

Media Information
September 19, 2024

BMW honors Esther Mahlangu as official partner of Frieze London 2024.

Actor and Talk Art podcast co-host Russell Tovey presents his private collection in response to the artist's work at the BMW Lounge. Frieze Music, presented by BMW, features contemporary Indie-Pop singer Arlo Parks at KOKO Club.

Munich/London. From October 9 to 13, Frieze London and Frieze Masters will return to London's Regent's Park. As one of Frieze's long-term global partners since 2004, BMW will honor the artistic oeuvre of Ndebele artist Esther Mahlangu, who was the first woman to create a BMW Art Car in 1991. Together with BMW, Serpentine will reveal "Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu" ("I am because you are"), a new site-specific mural by Mahlangu in the garden at Serpentine North. In celebration of cultural exchange and responding to Mahlangu's work, renowned actor, collector and Talk Art host Russell Tovey will curate a selection of artworks from his private collection that will be displayed at Frieze London in the BMW Lounge. He chose pieces by female, queer and artists of colour in response to works by Mahlangu. The first interview publication with Esther Mahlangu, titled "Esther Mahlangu: To Paint is in My Heart", published by Thames & Hudson, will be launched during Frieze week with co-editors Azu Nwagbogu and Hans Ulrich Obrist.

Esther Mahlangu (b. 1935, South Africa) has been creating large-scale and site-specific works for over eight decades and is a pioneer of Pan-African contemporary art. She began painting at the age of ten, learning the traditional Ndebele techniques and visual language of covering houses in bold patterns from her mother and grandmother. Mahlangu uses natural pigments mixed with clay, soil and cow dung to paint directly on the exteriors of structures in her village. Rather than using stencils and tape to achieve lines and shapes, she paints by hand with chicken feathers and an array of different brushes. The artist also works with acrylic paints on canvas, which allows her to explore different scales and a broader colour palette.

In 1991, Esther Mahlangu designed the 12th BMW Art Car in the esteemed collection, based on a BMW 525i – becoming the first woman and African artist to do so. Since 1975, artists such as Alexander Calder, Frank Stella, Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol, Jenny Holzer, Jeff Koons, Cao Fei, and John Baldessari have turned BMW race and series cars into works of art. Her BMW Art Car marked the beginning of a longstanding relationship between the BMW Group and Mahlangu, inspiring future collaborations.

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BMW and Esther Mahlangu during Frieze London

"Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu", presented in the garden at Serpentine North in collaboration with the BMW Group and The Melrose Gallery, supported by Benjamin Milstein, is Esther Mahlangu's first public mural in the UK. Painted over sixteen wooden panels, the work depicts traditional Ndebele shapes and patterns outlined with a black border. The title of the work translates directly from Ndebele as "I am because you are", emphasising the importance of communities and unity among humans and other living species.

"I am proud to present this monumental outdoor work at Serpentine in London. It is my wish that this painting brings much joy to those who see it in celebration and recognition of the interconnectedness that exists between our two nations and indeed all living beings", comments the artist.

Bettina Korek, CEO, and Hans Ulrich Obrist, Artistic Director, Serpentine say: "Esther Mahlangu is one of the most important artists of our time who continues to inspire emerging talents. Mahlangu is a polymath who brings art into society. This is a wonderful moment to celebrate Serpentine's friendship with the artist and honour her work in the UK. We're grateful to all our partners who have made this fantastic project possible and particularly BMW for their support, and we hope audiences will engage with the piece and the unique surroundings of The Royal Parks".

The work will be officially inaugurated at the traditional Serpentine breakfast on October 9 during Frieze London.

Various events at the BMW Lounge at Frieze London will celebrate the relationship with the artist. The lounge exhibition itself salutes Esther Mahlangu's work, showcasing a selection of the collection of renowned actor, collector and Talk Art podcast host, Russell Tovey, for the first time at Frieze London. As an admirer of the artist's colourful abstract paintings, he chose pieces by Etel Adnan, Math Bass, Matt Connors, Jadé Fadojutimi, Mary Heilman, Carmen Herrera and Hayley Tompkins in response to Esther Mahlangu's works "Ndebele Abstract" and "Ndebele Abstract 2022".

"Esther's geometric work inspires me deeply, the freedom that can be found within her paintings and her practice resonates throughout my collection. Geometric abstract art has been something that I've gravitated towards for many years. To live with these

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works has felt calming and has satisfied the curiosity and enthusiasm that I long for in an image. I am so excited to bring works from my own personal collection, that bring so much to me on a daily basis, into a rich conversation with Esther Mahlangu", says Tovey. During a talk followed by a reception on October 10 at the BMW Lounge, Russell Tovey will explain his fascination with Mahlangu.

BMW is proud to enable the first interview publication with Esther Mahlangu. "[Esther Mahlangu. To Paint is in My Heart](#)" will be published by Thames & Hudson in autumn 2024 and exclusively pre-launched during Frieze London. The book explores the life and revolutionary art of Esther Mahlangu through a series of interviews between the artist and curators Hans Ulrich Obrist, Azu Nwagbogu and BMW's head of cultural engagement, Thomas Girst as well as a foreword by Nontobeko Ntombela, curator of the Esther Mahlangu "Then I Knew I Was Good at Painting" retrospective. In addition, the South African fashion designer Thebe Magugu provides an insight into the connection between Esther Mahlangu and Ndebele culture in relation to fashion as part of the book.

On October 9, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Azu Nwagbogu and Thomas Girst will talk about their collaboration for "Esther Mahlangu. To Paint is in My Heart" at the BMW Lounge and will sign copies the book which will be on sale on site.

