

A System of Her Own



Tanatsei Gambura



Table of Contents

1. Project Title and Curatorial Narrative	2
2. Mediums of Resistance and Ritual	3
Poetry as Infrastructure	3
Voice as Presence	3
Gesture as System	3
3. Tanatsei Gambura: Poetic Resistance in Practice	5
4. Format and Exhibition Structure	6
Exhibition Overview	6
Zine Launch: Public Programme	6
Participatory Workshop: Writing as Ritual	8
5. Site and Space	9
6. Audiences and Publics	10
Audience Communities	10
Accessibility Design	11
7. Ethics and EDI Considerations	11
8. Project Timeline	12
9. Project Budget Estimate	14
10. Beyond the Exhibition: Distribution and Continuity	15
Zine Publication and Afterlife	15
Digital Archive and Public Response	16
Bibliography	17

1. Project Title and Curatorial Narrative

A System of Her Own proposes a curatorial reorientation—away from spectacle, scale, and strategic institutional critique, and toward resistance as an embodied, poetic, and autonomous gesture. In an art world increasingly saturated with curatorial frameworks, funding imperatives, and metrics of visibility, this project turns toward what lies at the margins: **systems built not for recognition but for survival, care, and meaning on one's own terms.**

The exhibition centres on **Tanatsei Gambura**, a poet, curator, and researcher whose practice actively resists normative structures of knowledge and display. Grounded in African feminist thought, epistemic decolonisation, and ritual, her work does not shout to be heard. Instead, it moves gently—through spoken word, text-based installations, and ceremonial encounters—to reclaim knowledge as something lived, remembered, and felt. Her practice is deliberately unmarketable, unmeasurable, and institutionally elusive.

Rather than confronting the system in overt protest, *A System of Her Own* presents an alternative logic of being and making. It traces the contours of refusal not through withdrawal, but through creation on different frequencies—those that institutions often cannot capture. Resistance here is not a negation but a reconfiguration: of space, of authorship, of curatorial agency.

Hosted at **Custom Lane** in Leith, a hybrid space known for its support of alternative formats, the project combines a week-long exhibition with a zine launch, bridging the practices of showing and publishing. It envisions curating not as a structure of display, but as a poetic tool—one capable of building temporary, meaningful systems outside dominant narratives.

A System of Her Own asks: How can curating make space for art that doesn't seek validation? What does it mean to care, quietly, in a system designed to reward loudness? What knowledge lives in the shadows of institutions?

2. Mediums of Resistance and Ritual

The exhibition engages with three primary mediums: **text-based installation, sound, and ritual performance**. Each of these is not simply a material choice, but a conceptual gesture that aligns with the artist's broader practice of resisting dominant knowledge systems and institutional legibility.

Poetry as Infrastructure

Text, as a central medium, becomes a site of reclaiming authorship and epistemic power. Gambura's use of poetic language in space—whether suspended, handwritten, or embedded in sculptural form—subverts the didactic authority of institutional text and instead invites embodied and intuitive reading. This aligns with feminist theorist Audre Lorde's assertion that "poetry is not a luxury," but a vital tool for survival and transformation.¹ Through this medium, knowledge is not fixed but fluid, relational, and personal.

Voice as Presence

Sound, particularly in the form of spoken word, is employed not merely as performance but as transmission. The sonic presence of Gambura's voice activates the space as a living archive, privileging orality and memory over visual documentation. This emphasis on the audible rather than the visible challenges the ocular-centricity of Western exhibition traditions.²

Gesture as System

Ritual, finally, operates as both medium and methodology. In Gambura's practice, ritual is not symbolic but constitutive—it generates meaning through repetition, gesture, and presence. By foregrounding ritual over spectacle, the project displaces curatorial time from institutional programming toward ancestral rhythms, spiritual cycles, and nonlinear experience. Here, curating becomes less about sequencing and more about holding space.

