PRESS RELEASE

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Moving in Harmony

Dance to the Rhythm of My Soul

Nairobi National Museum

5 - 31 August

London, 27 June 2024: Celebrating 60 years of diplomatic relations between South Korea and Kenya, the eagerly awaited exhibition Dance to the Rhythm of My Soul arrives at the Nairobi National Museum this August for a dazzling month-long run.

Central to the exhibition is 'Nowness,' exploring contemporary identity from a female perspective. Dance to the Rhythm of My Soul dives into our sense of self through the intricate lens of memory, weaving together diverse yet shared cultural experiences across Asia and Africa.

Kenya and Korea share a vibrant history rooted in rich heritage and proud national identities - but both nations also overcame colonization; Kenya by the British and Korea

by the Japanese - who even banned the Korean language. Despite these challenges, their cultural heritages have thrived and continue to blaze their own paths.

For the first time, this exhibition unites three brilliant, internationally acclaimed artists - Oh Myung Hee, Prina Shah, and Nadia Wamunyu - whose works transcend cultural and temporal boundaries, offering profound insights into identity shaped by personal, collective, and cultural memory.

The exhibition runs from 5th to 31st August, with a VIP opening reception on the 6th of August opened by Korean ambassador HE Sung-jun Yeo.

The Artists

Oh Myung Hee is renowned for her mastery of mother-of-pearl, acrylic on canvas, and Geonchil - a traditional Korean lacquering technique embodying Korean cultural heritage, blending beauty, functionality, and profound respect for nature and craftsmanship. However, for her Venice exhibition, she began incorporating family photos, seamlessly merging traditional techniques with contemporary materials, themes, and concerns to craft new narratives.



Giseang, Oh Myung Hee

Her work on show features two cycles, each exploring significant themes in Korean women's history. The first cycle focuses on Korean Giseang (comfort) women, who were highly trained artists in music, conversation, and poetry, akin to Japanese geishas (distinct from the imperial era 'sex' slaves). Revered as fashion icons and intellectuals, these women graced royal courts and scholar-officials' homes. Her work celebrates their femininity, freedom, and desire, boldly challenging societal norms with materials

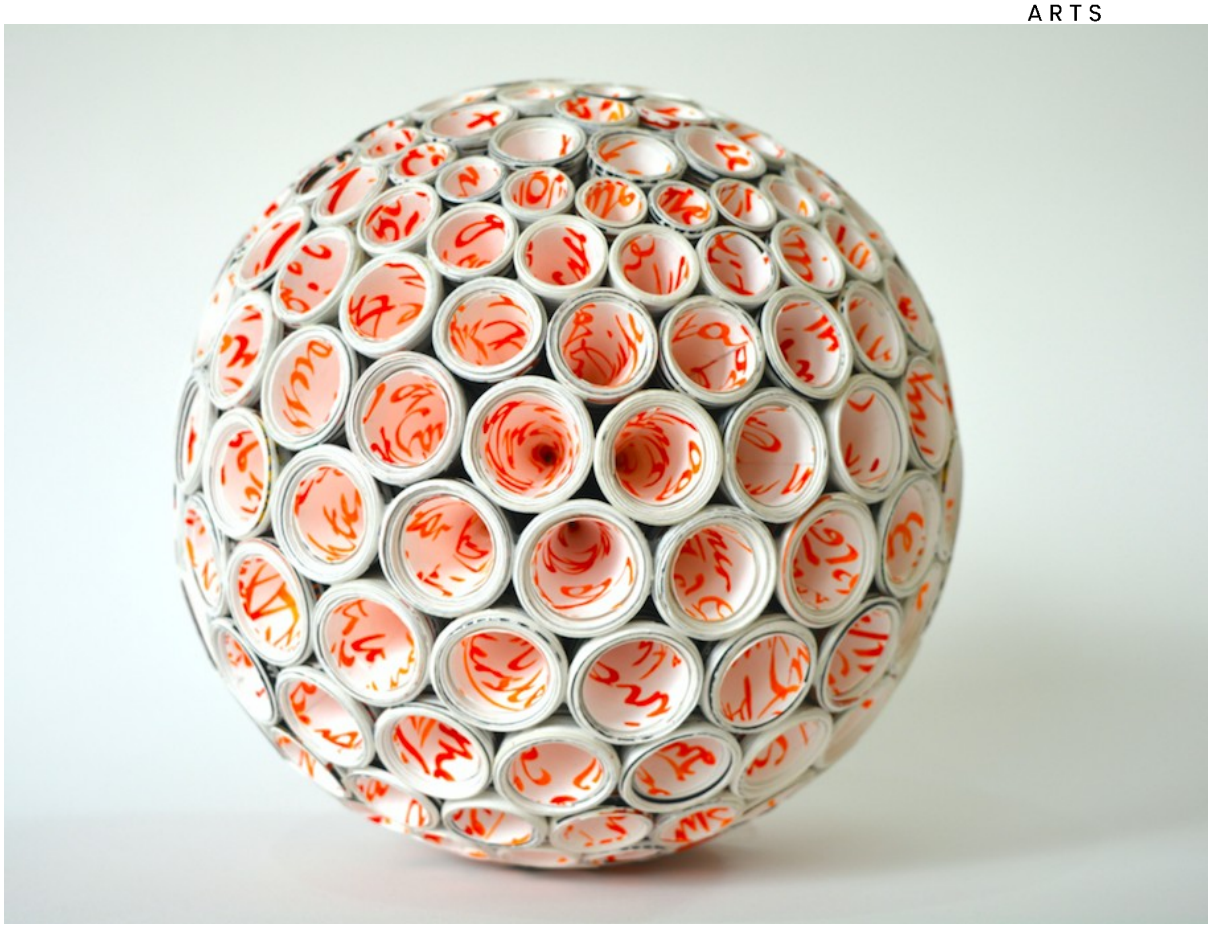
such as mother-of-pearl, eggshell, and Geonchil lacquer. Her art salutes the Giseang's audacity, courage, and trailblazing spirit in the fight for Korean women's emancipation.

