

A System of Her Own

A Speculative Curatorial Proposal for a One-Week Exhibition by Tanatsei Gambura

Table of Contents

1. Project Title and Curatorial Narrative	2
2. Mediums of Resistance and Ritual	4
3. Tanatsei Gambura: Poetic Resistance in Practice	6
4. Format and Exhibition Structure	7
5. Site and Space	9
6. Audiences and Publics	10
7. Ethics and EDI Considerations	12
8. Project Timeline	13
9. Project Budget Estimate	14
10. Beyond the Exhibition: Distribution and Continuity	16
Bibliography	18

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?



Figure 1. Tanatsei Gambura, *Hand Wash Only*, 2022. Embroidered textile, water basins, mixed media installation. Image courtesy of Aesthetica Magazine. Accessed April 12, 2025. <https://aestheticamagazine.com/profile/tanatsei-gambura/>.



Figure 2. Exterior view of Custom Lane, Leith, Edinburgh. Image courtesy of Custom Lane. Accessed April 12, 2025. <https://customlane.co/about/>.

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.

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.

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

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,

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.

spiritual cycles, and nonlinear experience. Here, curating becomes less about sequencing and more about holding space.

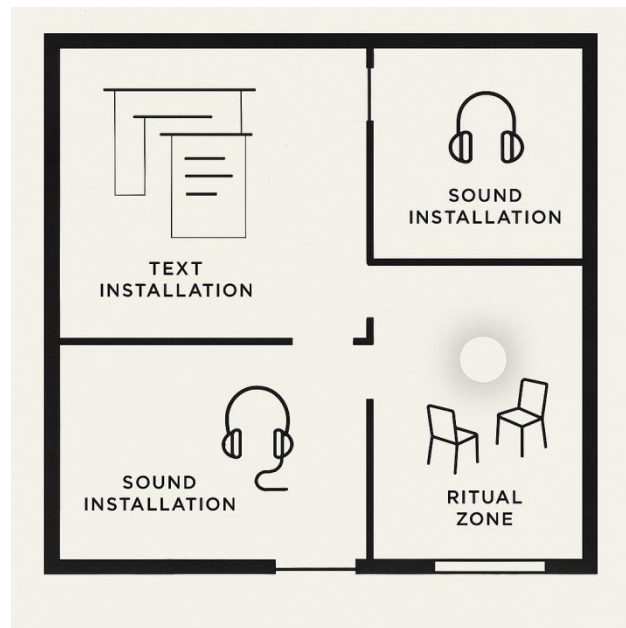


Figure 3. Exhibition floor plan for *A System of Her Own*, illustrating the spatial distribution of text installations, immersive sound works, and the ritual zone. The layout proposes a non-linear, multisensory navigation that aligns with the curatorial emphasis on quiet resistance, embodied knowledge, and epistemic decentralisation. Designed by the curator, 2025.

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 4. Tanatsei Gumbura recording sound for her project *Nzira Yeparuware*, Edinburgh, 2023. Photograph by [Photographer's Name if known]. Image courtesy of Edinburgh.

gh Art Festival. Accessed April 12, 2025. <https://www.edinburghartfestival.com/event/nzi-ra-yeparuware-tanatsei-gambura/>

3. Tanatsei Gambura: Poetic Resistance in Practice

Tanatsei Gambura is a Zimbabwean poet, curator, and researcher whose 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.

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/>.

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.



Figure 5. 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

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.

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

There is no private view or formal press release. The exhibition will instead be softly announced via word-of-mouth, mailing lists, and independent networks—resisting institutional publicity models and aligning with the artist's preference for minimal visibility. Curatorial labor is visible in the space but not centralised; it is felt through hosting, care, and rhythm.

By combining exhibition-making and publishing, *A System of Her Own* enacts a curatorial methodology rooted in softness, slowness, and refusal. It proposes a mode of showing that values depth over reach, presence over spectacle, and relation over representation.



Figure 6. Exhibition space at Custom Lane, Edinburgh. Image courtesy of Custom Lane. Accessed April 12, 2025. <https://customlane.co/hire-our-space/>

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,

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

informal readings, and quiet performances—supports the hybrid curatorial structure of *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 7. 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

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 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.

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

In place of audience as consumer, *A System of Her Own* imagines the audience as witness, as guest, as participant in a slow system of relation.

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. Drawing from Gabi’s Week 4 lecture on curatorial ethics, this project embraces care, responsiveness, and consent as guiding values.

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.⁵ 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 30, 2025	Venue visits and spatial assessments
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

Item	Details	Estimated Cost (£)
Venue Rental	Custom Lane (1 week incl. utilities)	1200
Artist Fee	Honorarium based on SAU rate (£350 × 2 days), incl. prep & rights	800
Artwork	UK transport to/from venue	300

Transport		
Installation Materials	Clips, fabric, seating cushions etc.	400
Sound System Rental	Speaker, mic, stand (rental)	200
Zine Printing (100 copies)	small batch, ~20pp booklet	300
Zine Design/Layout t	Freelance graphic collaborator	200
Zine Audio Version	Voice recording + editing	200
Access Provisions	Seating, subtitles, formats	150
Hospitality	Tea, water, non-alcoholic drinks	100
Documentatio n	Photographer + editing	250
Marketing	Poster, visual materials	100
Contingency Fund (10%)	Buffer for unknown costs	550
TOTAL		4750

The project maintains a modest and realistic budget of approximately £4,750, aligned with small-scale independent curatorial practice. In keeping with the exhibition's ethos of autonomy and anti-commerciality, all expenses are allocated toward essential creative and accessibility needs, rather than spectacle or prestige.

Funding will be sought through a combination of artist-led micro-grants (e.g. Creative Scotland's Open Fund), which supports independent artists, curators, and researchers working in Scotland, in-kind support from Custom Lane, and small fundraising activities via poetry/zine collectives.⁶ No institutional sponsorship is pursued to preserve curatorial independence and avoid aligning with extractive funding models.⁷

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 Rather than relying on prestige-based funding structures, it imagines value as being co-produced by artistic labour, community support, and care-based curation.

10. Beyond the Exhibition: Distribution and Continuity

A System of Her Own is designed not as a standalone event, but as a curatorial system that generates further life beyond the week-long exhibition. The project adopts a hybrid model that combines exhibition-making with independent publishing,

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>.

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

intentionally creating multiple entry points for engagement both during and after the show.

The zine publication plays a central role in this continuity. Developed collaboratively with the artist, it will be printed in a small risograph edition of 100 copies, available freely during the exhibition. In addition, a digital version will be hosted on a temporary webpage accessible via QR code and curated mailing list, along with an audio-recorded version of select texts for accessible listening.

This digital publication archive will remain open for at least six months post-exhibition and will invite visitors to contribute feedback, reflections, or creative responses through a form embedded on the same platform. This approach transforms the exhibition from a finished event into an evolving conversation.

Furthermore, documentation of the exhibition—including photographs, spatial audio clips, and curatorial notes—will be assembled into a reflective portfolio. This archive may serve as a resource for curators, educators, or artists working with feminist, ritual-based, or decolonial methodologies, continuing the system's function as a knowledge-sharing tool.

In refusing institutional closure and enabling public circulation, *A System of Her Own* sustains the values of slowness, care, and decentralised authorship. It becomes not just a temporary exhibition, but a porous, living project—open to re-reading, re-hearing, and re-activation.

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>

<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/>

<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.

hes, 36–39. Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984.