

# GLADSTONE GALLERY

Anne Wehr, Wangechi Mutu, "Hunt Bury Flee", *Time Out New York*,  
November 18-24, 2010.

## Wangechi Mutu, "Hunt Bury Flee"



**Gladstone Gallery**,  
through Dec 4 (see  
Chelsea)

Hunt and bury? Sure. But flee? That seems an unlikely prospect for the beleaguered female dynamos in Wangechi Mutu's latest large-scale collages, gloriously encumbered by decorative encrustation, contact-paper patterning, and glossy cutouts from fashion, porn and *National Geographic* magazines. For her first Gladstone Gallery show, this Kenyan-born artist continues to create dense, arresting art that takes on modern beauty myths and popular depictions of non-Western cultures. In *Oh Madonna!*, a Josephine Baker-like creature sporting ostrich feathers and a bare breast conjures the West's historic fascination with "Le Noble Sauvage" exoticism, while her kaleidoscopic bod tells a more contemporary tale: With knees made of artillery pieces and stacked cans of crude for high heels, oilmongering geopolitics insinuate themselves in her very contours.

Too bad Mutu's work has increasingly come to resemble exactly what she aims to critique. Two installations of industrial felt,



crumpled to evoke wrecked trees in desolate landscapes, set a war-torn stage for the collages' more intimate, mythological acts of destruction. Yet the thread of violence (along with a certain visual monotony) that connects Mutu's work seems opportunistic, even misogynistic, especially in visually simpler works like *Sprout*, an inverted Daphne buried up to her elbows in scorched earth.

Mutu's saving grace is her ability to elicit seductive, alchemical effects with paint on Mylar. Her jewel-toned, marbled renderings of mottled flesh, textured with hair and fishnet patterns, ground her compositions and, one hopes, will be good fodder for whatever comes next.—*Anne Wehr*