The second cycle, "Ganggangsullae" or "Moondance," captures the exhilarating harvest-time performance where women sang and danced all night, expressing their innermost thoughts without societal judgment. Traditionally, in Korea's male-dominated society, women were restricted from singing loudly or going out at night. But during the Chuseok festival, they revelled in Ganggangsullae, seizing a rare chance to break free and express themselves with abandon.



Ganggangsulae, Singing and Dancing in the Moonlight, Oh Myung Hee

Oh Myung Hee's art, despite confronting the pain and conflict of history, carries an enduring message of hope, celebrating the indomitable spirit of women who carved out their own paths.



Prina Shah

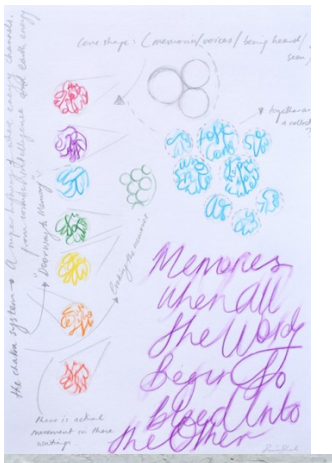
Doorway to memory

Prina Shah presents a powerful site-specific installation comprising seven vibrant sculptural balls, each symbolizing a chakra and reflecting her rich Asian heritage. Adorned with handwritten ink messages, these intricate creations resonate with memories, serving as the ‘voice’ that energizes each chakra. A mirrored door stands before the balls, inviting viewers to engage in deep self-reflection and encouraging them to explore their own memories and identities.

Cultural identity is at the heart of Shah’s art, resonating with the experiences, beliefs, and traditions of her community. In *Doorway to Memory*, she transcends personal ego, fostering a profound connection with others: a journey toward self-transcendence and an epiphany of the Other.

Rooted in meditation and her life experiences, including the 1982 Kenyan coup attempt, Shah’s art delves into human evolution and consciousness. She celebrates the importance of cultural connections and personal creativity, emphasizing spiritual investigation and self-exploration.

Shah works on memory at an energy level. Specifically, she addresses this through the yogic tradition of energy chakras. Shah believes, as do the Yogic traditions, that the energy we hold and develop carries memory. This memory is inherited from our ancestors and events from the past that have shaped us, affecting us from the inside on an energy level. By turning inwards and working through each chakra, which represents a different aspect of energy, Shah explores these memories.









Body Double, Nadia Wamunya

Body of Evidence

Nadia Wamunyu lives and works in Nairobi, with her art being shown throughout the African continent and worldwide. She experienced a partial loss of hearing at the age of five and learned from an early age to communicate through her work: 'I realised I could record my memories, experiences, tastes and feelings through drawing,' she says, 'a relief from the stress of vocal communication that I struggle with.'

