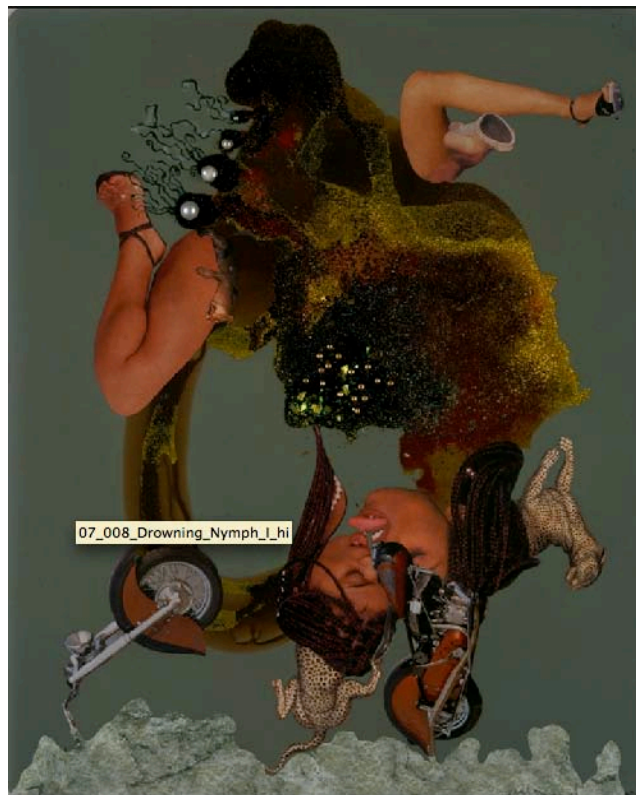


GLADSTONE GALLERY

"It Was All A Dream." *Life+Times*. September 19, 2011.



Kenyan born Wangechi Mutu has been creating some of the art world's most provocative painting and installations for the better part of a decade. *Exhuming Gluttony: Another Requiem*, her current installation at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao began as a collaboration with Ghanaian architect David Adjaye; the space has bottles hanging from the ceiling dripping red wine onto fur pelts and is a sensory engaging, visceral commentary on the cycles of consumerism. The recently married 38-year-old Brooklyn resident has earned the attention of *Vogue* and other women's magazines for her singular style and effortless poise. Ironic, since it is often those same women's tomes that she rips images to collage onto her massive paintings that examine women's bodies and the many ways ingested text and images from mainstream media, maim and contort them. A Yale graduate who also studied at Parsons and Cooper Union Art School, Mutu brings intellectual rigor to the very physical world of painting.

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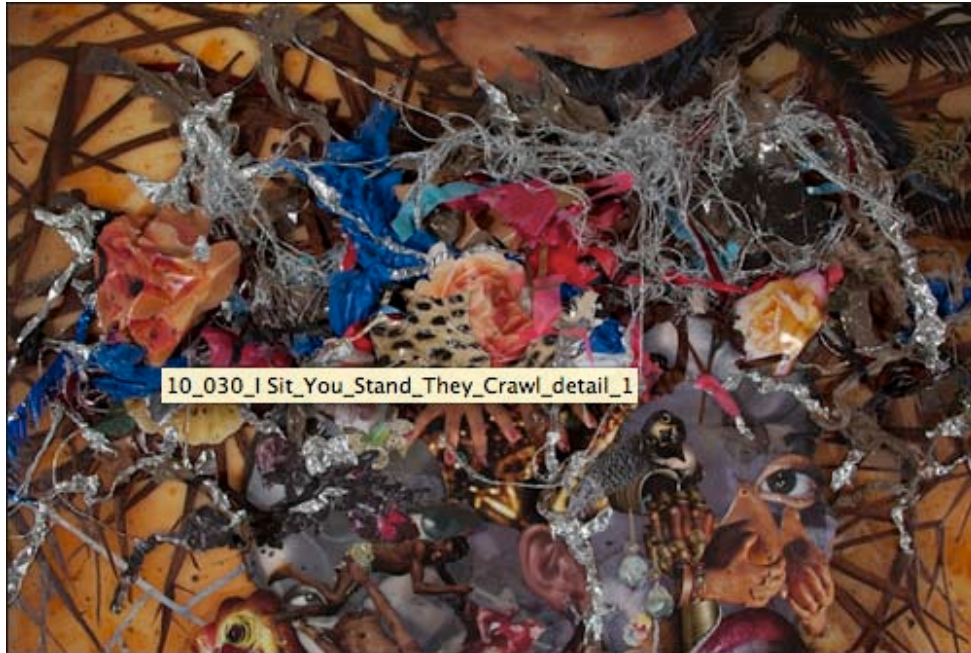
Life+Times: There have been (revived) recent assaults on black feminine beauty; whether it's shoddy scientific polls or some new attack on Serena Williams' strong body. So much of your work in painting has been about opening up the psychological spaces where we've internalized messages about the supremacy of "white beauty". What if anything at all, can art and representation contribute towards healing?

