmain Carrol, 2014*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches





*Nosizwe Cekiso, Gugulethu, Cape Town, 2008*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Skye Chirape, Brighton, United Kingdom, 2010*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Bathini Dambuza, Tembisa, Johannesburg, 2013*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



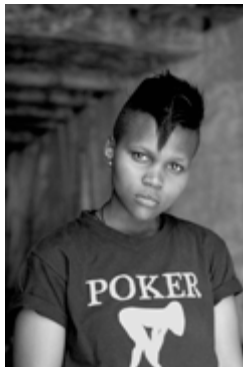
*Akhona Hentili, Makhaza, Khayelitsha, Cape Town, 2011*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Des're Higa, Makhaza, Khayelitsha Cape Town, 2010*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Kasha N Jacqueline, Toronto, 2009*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Ziyanda Daniel, Buitenkant Street, Gardens, Cape Town, 2011*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Nokuthula Dhladhla, Berea, Johannesburg, 2007*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Thembela Dick, Vredehoek, Cape Town, 2012*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



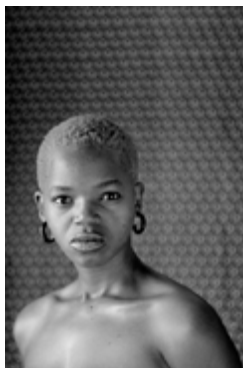
*Anele 'Anza' Khaba, KwaThema Community Hall, Springs, Johannesburg, 2011*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*TK Thembi Khumalo, BB Section, Umlazi Township, Durban, 2012*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



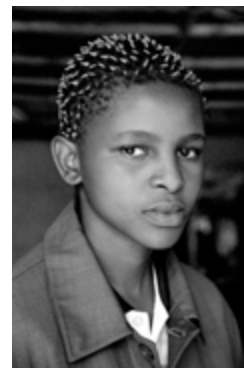
*Siphosethemba Koli, Parktown, Johannesburg, 2013*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Pam Dlungwana, Vredehoek, Cape Town, 2011*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Tash Dowell, Harare, Zimbabwe, 2011*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Zukiswa Gaca, Makhaza, Khayelitsha, Cape Town, 2010*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Zizima Kom, Embekweni, Paarl, Cape Town, 2011*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Siphokazi Kula, Embekweni, Paarl, Cape Town, 2011*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Ayanda Magoloza, Kwanlele South, Katlehong, Johannesburg, 2012*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Ayanda Magoloza, Thokoza, Johannesburg, 2013*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Amanda Mahlaba, Mt. Moriah, Edgcombe, Durban, 2012*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Refilwe Mahlaba, Thokoza, Johannesburg, 2010*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Collen Mfazwe, August House, Johannesburg, 2012*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Ntobza Mkhwanazi, BB Section, Umlazi Township, Durban, 2012*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Skipper Mogapi, Gaborone, Botswana, 2010*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Puleng Mahlati, Embekweni, Paarl, 2009*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Pearl Mali, Makhaza, Khayelitsha, 2011*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Dee Mashoko, Harare, Zimbabwe, 2011*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



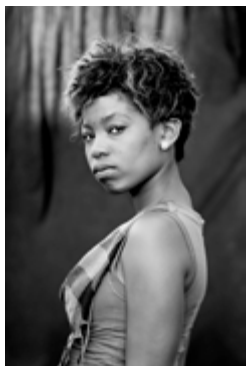
*Lynette Mokhooa, KwaThema Community Hall, Springs, Johannesburg, 2011*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Thekwane Bong'i Mpisholo, Women's Gaol, Constitution Hill, Braamfontein, Johannesburg, 2013*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Thobe Mpulo, Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu Natal, 2012*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Thobeka Mavundla, Kwanele South, Katlehong, Johannesburg, 2012*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Vuvu Mdaka, Nyanga East, Cape Town, 2011*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