Inspired by her tutor Patrick Mubaki, her expansive works include themes of women's rights, feminism, the body, identity, and memories. Her collections celebrate black women, depicted as powerful gymnasts exuding pride, potential, and character - and in continuous motion, symbolizing time's passage, and the relentless quest for self-discovery. Through coffee and ink stains, she highlights the gymnasts' stark white leotards, challenging historical misrepresentations of African women and challenging the prejudices they endure. By confronting traditional portrayals of black female bodies, Wamunyu addresses the ongoing battle against marginalization, objectification, fetishization, and erasure.


Ladies Earth, Nadia Wamunyu

By focusing on the body's symbolism rather than facial features, Wamunyu initiates a dialogue on the representation of black female bodies, probing questions about identity and perception, such as, "What is the relationship between my body and my work?" and "How does it influence my self-perception and others' perceptions of me and my art?"

Diversity and Direction

Challenging traditional gender dynamics, Dance to the Rhythm of My Soul features three groundbreaking female artists from diverse cultural backgrounds exploring how memory impacts identity. Through the artists' unique journeys, the bonds between Korea and Kenya are emphasised.

The exhibition is curated by Metamorphosis Art Projects, London, founded by Tatiana Palinkasev and Eva McGaw. Renowned for their innovative approach and commitment to highlighting the relevant stories of our times, MAP has earned international acclaim

for showcasing artists from around the world, pushing the boundaries of contemporary art. Sending a powerful message about the changing tides in the global art scene, this exhibition not only supports these artists' careers but also serves as an inspiration for young female artists and curators globally.

Engagement

A series of workshops and round-table discussions will accompany the exhibition, held in collaboration with Kenyatta University of Nairobi and the University of Seoul. These sessions are designed to deepen the engagement with the exhibition's themes and foster dialogue among artists, scholars, and the community.

This will also be an important platform for the artists, curators, and the students to talk about the theme of contemporary identities through the prism of memory, and approach as diverse creative professionals.

A comprehensive catalogue, featuring essays and studies from curators and art critics, will provide insight into the artworks, practices, contemporary East African art scene and the artists themselves.

International Scope

Following its premiere in Nairobi, the exhibition aims to travel to Seoul, London, Amsterdam, the Middle East, together with other significant art centres. The aim is to incorporate local artists at each venue, fostering an exchange of ideas and perspectives to highlight the importance of personal memory and cultural identity in contemporary art worldwide.

- ENDS -

Note to Editors

Venue:	Nairobi National Museum, Museum Hill, Westlands Road Nairobi, Kenya
Dates:	August 5th – August 31st, 2024
VIP Opening Reception:	August 6th, 2024

For more information, interview requests and images, please contact:

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Oh Myung Hee
Award-winning artist Oh Myung Hee is a graduate of Sejong University and an Honorary Professor of College of Art & Design, at Suwon University, South Korea. She has exhibited extensively, including a solo exhibition at London's Saatchi Gallery, The Garrison Chapel, London, the Kaze Gallery, Osaka, the Galerie Bhak, (Bhak Young- Duk), in Seoul, and at the Espace Miromesnil, in Paris.

Nadia Wamunyu
Contemporary visual artist and gallerist Wamunyu, has exhibited locally and internationally, including Alliance Français, Kuona Artists Collective, the US Embassy, British Council, Baitil Aman in Shela, Nairobi Museum, Polka Dot Art Gallery, Absa Gallery in South Africa, and Kerry Packer Civic Gallery in South Australia. Wamunyu won the Manjano Art Competition and Exhibition in 2013 and third prize in the artist category in 2020.

Prina Shah
The Kenyan born contemporary artist enjoys a creative practice spanning sculpture, painting, and glasswork. Shah's work has been included in numerous national and international exhibitions and has been acquired by the permanent collections of Finland's Poikilo Kouvola Art Museum and the I&M Bank Collective in Kenya, as well as numerous private collections.

Metamorphosis Art Projects
MAP produces and curates exceptional art exhibitions and represents visual artists globally. They collaborate with artists and institutions to create new concepts, artistic paths, and foster cross-cultural dialogues. Through creative curation, MAP tells contemporary stories, drawing from the past, influencing the present, and shaping the future, with a commitment to making a positive impact on the world.

Additional Notes:
Recent research has found a far earlier link between the two countries, dating back to 1000AD, when traders from Asia visited the Swahili coast, bringing their culture and religion with them. Rather than one group dominating, there was a blending, with Islam becoming the second largest faith (after Christianity) and artistic influence with the building of mosques and monuments being shared.