

# GLADSTONE GALLERY

**Wangechi Mutu**

515 West 24th Street

May 6 – June 25, 2021

Opening May 6, 10am – 6pm

Gladstone Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of new sculptures by Wangechi Mutu, and the East Coast premiere of two bronze works: *Crocodylus* and *MamaRay*. Drawing upon her sculptural practice, a core aspect of her work, this installation brings to life otherworldly alternatives to the systemic modes of representation portrayed throughout global traditions in art. Through an incisive re-examination of relations between the body, the natural world, and social forces, the works in this exhibition represent a new kind of hybridized humanity and iconography through the artist's intuitive and forward-thinking eye.

Mutu's bronze figures exude grace and mystery. Their powers are palpable, both through their postures and their dense materiality. The authority they wield offers a template for a new rethinking of our world order, wherein nature, mythology, and human life commingle.

Deeply rooted in art history, Mutu excavates the modes of representation throughout recorded time to arrive at new forms of womanhood with an eye towards an undiscovered future. In *Crocodylus*, the human figure is perched on top of a gigantic reptile. Her legs tuck neatly under her own body and are embedded in the animal's abdomen, giving the crocodile additional equilibrium. The rider harnesses the animal's strength with her hands inside its enormous jaws, unafraid and unconcerned of its pattern of sharp teeth, mirrored in her own mouth. Both the woman and the crocodile are wrapped in a stylized exoskeleton with unbroken lines running all the way up and down each of their bodies blending where one begins and the other ends.

This combination of human, hero and animal is portrayed in Mutu's monumental work, *MamaRay*. This remarkable twelve feet wide, partly human, as well as part Manta ray, represents a chimeric relationship with power, poise, and dynamism.

*MamaRay's* body envelops and emerges from the space around her, demonstrating a harmony of balance and strength, as well as a tenderness encapsulated by the sheer force of nature. Employing similar techniques in her earliest painting-collages and assemblage works, which critique the power of unequal representation that regulate the aesthetic and symbolic status of the gendered and racialized body, Mutu's three-dimensional hybrid humanoid figures propose a new kind of heroic image, the triumphant goddess female.

Concurrent to this show, the Legion of Honor Museum in San Francisco, California presents "Wangechi Mutu: I Am Speaking, Are You Listening?" a site-specific exhibition of new and recent sculpture, painting collage, and film, on view from May 1 through November 7, 2021.

Wangechi Mutu was born in Nairobi, Kenya, and currently lives and works between Brooklyn, New York and Nairobi. She received her MFA from Yale University. In 2019, she inaugurated The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Facade Commission, with an exhibition entitled "The New Ones, will free Us." Her work has been the subject of numerous solo shows, including, "Wangechi Mutu: A Fantastic Journey", which traveled to: Brooklyn Museum, New York; Nasher Museum of Art, Durham, North Carolina; Museum of Contemporary Art North Miami; and Block Museum, Evanston, Illinois. Other solo exhibitions include: Institute of Contemporary Art Boston; The Contemporary Austin, Texas; SITE, Santa Fe; Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; Musée d'Art Contemporain de Montréal; Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin; Wiels Center for Contemporary Art, Brussels; Art Gallery of Ontario; Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego; Kunsthalle Wien; and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Mutu is the recipient of Deutsche Bank's "Artist of the Year" award, the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Grant, the Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters & Sculptors Award, and the American Federation of Arts' Leadership Award. Later this year, *MamaRay* will travel to the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, where it was commissioned for the collection. In October 2021, Mutu will be included in Prospect New Orleans' fifth edition, "Yesterday we said tomorrow."

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Arthur Jafa  
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For further information, please contact Andrew Huff: [ahuff@gladstonegallery.com](mailto:ahuff@gladstonegallery.com)  
New York gallery hours: Tuesday–Saturday, 10am–6pm  
Brussels gallery hours: Tuesday–Friday, 10am–6pm and Saturday, 12pm–6pm