

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Goldstein, Andrew M., "Wangechi Mutu wins Deutsche Bank 'Artist of the Year' award,"
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Wangechi Mutu wins Deutsche Bank "Artist of the Year" award

By Andrew M. Goldstein

Wangechi Mutu, a multimedia artist best known for her fantastical, politically and socially engaged collages addressing the African diaspora, has been named winner of Deutsche Bank's first "Artist of the Year" award. As part of the honor, the 37-year-old artist will receive a survey of her work opening this April at the Deutsche Guggenheim, which is run in partnership with the bank. A selection of her works on paper will be acquired for the Deutsche Bank Collection and dispersed among its various offices.

Mutu, who was born in Nairobi, Kenya, and is now based in New York, was selected for the award by the Guggenheim's Nancy Spector, Berlin Nationalgalerie director Udo Kittelmann, and independent curators Okwui Enwezor and Hou Hanru. At an award luncheon in New York, Enwezor — who has known Mutu for 15 years and included her in his 1997 Johannesburg Biennale — said their choice arose from "a conversation among colleagues about our deepest passions" that eventually led them to Mutu.

"Her body of work is one that is very much engaged with the global image ecology, and her engagement with the archeology of that ecology is what makes it interesting," Enwezor said, praising the artist for her "constant excavation of her process, the constant excavation of her own ideas, and her breaking boundaries within that."

Enthusiating that "there could be no better person to start with than Wangechi Mutu," Deutsche Bank global head of art Friedhelm Hütte said the organization gave the artist "carte blanche for [her show] so I think it will be a little different from her shows and installations before." There are discussions underway to tour the exhibition through South Africa and Asia after the Deutsche Guggenheim show closes on June 13, he added. "It's not just a singular project, it's bringing together different aspects of global art in Deutsche Bank," Hütte said. "It underlines the importance of contemporary art to corporate culture. We believe that it plays a big part with Deutsche bank, and we will go on with that."

In a sweetly modest speech, Mutu accepted the award with a touch of wry humor: "I don't know how a bank and an art group get together and do something like this, but it works, and it's amazing."

Deutsche Bank, which began its world-class collection of works on paper as a cultural gesture to improve its image after the fall of the Third Reich, first recognized artists with a different award discordantly called "Artist of the Business Year," which was given between 1980 and 1995 to artists including Neo Rauch and Kara Walker.



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