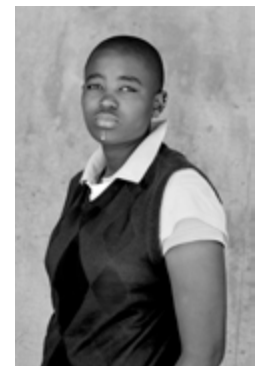
*Nontuthuzelo Mduba, Daveyton, Johannesburg, 2013*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Ayanda Mqakayi, Nyanga East, Cape Town, 2011*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Babalwa Nani, Cape Town Station, Cape Town, 2011*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Makhethi Sebenzile Ndaba, Constitution Hill, Johannesburg, 2010*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches

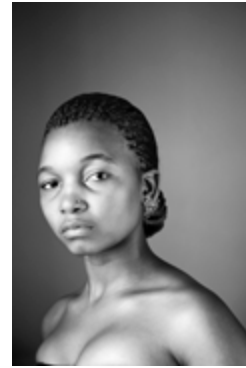




*Shirley Ndaba, Braamfontein, Johannesburg, 2010*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Mshini K. Ndzimande, Vosloorus, Johannesburg, 2011*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Lithakazi Nomngongo, Vredehoek, Cape Town, 2012*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Anele Sibamba, Gugulethu, Cape Town, 2008*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Anele Sibamba, Nyanga East, Cape Town, 2011*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



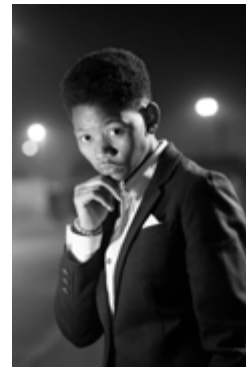
*Bakhambile Skhosana, Natalspruit, 2010*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Lebo Ntladi, Newtown, Johannesburg, 2011*  
Gelatin silver print  
30 x 19¾ inches



*Nana Nxumalo, Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu Natal, 2012*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Lebo Leptie Phume, Daveyton, Johannesburg, 2013*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Nosipho Solundwana, Parktown, Johannesburg, 2007*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Lumka Stemela, Nyanga East, Cape Town, 2011*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Lesego Thwale, Constitution Hill, Braamfontein, Johannesburg, 2012*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Lebo Leptie Phume*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Refiloe Pitso, Daveyton, Johannesburg, 2014*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Smanga Shangesm, Alexandra, Johannesburg, 2014*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Tinashe Wakapila, Harare, Zimbabwe, 2011*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Tinashe Wakapila, 2015*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches



*Londeka Xulu, Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu Natal, 2012*  
Gelatin silver print  
34 x 24 inches

# ZANELE MUHOLI: PERSONAE

## SOMNYAMA NGONYAMA

Meaning “Hail the dark lioness” in Zulu, *Somnyama Ngonyama* is the title of a series of self-portraits Muholi began in 2015. Muholi makes startling use of common objects—rugs, handbags, curtains—which she wears and transforms in order to conjure different ethnographic stereotypes of black Africans: as domestic workers, miners, or desirable yet taboo exotic others. The series is also deeply personal, reflecting Muholi’s exploration of her own complex identity, formed by her relationships with family members and friendships, for whom many of the photographs are titled; Muholi’s mother, Bester, was a domestic worker. On the importance of the self-portraits to her, Muholi says, “We get caught up in other people’s worlds, and you never ask yourself how you became.”

A feature of the Somnyama portraits is Muholi’s intentional darkening or lightening of her own skin tones, achieved through photographic techniques, such as lighting and contrast filters. Playing with cultural attitudes toward skin color, Muholi calls into question the widespread use of skin-lightening products sold in Africa, which exploit common assumptions about light skin and beauty. By enhancing the blackness of her own skin, Muholi asserts a fierce pride in her given appearance—“hail the dark lioness.”



