

Helen Cammock, Turner Prize Nominee and Winner of the Max Mara Art Prize for Women, premieres new work at Whitechapel Gallery

Che si può fare

Max Mara Art Prize for Women: Helen Cammock

25 June – 1 September 2019

#MaxMaraArtPrize #HelenCammock

Interweaving women's stories of loss and resilience with seventeenth century Baroque music by female composers, a new body of work from the seventh winner of the Max Mara Art Prize for Women **Helen Cammock** (b. 1970, UK) premieres at Whitechapel Gallery in June. Cammock presents a film, a series of vinyl cut prints and a screen-printed frieze exploring the idea of lament in women's lives across histories and geographies.

The exhibition is the result of a bespoke six-month Italian residency, organised by Max Mara, the Whitechapel Gallery and Collezione Maramotti, undertaken by Cammock in 2018 on receipt of the prestigious biannual prize. Travelling from Bologna to Florence, Venice, Rome, Palermo and Reggio Emilia, she set out to explore the expression of lament and uncover hidden female voices. Across the country historians, musicians, artists and singers opened their archives and shared their stories and research.

Featuring interviews with the diverse women Cammock met on her travels including social activists, migrants, refugees, a member of a religious order, a Catholic nun and women who fought the dictatorship, the split-screen film at the heart of the exhibition memorialises the power of women's voices from the Baroque period to Italy today. Their testimonies are layered with music and footage shot across Italy in a complex oral and visual collage. Three colour saturated prints depict music and voice through line drawing and a 6 meter long hand painted frieze contains words and images drawn from the women Cammock encountered in Italy.

Che si può fare (What can be done) takes its title from a 1664 pre-opera lament by Italian composer **Barbara Strozzi** (1619-1677). Cammock took classical singing lessons to learn the aria and rehearsed its melody throughout the residency. The music recurs in the new video work and as a live performance. Twice during the exhibition run Cammock will perform Strozzi's music with a jazz trumpeter, reviving her legacy through her own voice. The music of fellow Italian composer Francesca Caccini (1587-1641) is incorporated into the performance as a soundtrack to an accompanying movement piece. Both Strozzi and Caccini were celebrated in their day but have since fallen into obscurity with their compositions only now being acknowledged and performed again.

A visual poet whose drawings, prints, photographs and films juxtapose word and image, Cammock's multimedia practice embraces text, photography, video, song, performance and printmaking, and is motivated by her commitment to questioning mainstream historical narratives around blackness, womanhood, wealth, power, poverty and vulnerability. Mining her own biography in addition to histories of oppression and resistance, and incorporating influences from jazz, blues, poetry and dance, as well as the words of other writers – including James Baldwin, Maya Angelou and Audre Lorde –

Cammock excavates lost, unheard or buried voices. For Cammock, music – from Nina Simone and Alice Coltrane to seventeenth-century Italian pre-opera – is able to further this endeavor to complicate the concept of history.

The Max Mara Art Prize for Women is a collaboration between Whitechapel Gallery, Max Mara and Collezione Maramotti and has been awarded in alternate years since 2005 to support UK-based female artists who have not previously had a solo survey exhibition. Known for launching the careers of artists, it is the only visual art prize of its kind in the UK. The previous winners of the prize are Emma Hart, Corin Sworn, Laure Prouvost, Andrea Büttner, Hannah Rickards and Margaret Salmon.

The judging panel for the seventh Max Mara Art Prize for Women was chaired by Iwona Blazwick OBE, Director of the Whitechapel Gallery, and joined by gallerist Vanessa Carlos, Carlos/Ishikawa, London; artist and previous recipient of the prize Laure Prouvost; collector Marcelle Joseph and art critic Rachel Spence.

Following its presentation at Whitechapel Gallery, *Che si può fare* will travel to Collezione Maramotti in Reggio Emilia, Italy (13 October 2019 – February 2020).

