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Esther Mahlangu

*An exhibition of tapestries featuring the designs of Esther Mahlangu
by Alexandra de Cadaval*

16th - 20th September
Tuesday - Sunday, 11 am - 6 pm

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Tapestries featuring the designs of the artist

Presented by Alexandra De Cadaval

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Press Release

Tristan Hoare Gallery is delighted to present an exhibition of tapestries featuring the designs of *Esther Mahlangu* by Alexandra de Cadaval, celebrating one of the most singular artistic voices to emerge from South Africa in the twentieth century. For more than seven decades, Mahlangu has transformed the visual language of Ndebele painting into a globally recognised contemporary artistic practice while remaining deeply rooted in the cultural heritage from which it originates.

Working freehand without preparatory drawings or measurements, Mahlangu's striking geometric compositions are distinguished by their bold colour, precision and rhythmic abstraction. Rooted in a visual language traditionally painted by Ndebele women onto the exterior walls of family homes, her work embodies histories of identity, kinship and cultural continuity. By translating these forms from architecture to canvas, Mahlangu expanded the possibilities of this centuries-old tradition, establishing a body of work that has profoundly influenced contemporary art while preserving the integrity of its origins.

Mahlangu first gained international recognition through her inclusion in the landmark exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* at the Centre Pompidou and Grande Halle de la Villette, Paris, in 1989. Her work has since been exhibited internationally and is held in major public and private collections worldwide. Most recently, her major retrospective, *Then I Knew I Was Good at Painting*, opened at the Iziko South African National Gallery in Cape Town before travelling to Wits Art Museum, Johannesburg, reaffirming her position as one of the most important living artists working today.

The exhibition centres on a series of handwoven Dhurrie tapestries developed in close collaboration with de Cadaval. Translating eight of Mahlangu's compositions into the historic Indian weaving tradition, the works bring together two craft practices recognised by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage: Ndebele mural painting and Dhurrie weaving. Handwoven by master artisans using techniques passed down through generations, the tapestries establish a dialogue between southern Africa and the India through a shared language of geometry, ornament and craftsmanship.

Conceived through an ongoing dialogue between the artist and curator, the series was developed over several years, including periods spent working with Mahlangu at her home in South Africa to refine colour and composition. Rather than reproductions, the tapestries are thoughtful translations of Mahlangu's visual language into a new material form, reflecting a shared commitment to preserving living artistic traditions while allowing them to evolve. For Mahlangu, whose lifelong ambition has been to ensure the continuity of Ndebele artistic knowledge for future generations, the project represents a natural extension of a practice dedicated to cultural preservation.