¹ Audre Lorde, "Poetry Is Not a Luxury," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984), 37.

² Tina Campt, *Listening to Images* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 8.

These mediums are not chosen for their novelty or aesthetic value, but for their capacity to carry embodied, intuitive, and decentralized knowledge. They resist objectification, market commodification, and archival permanence—thus echoing the core curatorial aim of *A System of Her Own*.

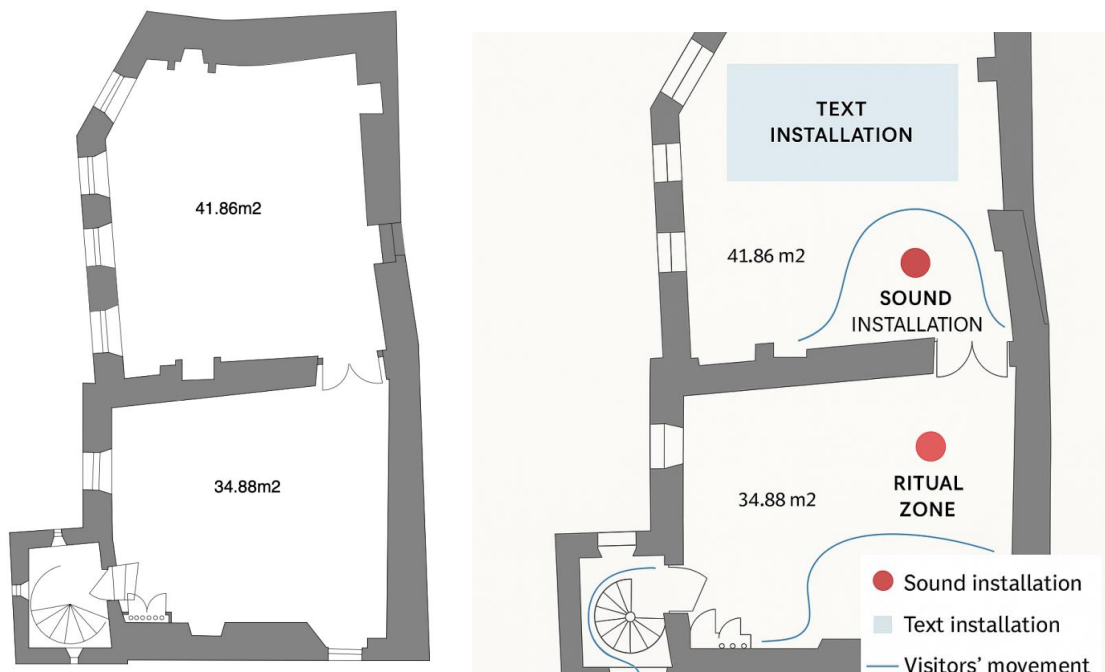


Figure 1. Floorplan of Custom Lane Studio Space, showing two adjoining rooms (41.86 m² and 34.88 m²) proposed as the site for *A System of Her Own*. The layout supports a non-linear, immersive curatorial structure. Image courtesy of Custom Lane. Accessed April 17, 2025.
<https://customlane.co/news/studio-space-available/>

Figure 2. Spatial plan of the exhibition layout within Custom Lane designed by the curator. The floor plan maps the placement of text-based installations, sound works, and the ritual zone, along with an indicative path of visitor movement.

3. Tanatsei Gambura: Poetic Resistance in Practice

Tanatsei Gambura's transdisciplinary practice explores themes of epistemic decolonisation, African feminist thought, ritual, and embodied knowledge. Her work frequently engages with alternative systems of value and meaning—prioritising poetic intuition, memory, and ancestral presence over institutional recognition or market legibility.

Gambura's projects often unfold through spoken word, text-based installation, sound works, and participatory or ritual encounters. Her approach challenges traditional notions of “artwork” as a static, object-based form and instead embraces temporality, community, and gesture. In her own words, she seeks “to think and feel with the body, to approach language as a site of power and intimacy.”³ This methodology positions her not only as an artist but as a knowledge-holder, ritualist, and space-maker.

