

**CLAUDE
SAMUEL**

ZANELE. Three first names, three individuals, three photographers. The self-portraits brought together for this exhibition are, without exception, compelling statements and full of meaning. The photographers are their own models; they control every element. from clothing to make-up, composition to lighting and body posture to facial expression.

For these artists, the self-portrait is a tool to say something about the world. Although there are many interfaces, their approaches and intentions are widely varied. Samuel Fosso (NG/CM, 1962) transforms his body into highly diverse characters, both real and imagined. His malleable face and body become the canvases for his narrative. Claude Cahun (FR, 1894-1954) demonstrated how a self-portrait can express the fluid nature of an individual. She perceived her outer appearance as a mask that could take on endless forms, with each mask forming part of her complex personality. For Zanele Muholi (ZA, 1972), the self-portrait is the only option. In their ongoing series *Somnyama Ngonyama*, Muholi refuses to allow privileged, Western *others* to define their existence and visual representation.

The self-portraits of Claude Cahun, Samuel Fosso and Zanele Muholi are not selfies. Selfies are snapshots, usually taken with a smartphone or webcam, and intended for social media. Claude, Samuel and Zanele use the most naked tool in their arsenal: their own bodies. The image of themselves becomes a commentary on society: the self-gaze as a window on the world.

As a non-binary person, Zanele Muholi prefers to use the non-gendered pronouns they/them/their.