In the diptych Yo Mama, Mutu gives a shout out to Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, the trailblazing Nigerian women’s rights advocate who fought against British colonialism. A female with luminous, mottled skin, knees, legs sprawled, on a planet. She holds the body of a white snake entangled on a distant sphere. Her sutured head joins its decapitated head. Little black orbs, representing the African Diaspora, float off into the pink sky. She knows how to tell a story.

Family Tree is a series of 13 collaged portraits arranged to show the lineage of a couple. In this family, all the members are female – including the original parents. Behind these strange amalgamated faces the message is loud and clear – a feeling of empowerment is palpable.

Viewing this video is like watching a feral animal consume something it doesn’t need.

In her first animation, The end of eating Everything, an Egyptian–eyed woman (played by recording artist Santigold) with medusa hair and a body as big as an island, lumbers through space. Her characteristic mottled skin glows like molten lava. Straining from her bulk, she gorges on a flock of birds until she explodes into lots of little heads that spiral away. Is it the end of a cycle or the exponential beginning of more?

Wangechi Mutu’s work can be read as an epic Afro-feminist manifesto. Wrestling with one political and cultural stereotype after another she rewrites the script and the victims becomes the victor. We are not spared the terrible struggle, the blood, the anguish, but in looking we share in the triumph.


The Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia will host the largest international survey of Mutu’s work May 23 – August 14, 2013.