Wangechi Mutu: As an African woman I truly believe one of the things most potent and even threatening things about black femaleness is how thoroughly uncharacterizable and broad of a definition it is. I mean what really is Black female beauty? Is it black to brown to caramelized skin...surely it's more than skin deep, Is it a certain composure, attitude or decorum, but aren't these learned and rehearsed traits? Is it sunny weather genes? Is it anyone derived from African women, but wait doesn't that just mean everyone. There are just so many different physical "phenotypes," cultural sways, linguistic melodies, personal swaggers that characterize what we want to call black feminine beauty. The thing is that "African" is the mother of all our genes and I suppose every little new thing or mutation we've been able to develop as a species that

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doesn't look anymore African-black-mama-like makes us feel slightly unique. Like pubescent rebel prodigy, eternally trying to cut our genetic umbilical chords and come up with something our Black Mama didn't make us into. I'm obsessed with the fact that every-where you look beauty ideals are influenced by all kinds of feminine black characteristics...and yet ironically I try to portray the slight fear or colonial hangover we have of these melanin stained reminders.



L+T: Your work is often phantasmagorical and sometimes slightly spooky. What frightens you, on a visceral level?

WM: Things that perforate the skin and the body really freak me out...and yet I'm obsessed with the idea of the punctured body...The qualities that make the body elastic and impenetrable are the same things that make it hideously vulnerable vulnerable and hard to imagine opened up. I always say I can't watch horror films because I think that way already.

L+T:Who are your favorite authors? Singers?

WM: Zora Neal Hearston, Amos Tutulo, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Flannery O'Conner, Arundahti Roy, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Octavia Butler, Robert Farris Thompson....Nina Simone, Lhasa, Casandra Wilson Skin of Skunk Anansi, Omou Sangare, Michele Ndege O'chello, Bjork, Imani, Laura Marling, Edith Piaf, Meklit Hederu

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L+T: What are your favorite things about Brooklyn?

WM: The feeling that it's off the grid...out of the matrix. It's ethnic, cultural, religious diversity. Somethings about it remind me of Nairobi; affordable old buildings. You don't need to make a reservation for brunch. My backyard. The Artists and Creators who live in the Borough. The Mermaid Parade. Drum circles and kite flying in Prospect Park.

L+T: How has becoming a mother changed your workday?

WM: You know, I wasn't one of those women who looked forward to motherhood. I was so afraid she'd disrupt my studio schedule, which I'm very particular about, but as it turns out, she's a joyous distraction!

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Credits:

Wangechi Mutu

"Exhuming Gluttony (Another Requiem)"

2011, Mixed media installation

Courtesy the artist and Image ©FMGBGuggenheim Bilbao Museoa, 2011

Photo: Erika Barahona-Ede

Wangechi Mutu

"Drowning Nymph I"

2007, Mixed media ink, paint, plant materials, plastic pearls on x-ray paper

17 x 14 inches

Courtesy the artist and Victoria Miro Gallery

Wangechi Mutu

"I Sit, You Stand, They Crawl"

2010, Mixed media ink, paint, collage on Mylar

97 x 61-1/2 inches

Courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York

Wangechi Mutu

"Old Blue Eyes"

2009, Mixed Media on Mylar

42 x 52 inches

Courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York