*Bester IV, Mayotte* 2015  
Gelatin silver print  
31¼ x 22½ inches  
Collection of Deborah Raisel



*Somnyama IV, Oslo*, 2015  
Gelatin silver print  
39 x 32½ inches  
Collection of Nion McEvoy



*Thando II Nuoro, Sardinia, Italy*, 2015  
Gelatin silver print  
34½ x 20¾ inches  
Courtesy of the artist, Yancey Richardson Gallery,  
New York and Stevenson, Cape Town/Johannesburg



*Somnyama I, Paris, France*, 2014  
Gelatin silver print  
31½ x 20¾ inches  
Collection of Nion McEvoy



*Somnyama III, Paris*, 2014  
Gelatin silver print  
31½ x 23½ inches  
Collection of Colin Hutzler



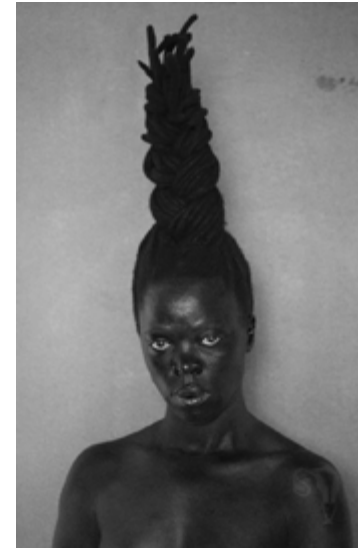
*Vukani I (Paris)*, 2014  
Gelatin silver print  
31½ x 20 inches  
Joseph M. Cohen Family Collection



*Bester I, Mayotte, 2015*  
Gelatin silver print  
27¼ x 20 inches  
Collection of Marla Helene



*Bester II, Paris, 2014*  
Gelatin silver print  
31½ x 21 inches  
Collection of Rasika and Girish Reddy



*Zibuyile, Parktown, 2015*  
Gelatin silver print  
19½ x 12¼ inches  
Joseph M. Cohen Family Collection



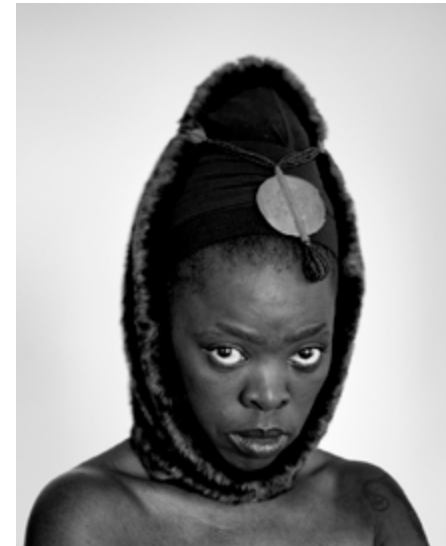
*Ntombi I, Paris, 2014*  
Gelatin silver print  
39¾ x 32¼ inches  
Courtesy of the artist, Yancey Richardson Gallery,  
New York and Stevenson, Cape Town/Johannesburg



*Musa, London, 2015*  
Gelatin silver print  
14 x 12 inches  
Courtesy of the artist, Yancey Richardson Gallery,  
New York and Stevenson, Cape Town/Johannesburg



*Bona, Charlottesville, 2015*  
Wall graphic  
59 x 93¼ inches  
Courtesy of the artist, Yancey Richardson Gallery,  
New York and Stevenson, Cape Town/Johannesburg



*Ntombi II, Paris, 2014*  
Gelatin silver print  
39¾ x 32¼ inches  
Courtesy of the artist, Yancey Richardson Gallery,  
New York and Stevenson, Cape Town/Johannesburg



*Thembeke I, Upstate New York, 2015*  
Gelatin silver print  
23½ x 19¼ inches  
Courtesy of the artist, Yancey Richardson Gallery,  
New York and Stevenson, Cape Town/Johannesburg



FOTOFOCUS BIENNIAL  
PHOTOGRAPHY,  
THE UN-  
DOCUMENT  
OCTOBER  
2016

**ZANELE MUHOLI: PERSONAE**

CURATED BY FOTOFOCUS

Kevin Moore, Artistic Director and Curator

The FotoFocus Biennial 2016, themed *Photography, the Undocument*, features over 60 exhibitions at Participating Venues and eight exhibitions curated by FotoFocus Artistic Director and Curator Kevin Moore. These eight exhibitions bear diverse and nuanced, yet interconnected, relationships to the theme, which seeks to break apart assumptions about photography's documentary character by emphasizing the medium's natural tendency to distort, edit, and reshape the visible world.

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