Notes to Editors

- The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated publication with contributions from Whitechapel Curator Laura Smith, Guest Curator Bina Von Stauffenberg, independent writer and curator Taylor Le Melle and Assistant Professor of History of Art and African American Studies at Yale University Rizvana Bradley.
- The exhibition is curated by Laura Smith, Curator, Whitechapel Gallery, Wells F. Smith, Assistant Curator Special Projects, and Candy Stobbs, Assistant Curator, Whitechapel Gallery
- The Max Mara Art Prize for Women in collaboration with the Whitechapel Gallery is a biannual award established in 2005. It is the only visual art prize for women in the UK and aims to promote and nurture female artists, enabling them to develop their potential with the gift of time and space. The winner is awarded a six month Italian residency tailored to fit the artist and their winning proposal for the Prize. During the residency which is organised by Max Mara and the Whitechapel Gallery, the artist has the opportunity to realise an ambitious new project which is presented in major solo exhibitions at the Whitechapel Gallery in London and Collezione Maramotti in Reggio Emilia, Italy. The prize is open to women artists living and working in the United Kingdom who have not previously had a major solo survey exhibition. The partners of the prize are Max Mara, Whitechapel Gallery and Collezione Maramotti who collaborate on each phase of the prize. Each year a jury chaired by Whitechapel Gallery Director Iwona Blazwick and including a gallerist, critic, artist and collector agree a shortlist of five artists before the winner is decided based on a winning proposal. The Max Mara Art Prize for Women was awarded the British Council Arts & Business International Award in 2007 and has enabled winning artists to take major steps in their careers.
- Previous winners of the Max Mara Art Prize for Women are:
 - Emma Hart (2015 – 17) – Hart (b. 1974) created a large-scale installation titled *Mamma Mia!* Following a six month bespoke residency divided between Milan, Todi and Faenza.
 - Corin Sworn (2013-15) - Sworn (b.1976) created a work drawing from the Commedia dell'Arte improvised plays originating in 16th century Italy. Sworn was awarded the Leverhulme Prize 2015 which recognises the achievement of outstanding researchers whose work has already attracted international recognition and whose future career is exceptionally promising.
 - Laure Prouvost (2011-13) - Laure Prouvost created an ambitious new large-scale installation for her Max Mara Art Prize exhibition, for which she was awarded the Turner Prize in 2013.
 - Andrea Büttner (2009-11) – Part of Andrea Büttner's work created for her Max Mara Art Prize exhibition, *The Poverty of Riches*, and titled *Untitled (Paintings)* (2011) was included in the Whitechapel Gallery's landmark exhibition *Adventures of the Black Square* in 2015.
 - Hannah Rickards (2007-2009) - The prize enabled Hannah Rickards to realise an ambitious new work she had been researching before winning the Prize. Rickards was also awarded the Leverhulme Prize in 2015 and had a major exhibition at Modern Art Oxford in 2014.

- Margaret Salmon (2005-2007) - Margaret Salmon travelled to Italy and created a triptych of black and white films exploring themes of motherhood. She went on to exhibit at the Venice Biennale in 2007.
- The Max Mara Fashion Group was founded in 1951 by Achille Maramotti and is now run by the next generation. It is one of the largest women's ready-to-wear companies in the world, with 2600 stores in more than 100 different countries
- The Collezione Maramotti opened to the public in Reggio Emilia, Italy on 2007. It is a private collection of contemporary art with an important historical collection (1950-2000); it keeps on with new projects and commissions to international mid career and young artists. For further information, please visit www.collezioneMaramotti.org
- For over a century the Whitechapel Gallery has premiered world-class artists from modern masters to contemporaries. The Gallery is renowned for showcasing emerging and established female artists and has presented major solo exhibitions of Barbara Hepworth (1955), Eva Hesse (1979), Frida Kahlo (1982), Nan Goldin (2002), Sophie Calle (2009), Gillian Wearing (2012) and Sarah Lucas (2013). The Gallery is a touchstone for modern and contemporary art internationally, plays a central role in London's cultural landscape and is pivotal to the continued growth of the world's most vibrant contemporary art quarter.

Press Information

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