



# Presseexemplar

**Opening of ‚Faces and Phases‘ by Zanele Muholi, am Tuesday, October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012, 6.00 p.m., Seelig Kulturlounge  
Mayor Prof. Dr. Schwandner**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On the behalf of the City of Oldenburg I wholeheartedly welcome you to the opening of ‚Faces and Phases‘. A special welcome goes out to the artist herself, Zanele Muholi. I’m happy and I’m proud to have you here. And I’m not only being polite here. My enthusiasm is more than a gut feeling. There are – at least – four reasons to back this up.

First of all – Oldenburg is a city of internationality. We consider ourselves a lively and active part of the world. We keep partnerships and, even more important, friendships with people and places all over the world. Also, it’s always a pleasure for us to welcome international guests in our city and make them feel welcome here. So, please consider my words an expression of honesty.

Second – Oldenburg is a city of art. We have a large number of museums and galleries, which feature both, traditional und contemporary art. And we’re always curious for new artists, especially when they’re as talented as you are, Zanele Muholi. You’re certainly one of the finest photographers of our time. Not only artistically – which would have been reason enough to present your work. But you’re also a gay activist in South Africa – and the photography is your means of expression.

That leads me straight to the next reason for my enthusiasm: Third – Oldenburg is a city of tolerance. We have made tolerance a leitmotiv of our development strategy. We try to establish a culture of togetherness and mutuality; an atmosphere where everybody feels like home. That includes foreigners, migrants and other minorities of all kinds. And it also includes, by a large number, gays, lesbians, transsexuals and transgender. In every June we



have a huge Gay Pride Parade in Oldenburg. It's called 'Christopher Street Day' in Germany. There are thousands of participants – and even more visitors that cheer up and show their support. I think that's quite impressive for a city of our size. Still, we have a long way to go and there's much to be done. That's why I consider exhibitions like this one a gift for our city.

And fourth: I am glad to meet you again here in Oldenburg. I have had already the chance to talk to you over a cup of coffee at the opening of the documenta in Kassel and I was deeply impressed by you as an artist and by your personality.

I hope for your understanding, if I go on in German now. There are so much good things to be said about your work. It would be a shame if some of our guests wouldn't be able to understand it. But I'm sure we'll have the time for some chit-chat later on.

Ladies and Gentlemen, at openings of art exhibitions I always ask myself: What can, should or may do art for us? Those questions never grow old. In this particular case they're even more interesting. Zanele Muholi is one of South Africa's best known and most provocative artists. But not because she explores the boundaries of taste. Her work is provocative, because it's a thorn in the flesh of a latent intolerance in South Africa. Zanele Muholi combines her art with an urgent concern – and that makes it even more powerful.

The skillful combination of medium and message has made her an internationally renowned artist. She's a big name in Europe, too. At documenta(13) she was one of the highlights. I'm happy and I'm proud to present such a renowned artist in Oldenburg. Even though there are some 6,000 miles between us and her home, this exhibition fits here perfectly. It mirrors our key aspects 'tolerance' and 'internationality'. And that's just the side effects. Even more important is the art itself.

Here, in this room, it's plain to see, what art can, should or may do for us. It can give us an understanding of foreign countries and controversial topics. It should bring in new insights and perspectives, which we can argue about. And it may be emotional, insistent, or even provoking.

Let's be honest: Homosexuality – still – is far from being a matter of course: Even in Germany. We consider ourselves liberal, we even have a gay minister of foreign affairs. And,



yes, that are huge steps in the right direction. But the sublime discrimination, the whispered insults, they are still there. Even in Oldenburg.

So, what do you think, what might help best to get over these prejudices? No, it's not the theoretical discussion, as helpful as it might be. It's the real encounter, because it touches us. As far as art can substitute reality, Zanele Muholi achieves exactly that. Her photography creates closeness and conviction. You can use it to broaden your horizon. And that's what I expect from my fellow people of Oldenburg. But some people might indeed feel provoked, because the content doesn't fit into their small worlds. So did some contemptible thieves, who robbed Zanele Muholi a couple of weeks ago – luckily after those photos went into print. Maybe we can consider this a 'symbolic' incident: The pictures have been one step ahead of their enemies. Just like that, I hope tolerance will always be one step ahead of homophobia.

I hope many people take the chance to visit this exhibition. Here, right in the heart of the city, the chances are high. Especially the opening hours are unbeatable: They go on to one a.m. So there's no room left for excuses..

The answer to the question what art can, should or may do for us varies from case to case. But this exhibition gives us a glimpse of the many opportunities of international contemporary art. That makes it a benefit for our city. I want to thank all those, who made this exhibition possible. I want to thank the director of the Goethe Institute Johannesburg, Dr. Katharina von Ruckteschell – because she was the one, who gave us the hint to have a look at Zanele Muholi's work. I'd like to thank the Lake Gallery, the Seelig Kulturlounge, the Stadtmuseum Oldenburg and the Department of Cultural Affairs, and Dr. Jutta Moster-Hoss, who is going to interview Zanele Muholi right here in a couple of minutes.

My biggest thanks – of course – go out to the artist herself. Thanks a lot, Zanele Muholi, for sharing your exceptional art with us – and for your visit to Oldenburg. We really appreciate that and we hope you feel welcome here. I hope the situation in South Africa is going to become more and more open-minded and tolerant. And if that happens – you surely have contributed your part.

Thanks a lot for your attention!