The year marks a pinnacle in Esther Mahlangu's career. Besides the manifold activities during Frieze London, a retrospective of her work is touring the world: "Then I Knew I Was Good at Painting", which opened in February 2024 at the Iziko Museums of South Africa. The exhibition showcases Esther Mahlangu's more than 50-year career and her rise as a contemporary artist, a journey that has earned her global recognition. As part of the show, Mahlangu's BMW 525i Art Car returned to South Africa for the first time in over 30 years. The next stop on the global tour is at the Wits Art Museum in Johannesburg, opening on November 19. Moreover, her works were part of the 2024 Venice Biennale main exhibition, "Stranieri Ovunque – Foreigners Everywhere", curated by Adriano Pedrosa. And the latest in her remarkably versatile collaborations with the BMW Group premiered at Frieze L.A. this February: the BMW i5 Flow NOSTOKANA, featuring her artistic language and BMW's colour-change technology.

Frieze Music

Continuing their long-term collaboration, BMW and Frieze will once again partner to present Frieze Music in London. On **October 10**, contemporary Indie-Pop singer **Arlo**

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Parks will perform at the legendary KOKO Theatre in Camden. The 24-year-old artist's most recent LP "My Soft Machine" made it into the Rolling Stone's 100 Best Albums of 2023. Her debut album "Collapsed in Sunbeams", released in 2021, won Parks a Mercury Prize and critical acclaim, especially for her poetic and intelligent songwriting portraying the complex reality of her contemporaries.

Exploring the intersection of music and the arts to spark inspiring dialogues, Frieze Music provides artists the opportunity to create a unique performance, highlighting their craft through song, inspiration and conversations with fellow artists. Launched during the inaugural Frieze Los Angeles in 2019, the joint initiative between BMW and Frieze has brought together a wide range of musicians, including Moses Sumney, Caroline Polachek, Nilüfer Yanya and Loyle Carner.

To visit the BMW Lounge, please note that entrance tickets or VIP accreditation for the VIP day on October 9 & 10 are required. Media can register for accreditation [here](#).

BMW Lounge featuring Esther Mahlangu's works in dialogue with the private collection of Russell Tovey

October 9-13

Frieze London

Regent's Park

"Esther Mahlangu. To Paint is in My Heart" Book Launch

Wednesday, October 9, 3.30 – 4.00 pm

Followed by a Champagne Toast

Art Talk with Russell Tovey

Thursday, October 10, 3.00pm

[Media Accreditation and interview requests](#)

Opening Hours

Wednesday, October 9: 11am to 7pm (invitation only)

Thursday, October 10: 11am to 7pm (invitation and preview ticket holders only 11am to 3pm, open to the public from 3pm)

Friday - Sunday, October 11-13: 11am to 7pm

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The BMW Group's Cultural Engagement with exclusive updates and deeper insights into the global initiatives can be followed on Instagram at [@BMWGroupCulture](https://www.instagram.com/BMWGroupCulture).

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BMW Group Cultural Engagement

State Opera for all Gerhard Richter **CORPORATE CITIZENSHIP** Kochi-Muziris Biennale
BMW Art Cars Ólafur Eliásson Art Basel Max Hooper Schneider Städel Invites Frank Stella
BMW Art Club **INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE** Art D'Égypte Cao Fei Esther Mahlangu
Zaha Hadid Les Rencontres d'Arles Jeff Koons India Art Fair **LONGEVITY** Julie Mehretu
PARTNERSHIP BMW Open Work by Frieze Andy Warhol Lu Yang Preis der Nationalgalerie
Samson Young Bavarian State Opera **CREATIVE FREEDOM** BMW Young Artist Jazz Award
Ken Done **INTERACTION** Premio de Pintura Gallery Weekend Berlin Art Market Budapest
Paris Photo Leelee Chan Art Dubai **SUSTAINABILITY** BMW Photo Award Leipzig

Teatro alla Scala BMW Classics Jenny Holzer BMW Art Guide by Independent Collectors
Why Culture? Why not! Culture is knowledge, a sanctuary of beauty and depth, of meaning and peace. An inspiring escape. Tranquil at best, even unsettling sometimes. As a corporate citizen, the BMW Group takes social responsibility seriously, as part of which it has been involved in hundreds of cultural initiatives worldwide for over half a century, in the fields of contemporary art, music and film as well as in design. As a long-term partner, creative freedom is key – and as essential for groundbreaking works as it is for major innovations within a business enterprise like ours.

Further information: www.bmwgroup.com/culture and www.bmwgroup.com/overview

Instagram: [@BMWGroupCulture](https://www.instagram.com/BMWGroupCulture)

#BMWGroupCulture

The BMW Group

With its four brands BMW, MINI, Rolls-Royce and BMW Motorrad, the BMW Group is the world's leading premium manufacturer of automobiles and motorcycles and also provides premium financial and mobility services. The BMW Group production network comprises over 30 production sites worldwide; the company has a global sales network in more than 140 countries.

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In 2023, the BMW Group sold over 2.55 million passenger vehicles and more than 209,000 motorcycles worldwide. The profit before tax in the financial year 2023 was € 17.1 billion on revenues amounting to € 155.5 billion. As of 31 December 2023, the BMW Group had a workforce of 154,950 employees.

The success of the BMW Group has always been based on long-term thinking and responsible action. The company set the course for the future at an early stage and consistently makes sustainability and efficient resource management central to its strategic direction, from the supply chain through production to the end of the use phase of all products.

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