Her 2022 installation *Hand Wash Only* exemplifies her practice. Using hand-embroidered fabric, poetic fragments, and water basins, the piece becomes a site of care, healing, and resistance. The act of washing is transformed into a ritual of memory and intergenerational dialogue, drawing attention to colonial histories of domestic labor and the politics of cleanliness.⁴ The work resists commodification and archival permanence—it lives in process, gesture, and the body.

Gambura's alignment with the core ethos of *A System of Her Own* is foundational. She does not seek to be “included” in dominant structures; instead, she builds her own. Her “system” is one of embodied knowledge, ancestral listening, and poetic authorship—a system grounded in refusal and reworlding.

³ Tanatsei Gambura, “A Ritual of Return,” *Contemporary &* (2023), <https://contemporaryand.com/magazines/a-ritual-of-return/>.

⁴ Aesthetica Magazine, “Tanatsei Gambura: Interdisciplinary Storytelling,” accessed April 12, 2025, <https://aestheticamagazine.com/profile/tanatsei-gambura/>.



Figure 3. Tanatsei Gambura, *Hand Wash Only*, 2022. Mixed-media installation with photographic transfers, galvanized basin, and floor vinyl. Image courtesy of the artist and Contemporary &. Accessed April 12, 2025. <https://contemporaryand.com/magazines/a-ritual-of-return/>

4. Format and Exhibition Structure

Exhibition Overview

A System of Her Own takes the form of a **one-week** solo exhibition, presented at Custom Lane in Leith. The project comprises two interwoven components: an ephemeral installation by Tanatsei Gambura and the launch of an accompanying zine publication co-developed with the artist. This hybrid curatorial structure reflects the exhibition's thematic commitment to autonomy, intimacy, and decentralised systems of production.

The exhibition space will feature text-based installations, sound works, and ritual objects. These will be arranged in a deliberately unmonumental manner—floor-based, suspended, or woven into corners of the gallery. Rather than functioning as fixed displays, the works will invite temporal engagement, slow reading, and personal interpretation. The lighting will be soft and ambient, encouraging a quiet, contemplative atmosphere. Seating areas with zines and sound recordings will offer viewers an expanded temporal experience, breaking from the traditional pace of visual art exhibitions.

Zine Launch: Public Programme

A key element of the format is **the zine launch**, scheduled for the opening evening. The zine, collaboratively developed with Gambura, will contain poetry,

process notes, and reflections on the curatorial research. It will serve not only as a supplement to the exhibition but as a stand-alone poetic object, extending the project's afterlife beyond the physical show. Limited copies will be available onsite and online via a downloadable PDF.³

The zine launch will take the form of an informal, participatory evening gathering lasting approximately two hours (6–8pm). The event will begin with a short welcome and curatorial framing, followed by a collective listening session of selected audio poems featured in the exhibition. Attendees will then be invited to engage in a reflective reading circle, where they can respond to excerpts from the zine or offer personal thoughts through writing or conversation. The space will be softly lit, with cushions and chairs arranged to support small group interaction and quiet attention.

No preparation is required from participants, and attendance is open to the public via RSVP through community arts mailing lists and informal poster distribution. The intended outcome of the launch is to foster a space of slow reception, shared poetic response, and relational witnessing—echoing the exhibition's ethos of presence over spectacle.

