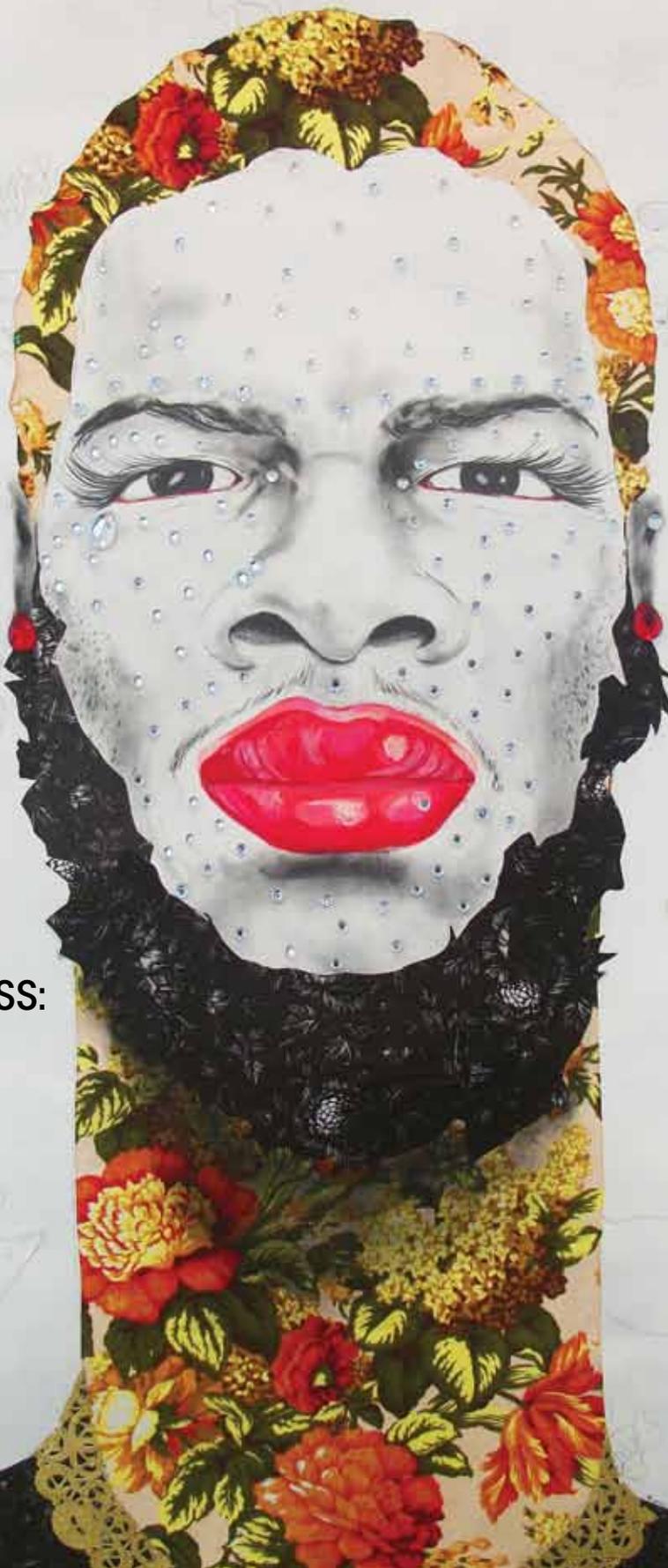


IRAAA

THE INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ART



**TRIPLE
CONSCIOUSNESS:**
Diasporic Art in
the American
Context

Ebony Patterson's
Dancehall Politics

María Magdalena
Campos-Pons:
Portfolio

Ivory Coast's
Biennale Debut

REVIEWS



LaToya Ruby Frazier
Self-Portrait
(March 10 a.m.),
2009
gelatin silver
photograph,
19½ x 15 in.
Courtesy of the
Brooklyn Museum

sites, including the local hospital over the course of its final years. An example of the intersection between public and private experience has Frazier (in mirror-view) and her mother inside a tavern that clings to life in the shadow of the neighboring hospital's ruins.

The exhibit also includes still-life compositions that reflect on the main characters—from Joseph Cornell-type arrangements of Ruby's kitschy dolls to a nightstand with family photos and a comb with entangled hairs—and betray the restrained codes of communication and love in this isolated family unit. In perhaps the most provocative image, Frazier depicts her mother and a boyfriend relaxing (clothed) in awkward positions on a bed, which, in the context of the overall narrative, reinforces the survivalist sense of openness and mutual support between mother and

daughter. It was not surprising to learn that Frazier's mother has collaborated with her on her photography, not only as a model but in developing ideas for various series. Frazier clearly conveys the blurred boundary between art and life in her works of art.

