

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Stern, Melissa. "Hunt, Bury, Flee: Drawings By Wangechi Mutu." *CityArts*. November 2010.

Hunt, Bury, Flee: Drawings By Wangechi Mutu

By [Melissa Stern](#)

Wangechi Mutu makes some of the most unsettling and potent drawings in recent memory. Her debut New York show at Barbara Gladstone Gallery is both haunting and disturbing—and I mean that as a compliment. The exhibition, titled *Hunt, Bury, Flee*, is a dazzling series of giant drawings, each portraying the African woman, writ large, in a state of raw conflict.

The works are meticulous in composition and craftsmanship. Mutu uses a wildly diverse group of materials including glitter, inks, paint, paper and beads in her work. In addition, she mines a far-ranging array of photographic sources, from fashion magazines to pornography to documentary content, to create richly layered images. The drawings are both subtle and boldly disquieting. Viewed up close, one is able to pick out the meticulously collaged photographic elements. Backing away we see that the entire surface coalesces into one unified image. Difficult to describe, they simply must be seen to feel the full depth of color, texture and meaning that is so very alive in these pieces.

The content of many of the drawings is seductive and terrifying. This is a cool and carefully calculated artist. She portrays both the beautiful and the horrible. Undercurrents of violence and sex are palpable throughout Mutu's work. Her women are fighting, copulating and fleeing from a variety of creatures. Snakes and birds abound, playing on all of the mythological and psychological aspects of their interactions with women. The levels of image and meaning are mesmerizing.

These portraits of the modern African abound in the contradictions of living in several worlds simultaneously. The women are sex objects, enslavers, victims and oppressors all at once. The gallery press release makes a hard case for the political, neo-colonialist and economic discourse of Mutu's work, but for me, the complexities and psychological content of her vision transcend issues of race and nationality. They dare to address deeper and more intimate questions of the female psyche. This is a daring show that warrants serious attention.

Through Dec. 4, Barbara Gladstone Gallery, 515 W. 24th St., 212-206-9300.