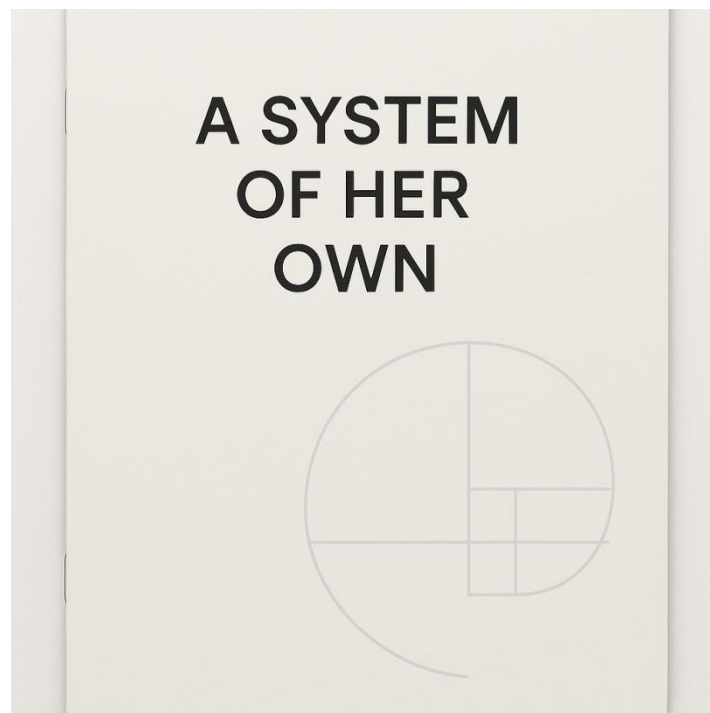


Figure 4. Proposed cover for the exhibition zine, *A System of Her Own*, designed by curator.

Appendix: Zine Launch Overview Table

Time	Opening evening, 6:00–8:00 PM
Location	Within the exhibition space (Custom Lane gallery zone)
Format	Informal poetry listening, reflective reading circle, open sharing
Access	Free and open to all via RSVP through community mailing lists and posters
Participant Prep	None required; materials (paper and pens) will be available onsite
Activities	Curatorial introduction, collective listening session, optional reflections
Expected Outcomes	Slow reception, poetic engagement, potential contributions to digital zine
Promotion Strategy	Distributed via zine collectives, community arts newsletters, and posters

Participatory Workshop: Writing as Ritual

In addition to the zine launch, the exhibition will include a one-off participatory workshop titled *Writing as Ritual*, held mid-week in the exhibition space. Designed for a small group (8–12 participants), the workshop explores poetic writing as a mode of embodied reflection, ancestral listening, and quiet resistance. No prior experience with poetry or ritual practices is required.

The two-hour session will begin with a brief guided grounding exercise, followed by a slow reading of selected fragments from the exhibition texts. Participants will then engage in a collective free-writing exercise, using prompts inspired by themes of memory, care, and refusal. The final part of the workshop will offer space for voluntary sharing, silence, or ritual gesture, in keeping with the non-linear and open-ended tone of the project.

All materials (paper, pens, floor cushions) will be provided. The workshop will be free to attend, with prior registration through the curator’s mailing list and community arts channels. The intended outcome is not product-based, but processual: to hold space for personal resonance, poetic expression, and co-presence in the

curatorial field. Fragments written during the session may be anonymously included in the post-exhibition digital zine (with consent), extending the exhibition’s life through community writing.

Workshop Overview Table

Workshop Title	Writing as Ritual
Date and Time	Mid-week during the exhibition, 2-hour session
Location	Within the exhibition space (Custom Lane)
Participants	8–12 people; open to public via registration
Access	Free to attend; registration via mailing list/community channels
Materials	Provided onsite (paper, pens, cushions)
Structure	Grounding exercise → Reading fragments → Free writing → Optional sharing
Outcomes	Personal reflection, poetic expression, potential inclusion in post-show zine (with consent)

5. Site and Space

A System of Her Own will be presented at Custom Lane, an independent design-focused hub located in Leith, Edinburgh. Custom Lane offers a flexible gallery space that supports research-led, design-driven, and experimental practices. This makes it an ideal site for a project that resists traditional exhibition hierarchies and prioritises intimacy, temporality, and poetic engagement.