Several mixed-media works, which include found objects and photographs etched on aluminum, extend the regional and personal history Frazier constructs in *A Haunted Capital* back to Carnegie and colonial ancestry. These works indicate promising new directions for the artist; however, they are overshadowed by Frazier's emotionally-loaded straight photographs.

A Haunted Capital is on view at the Brooklyn Museum through August 11, 2013.

Jody B. Cutler is an art historian based in New York.

Wangechi Mutu

A FANTASTIC JOURNEY
NASHER MUSEUM OF ART AT
DUKE UNIVERSITY
DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA
MARCH 21–JULY 21, 2013

Play and politics are constantly writhing just beneath the surface in *Wangechi Mutu: A Fantastic Journey*. Though the title brings to mind associations of 1960s and 70s sci-fi, Wangechi Mutu's Afro-futurist worlds forego phallic space rockets and clunky robots for a darker and deeply feminist terrain. Her collages, sculptures, drawings, and films are populated with powerful female bodies that cross between worlds and span generations.

Born in Nairobi, Kenya, Mutu's educational drive brought her to earn a BFA at the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art and an MFA in sculpture at Yale University. Though she is best known for her collages, Mutu's full artistic genealogy is represented in *A Fantastic Journey*, which is a mid-career survey. Sculptural elements installed throughout the exhibition bind the show together. In particular, felt cloth is used throughout the gallery, as wall coverings and sculptural formations.

One of Mutu's iconic transformative female figures crosses a terrain constructed of this gray felt. A hybridized being made of human, wood, coyote, snake, and motorcycle components, this cyborg creature refuses to be contained by a frame. Mutu describes this figure as a "triumphant warrior female." Composed directly on the gallery wall, this warrior sets a tone for the exhibition that will be recreated at subsequent venues.

Mutu weaves metaphorical references from African liberation politics and the legacy of Atlantic slavery to contemporary pop music and global consumer culture. One of her most famous collages, *Yo Mama*, 2003, pays homage to Funmilayo Anikulapo-Kuti, the pioneering African politician and mother of musician Fela Kuti. In this image, a female figure pierces the body of a serpent with the spiked



Wangechi Mutu, *The End of Eating Everything* (still), 2013
 animated video (color, sound), eight-minute loop, edition of six
 Courtesy of the artist

heel of her boot. Floating on a grassy planet, she crouches amidst black stars and celestial bodies that are described as symbols of the African Diaspora. These spheres are echoed in *Suspended Play Time*, 2008/2013, an installation of balls made of black plastic suspended by twine and bound in gold string. These balls echo both Mutu's imagined worlds and the improvised toys made throughout the world by children who cannot afford soccer balls.

Political undertones float throughout *A Fantastic Journey*. A haunting version of "Amazing Grace" sung in the Kenyan language Kikuyu blends together diasporic identities; the music accompanies an image of Mutu wading into the Atlantic. While Mutu slowly disappears into the site of the middle passage, her Kikuyu lyrics insert her own empathetic interpretation of the painful history that binds the Americas and Africa.

Alternative hip-hop star Santigold performs the role of a fantastical monster in Mutu's most recent video work. Floating in a polluted celestial space while



Wangechi Mutu
Suspended Playtime, 2008/2013
 packing blankets, twine, garbage bags, and gold string; dimensions variable
 Courtesy of the artist and Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects

REVIEWS



Wangechi Mutu
Once Upon a Time She Said, I'm Not Afraid and Her Enemies Became Afraid of Her the End,
2013
mixed media, dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist



Wangechi Mutu
Yo Mama, 2003
ink, mica flakes, pressure-sensitive synthetic polymer sheeting, cut-and-pasted printed paper,
painted paper, and synthetic polymer paint on paper; overall: 59 1/8 x 85 in.
Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art, New York

chasing and eating all she sees, Santigold's character eventually implodes under the weight of her own gravity. In a MOCATv interview featuring both artists, they assert that their collaboration is a reflection of consumption and excess.

Within the exhibition, Mutu also has allowed for facsimiles of her sketchbooks to be displayed; these raw images provide glimpses of the artist's journey through the wilds of the international art world. At only forty, Mutu has already earned a place within a group of esteemed artists who revel in internal fantasies, invented personas, and possible futures. We can only speculate how the next forty years will shape Mutu's vision.

Wangechi Mutu: A Fantastic Journey is on view until July 21, 2013, at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University.

Elizabeth Perrill is an art historian specializing in ceramics and contemporary African art.

MORE INFO

After its display at the Nasher Museum of Art (March 21–July 21, 2013) *Wangechi Mutu: A Fantastic Journey* will be shown at the following venues:

The Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York, September 2013

Museum of Contemporary Art North Miami, April 2014

Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art at Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, September 2014