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## Maud Sulter: *Passion*

1 April to 4 June 2016

Maud Sulter (1960—2008) was a photographic artist, poet, and curator of Scottish-Ghanaian descent. She declared that she wanted 'to put black women back in the centre of the frame'. Her work aimed to bring to light the histories of women, real or imagined, whose contribution to culture had been ignored or erased. Sulter believed passionately in the longstanding historical links between Africa and Europe. She said 'there is a compulsion to imagine that black people arrived in Britain in the 1950s' but, as her work shows, there has been a black presence in the UK and Europe for centuries.

This exhibition brings together many bodies of work from Sulter's career. These include *Zabat* (1989), which depicts contemporary black women in the guise of the ancient Muses. *Hysteria* (1991) was partly inspired by 19th century African American sculptor Edmonia Lewis, and tells the story of a black woman artist who came to Europe seeking fame and fortune, but disappeared without trace.

*Syracas* (1993) combines postcards of Alpine landscapes with illustrations from publications on African and European art. Sulter imagined *Syracas* as pages from a scrapbook made by 'Helga', a fictitious girl of Cameroonian descent whose parents were killed in Nazi Germany. *Twa Blak Wimmin* (1997) makes reference to historical accounts of 'Blak Margaret' and 'Blak Elene' who attended the court of King James IV of Scotland in the early 16th century.

An award-winning poet, Sulter wove words, poems, and texts into her visual work, and was often inspired by literature. In *Les Bijoux* (2002), she plays a character based on 19th century Frenchwoman Jeanne Duval, the so-called 'Black Venus' who inspired the poet Baudelaire. Sulter's books and poetry are on display in the exhibition, as well as an audio recording of poems read in her own voice.

Maud Sulter achieved many successes in her lifetime, including representing the UK at *Africus*, the first Johannesburg Biennale in 1995. However, her work has since been overlooked. *Passion* aims to share more widely her valuable contribution to photography and art.

*Passion* is a Street Level Photoworks / Autograph ABP partnership in association with TrAIN: the University of the Arts London research centre for Transnational Art, Identity and Nation. Co-curated by Malcolm Dickson, Street Level Photoworks, and Deborah Cherry, TrAIN, as an outcome of research led by Deborah Cherry and artist and curator Ajamu. We wish to thank all those who have generously loaned work: The Estate of Maud Sulter; Harris Museum & Art Gallery, Preston; The McManus: Dundee's Art Gallery & Museum; City Arts Centre, Edinburgh; Paul Wilson/MAG Collection.