Custom Lane's spatial openness aligns with the project’s emphasis on decentralised modes of presentation. The gallery’s raw wooden floors, large windows, and modular walls create an environment that does not impose a fixed narrative or curatorial rhythm. Instead, it offers an adaptable infrastructure for immersive installations, floor-based displays, ambient sound zones, and soft seating for slow engagement.⁵

Importantly, Custom Lane allows the exhibition to expand beyond static displays. Its capacity to host multi-format events—including publication launches, informal readings, and quiet performances—supports the hybrid curatorial structure of

⁵ Custom Lane, “About,” accessed April 12, 2025, <https://customlane.co/about/>.

A System of Her Own. The space's community-facing ethos also opens possibilities for alternative forms of audience interaction that do not rely on spectacle or institutional framing.

The location in Leith, a historically working-class and increasingly diverse district of Edinburgh, introduces another layer of contextual resonance. The site reflects the exhibition's interest in the margins—social, spatial, and epistemological. Rather than showing in a white cube or university-affiliated institution, the choice of Custom Lane proposes a relational model of curating, one grounded in dialogue, autonomy, and site-responsiveness.

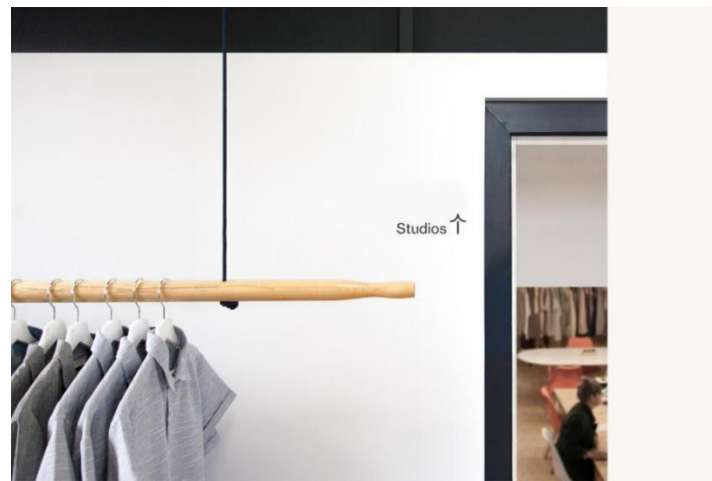


Figure 5. Interior detail of the studio entrance at Custom Lane, Leith. Image courtesy of Custom Lane. Accessed April 12, 2025. <https://customlane.co/>

6. Audiences and Publics

Audience Communities

The exhibition is designed with a deliberately specific yet diverse audience in mind—one that reflects the values of intimacy, care, and resistance articulated in *A System of Her Own*. Rather than targeting a broad general public, the project prioritises communities that often remain peripheral in mainstream cultural programming: women of colour, diasporic artists, students engaged in decolonial and feminist research, and individuals drawn to ritual-based or poetic practices.

This approach aligns with both the artist's own positionality and the exhibition's curatorial ethos. Tanatsei Gambura's work speaks to lived experience,

ancestral memory, and epistemic survival. It resonates with audiences who move between languages, who carry inherited stories, or who seek alternative systems of meaning and knowledge.⁶

The methods of engagement mirror the exhibition's values. Rather than launching a high-visibility marketing campaign, the show will be circulated via independent networks, zine collectives, community arts newsletters, and personal invitations. Posters and flyers will be designed with poetic text, avoiding institutional design templates. There will be no official "private view," but an informal zine launch evening, held as a quiet gathering rather than a press event. This approach resists extractive publicity and centres relationality over spectacle.

Accessibility Design

Accessibility is also embedded in the exhibition design. **Seating, soft lighting, and non-linear reading** options will support neurodiverse and sensory-sensitive visitors. The zine will be available in digital and physical formats, with recorded audio for selected texts. Gambura's voice as part of the sound installation will include subtitles or visual equivalents, acknowledging the need for multimodal accessibility.

