

**Grace Wales Bonner** is a London-based designer and curator known for her eponymous fashion label. *Artist's Choice: Grace Wales Bonner—Spirit Movers* includes 50 works from the MoMA collection selected by Bonner and features artists such as David Hammons, Terry Adkins, and Man Ray. Inspired by music and rhythm, *Spirit Movers* is informed by the sounds and aesthetics of the African diaspora. The spiritual nature of archival research and the challenges of translating sound into material are also documented in her new book, published by MoMA, *Grace Wales Bonner: Dream in the Rhythm—Visions of Sound and Spirit in the MoMA Collection*. The exhibit is on view at MoMA through April 7th, 2024.

**Molly Guillermo (Konch):** Sociologist Rolando Vázquez says, "Listening is a way to attend to the alternative voices silenced by modernity," and that there have always been different ways of negotiating the boundaries between music and noise, rhythm and melody, speech and song and what they indicate about the possibilities for sharing the world (in this case, the worlds of art and fashion.) So, how did you begin the process of curation for a show about sound? Which artists' voices felt particularly important to uplift? Is curating a show about giving political agency to an artist or their work?

**Grace Wales Bonner:** The idea of sound rendered through different forms is an idea I often return to. It is a difficult question to resolve, which then becomes a truly fascinating study for me. Imagining how marks of gesture in painting might convey rhythm, or how a certain patina might sound, enliven my spirit. The MoMA collection is expansive, and it was also important to have a filter within which to explore it, while also approaching it with openness. I wanted to allow myself to be surprised by certain artworks, to incorporate the unexpected.

It was a privilege to be able to showcase works held in the collection that have never been exhibited before, namely Moustapha Dimé's *Lady With a Long Neck* and David Hammon's *Afro-Asian Eclipse*. It felt good to let them shine.

**MG:** How did the research for this show compare to the research you conducted for your 2019 show, *A Time for New Dreams*, at the Serpentine Gallery?

**GWB:** I think there are threads connecting the two exhibitions, especially in terms of ritual and devotional practice. The difference with MoMA was the ability to work with a permanent collection and to build a narrative from works across cultures and artistic movements. This was a unique opportunity to work within a frame of the collection. I am often drawn to the idea of disrupting within, movement within a structure to create new possibilities and rhythms.

While developing the exhibition I was also able to extend aspects of the research into the publication, *Dream in the Rhythm*. It was interesting to work simultaneously in a different medium and draw from another chorus of materials.

**MG:** The sound, rhythm, and expression I saw in the artworks featured in Spirit Movers reminded me of Nick Cave's Soundsuits, which were inspired by protests and riots. The comparison felt relevant because your exhibit is in MoMA, a place that has seen a lot of sound, rhythm, and collective expression in the form of protests in the past month. Is Spirit Movers intended to be political? What is being communicated by the rhythm in the show? Can it be placed in the context of the protests?

**GWB:** I see the rhythm in the show as a way of invoking feelings of togetherness or collectivity, especially as it is experienced in music. Of course, this element of collectivity is necessary for many kinds of resistance and positive action, but I wouldn't say my intention was to make a political statement. I hoped to gather artworks with a strong valence, a strong resonance, and to arrange them in a way that offered the potential for new encounters.

**MG:** Is there a particular work in Spirit Movers that has spiritual significance to you personally?

**GWB:** I have always been moved by Terry Adkins' work, but I think each piece has something about it that feels significant and moving to me. A lot of the process was about listening to this intuition and treating it with a certain intensity. I wanted to devote myself to the act of a natural unfolding.