In addition to the embedded audio elements within the installation, an optional audio guide will be made available via QR code at the entrance, offering a quiet, non-intrusive curatorial narration of the exhibition's conceptual threads and spatial layout. This guide will be voiced by the curator and will include brief interpretive prompts for visitors who wish to navigate the space more intentionally. A transcript of the audio will be provided in large print and downloadable formats for d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing audiences.

7. Ethics and EDI Considerations

The ethical framework of *A System of Her Own* emerges not as an add-on but as a core methodology. Ethics here is not only about "doing no harm," but about curating in ways that resist extractive tendencies, platform marginalised knowledges, and refuse the pressures of legibility and spectacle.

⁶ bell hooks, *Belonging: A Culture of Place* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 99.

The project begins with the recognition that Gambura’s practice is rooted in lived experience, ancestral knowledge, and spiritual ritual. It does not seek to translate these elements for broader institutional legibility, nor to aestheticise decolonial trauma for public consumption. Instead, the exhibition creates space for these knowledges to unfold on their own terms. The artist maintains full agency over the presentation, wording, and contextualisation of her work. Consent is ongoing—not just a signed document, but a relational and iterative curatorial process.

Ethical curating also requires attention to audience needs. The exhibition environment is designed to reduce sensory overload, offer moments of rest, and enable multiple modes of engagement—visual, auditory, tactile. Where text is used, it is presented with legibility, clarity, and where possible, audio accompaniment. The zine format was chosen as an accessible, anti-hierarchical medium that invites participation without requiring institutional fluency.

From an EDI standpoint, the project does not treat “diversity” as representation alone. Rather, it challenges the very systems that exclude non-Western, non-linear, and non-object-based practices. It works with communities rather than audiences, with witnesses rather than consumers, and with poetic logic rather than institutional tempo.

Curating here is not the orchestration of content, but the hosting of a system—her system—based in autonomy, care, refusal, and radical listening.

8. Project Timeline

Phase	Dates	Tasks
Preliminary Research & Concept Framing	Mar 1 – Mar 14, 2025	Literature review; conceptual development
Artist Dialogue & Project Definition	Mar 15 – Mar 25, 2025	Conversations with artist; shaping curatorial questions
Site Research & Venue Inquiry	Mar 20 – Mar	Venue visits and spatial assessments

	30, 2025	
Zine Development Begins	Apr 1 – Apr 10, 2025	Drafting content and structure of zine
Budgeting & Accessibility Planning	Apr 5 – Apr 15, 2025	Budget planning and accessibility strategies
Exhibition Design & Layout	Apr 10 – Apr 20, 2025	Designing layout, sound, and seating plans
Zine Finalisation & Printing	Apr 15 – Apr 25, 2025	Final layout, recording, and formatting
Installation	Apr 28 – Apr 29, 2025	Physical install of works and equipment
Exhibition Open	Apr 30 – May 6, 2025	Public presentation and zine launch
Documentation	May 1 – May 6, 2025	Documentation and online archiving
De-installation & Site Clear	May 7 - May 25,2025	Exhibition takedown and material return
Reflection & Archival Processing	May 8 – May 15, 2025	Project reflection and archival summary

9. Project Budget Estimate

INCOME

Item	Amount (£)
Creative Scotland Open Fund (pending)	£2000
Zine Collective Micro-Fundraising	£1000
In-kind Support from Custom Lane	£1200
Community Arts Contribution	£550
Total	£4750

EXPENDITURE

Item	Amount (£)
Venue Rental	£1200
Artist Fee	£800
Artwork Transport	£300
Installation Materials	£400
Sound System Rental	£200
Zine Printing (100 copies)	£300
Zine Design/Layout	£200
Zine Audio Version	£200
Access Provisions	£150
Hospitality	£100
Documentation	£250
Marketing	£100
Contingency Fund (10%)	£550
Total	£4750

This project operates with a modest and realistic budget of £4,750, reflecting the values of small-scale, independent curatorial practice. All expenditure is focused on artistic labour, access provisions, and the creation of low-cost, high-impact engagement formats such as zines and sound installations. No funds are allocated to prestige-driven marketing or institutional spectacle.

Primary funding will be sought through the **Creative Scotland Open Fund** for Individuals, which supports artist-led, publicly accessible cultural projects across Scotland. The project's emphasis on accessibility, care, and poetic resistance aligns well with the fund's priorities. A formal application for £2,000 will be submitted to support core costs including artist fee, publishing, and sound production.⁷

⁷ Creative Scotland, "Open Fund for Individuals," accessed April 15, 2025, <https://www.creative-scotland.com/funding/funding-programmes/open-fund/open-fund-for-individuals>.

Additional income will be raised through small-scale micro-fundraising campaigns led by local zine and poetry collectives. These activities, rooted in existing community networks, reflect the project's decentralised ethos and refusal of extractive funding models.

In-kind support will be provided by Custom Lane in the form of discounted venue hire and access to basic equipment. A £550 contribution will be requested from a local community arts partnership to support workshop materials and access infrastructure.

This budget model supports ethical pay for the artist, accessibility provisions, and non-hierarchical public engagement tools such as zines. The artist honorarium is calculated in reference to national guidance from **the Scottish Artists Union (SAU)**, which recommends a minimum day rate of £350 for experienced practitioners.⁸

10. Beyond the Exhibition: Distribution and Continuity

A System of Her Own adopts a hybrid model that combines exhibition-making with independent publishing, intentionally creating multiple entry points for engagement both during and after the show.

Zine Publication and Afterlife

A central component of this continuity is the collaboratively developed zine, which extends the project's presence in both tangible and digital forms. Printed by **Good Press (Glasgow)**, an artist-run risograph publisher, the zine will be produced in an edition of **100 A5 booklets (~20 pages, staple-bound)**. It will include newly commissioned poetry by Tanatsei Gambura, curatorial reflections, conceptual notes on ritual and refusal, and selected anonymous excerpts from the participatory workshop (with consent).

Fifty copies will be distributed freely during the exhibition. A further thirty will be circulated through mail-outs to poetry collectives, decolonial reading groups, and independent bookshops. The remaining twenty copies will be reserved for future programming, zine libraries, or academic institutions. A **PDF version and an**

⁸ Scottish Artists Union. "Rates of Pay." Accessed April 15, 2025. <https://www.artistsunion.scot/rates-pay>.

audio-recorded edition of selected texts will be available via QR code and a curated mailing list, supporting accessibility and sustained engagement.

Digital Archive and Public Response

The digital archive will remain active for at least six months post-exhibition. In addition to housing the PDF and audio zine, the platform will include documentation of the exhibition—photographs, spatial audio clips, and curatorial notes. Visitors will be invited to leave reflections, feedback, or creative responses through an embedded form. These contributions may inform future iterations of the project or be compiled into a follow-up zine supplement.

Bibliography

- Aesthetica Magazine. "Tanatsei Gambura: Interdisciplinary Storytelling." Accessed April 12, 2025. <https://aestheticamagazine.com/profile/tanatsei-gambura/>
- Campt, Tina. *Listening to Images*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.
- Creative Scotland. "Open Fund for Individuals." Accessed April 15, 2025. <https://www.creativescotland.com/funding/funding-programmes/open-fund/open-fund-for-individuals>
- Custom Lane. "About." Accessed April 12, 2025. <https://customlane.co/about/>
- Gambura, Tanatsei. "A Ritual of Return." *Contemporary &*, 2023. <https://contemporaryand.com/magazines/a-ritual-of-return/>
- hooks, bell. *Belonging: A Culture of Place*. New York: Routledge, 2009.
- Lorde, Audre. "Poetry Is Not a Luxury." In *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, 36–39. Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984.