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NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY NEWS

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FOR RELEASE: September 8, 2014

THE BLOCK MUSEUM PRESENTS ‘WANGECHI MUTU: A FANTASTIC JOURNEY’

Internationally renowned artist transforms galleries with magnetic artworks and installations

- *Afrofuturist artist known for compelling hybrid female figures in otherworldly landscapes*
- *Beauty used to address issues of racism, gender inequality, war and environment*
- *Related free talks, panels and screenings across Northwestern campuses and Chicago*
- *Global, interdisciplinary content spotlights new vision of Northwestern museum*

EVANSTON, Ill. --- Full-scale figurative collages, gigantic felted trees and an immersive environment will transform Northwestern University’s [Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art](#) this fall when it presents [“Wangechi Mutu: A Fantastic Journey.”](#)

Organized by the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, the exhibition is the first U.S. survey for [Wangechi Mutu](#), a contemporary African artist and sculptor who has achieved great global acclaim for her works in a diverse range of artistic media.

The comprehensive exhibition featuring her thought-provoking and rich imagery opens Sept. 19 and runs through Dec. 7 at the Block Museum, the show’s sole Midwest region venue. (See below a listing of free fall 2014 events that will complement “A Fantastic Journey,” including film screenings, interdisciplinary gallery talks and a lecture by Wangechi Mutu.)

Mutu is best known for large-scale collages depicting powerful hybrid female figures in lush, otherworldly landscapes. Many of her most iconic works are included in “A Fantastic Journey,” which features more than 50 works from the mid-1990s to the present.

[The New York Times](#) describes the exhibit as “magnetic...visually ravishing” art that is “at what has to be some kind of peak moment.”

The exhibit includes rarely seen early works, new creations, sketches and the artist’s first-ever animated video, titled “The End of eating Everything,” featuring singer/songwriter [Santigold](#) as a mysterious part human, part cyborg protagonist whose monstrous appetite evokes critical societal issues involving human consumption.

The artist and members of her studio will transform the Block into an environmental installation that draws viewers directly into Mutu’s vision, including a monumental wall drawing made of materials such as soil from Kenya, the country where she was born. It

promises to be one of the most ambitious presentations of work by a contemporary artist ever seen at the Block.

“Wangechi Mutu’s work marks a new direction for our museum,” says Block Director Lisa Corrin. “We will exhibit art across time and cultures and focus on innovative approaches to the presentation of art, such as Mutu’s transformation of our main gallery from a white box into a mysterious forest.”

Mutu was born in Nairobi, Kenya, and has lived in New York since the early 1990s. Her work explores issues of gender, race, war, globalization, colonialism and the eroticization of the black female body. She creates mysterious composite figures pieced together with human, animal, machine and monster parts. She often combines found materials and magazine cutouts with sculpted and painted imagery, drawing from sources as diverse as international politics, African ethnography, fashion, eroticism and science fiction to produce an Afrofuturist vision.

“Wangechi Mutu’s work explores the complexity of African identity in the United States, where it is often oversimplified,” said Kathleen Bickford Berzock, associate director of curatorial affairs at the Block Museum.

“This topic is incredibly relevant at Northwestern, which is home to an active, longstanding African studies program and the globally recognized [Herskovits Africana Library](#),” she said. “More broadly, Mutu’s work moves beyond any single identity and speaks universally about the complexity of identity and its representation through space and time.”

In presenting the work of rising star Mutu, the Block continues along a dynamic trajectory. Last year’s widely acclaimed “Left Front” exhibition was called “pioneering” by The [Wall Street Journal](#) and “groundbreaking” by the [Chicago Sun-Times](#), showcasing how the Block has become a vital part of the arts landscape in Chicago. With “A Fantastic Journey,” the [museum reinforces its commitment](#) to presenting global, contemporary art and programming that engages the community with the important issues of our time.

“As a University art museum, we are in a unique position to offer encounters with art through our exhibitions and programs that have a distinct texture,” said Corrin. “Innovation and creativity are core values for a major research university, and they abound at Northwestern in every field of study, from engineering and medicine to journalism and law. Shaping opportunities for the broad public to experience an artist’s creative processes, as well as making unexpected connections between art and other fields of study, is a significant part of our engagement efforts.”

“A Fantastic Journey” opened at the Nasher Museum in July 2013 and has since traveled nationally to the Brooklyn Museum, New York, and the Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami. The Block is its final venue. The exhibition is curated by Trevor Schoonmaker, the Patsy R. and Raymond D. Nasher Curator of Contemporary Art at the Nasher Museum. At the Block, Berzock and Dan Silverstein, senior manager of exhibitions and collections, have collaborated closely with the artist on the Block’s unique presentation of the exhibition.

“Wangechi Mutu: A Fantastic Journey” is accompanied by a richly illustrated 160-page, full-color catalogue that will be available for purchase at the Block. The catalogue includes many images that highlight the most important and iconic works Mutu has created since the mid-1990s, as well as illustrating new collages, drawings, videos and site-specific installations. It offers an intimate look into Mutu’s sketchbooks and includes an interview with the artist conducted by exhibition curator Schoonmaker. Essays by Schoonmaker, art historian Kristine Stiles and Greg Tate, critic and musician, are paired with an illustrated chronology of Mutu’s work.

“Wangechi Mutu: A Fantastic Journey” is made possible by the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. Major support is provided by Marilyn M. Arthur, the Ford Foundation, the Mary Duke Biddle Foundation, Katherine Thorpe and Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects. Additional generous support was provided by Duke University’s Council for the Arts; Gladstone Gallery, New York; Victoria Miro Gallery, London; and the North Carolina Arts Council, a division of the Department of Cultural Resources.

Support for the presentation at the Block Museum has been provided by the Diane and Craig Solomon Contemporary Art Fund and an anonymous donor.

Additional generous support has been provided by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency.

The Block Museum is located at 40 Arts Circle Drive, on the University’s Evanston campus. Admission to the opening celebration and events complementing “Wangechi Mutu: A Fantastic Journey” (listed below) are free. For more information, visit <http://www.blockmuseum.northwestern.edu> or call 847-491-4000.

EVENTS COMPLEMENTING “WANGECHI MUTU: A FANTASTIC JOURNEY”

The Block offers a unique context for Wangechi Mutu’s work, as Northwestern curricula frequently explore issues of racial stereotyping, femininity and sexuality, and environmental destruction. To highlight these connections and offer a multi-faceted experience of the exhibition, the Block has collaborated with the Women’s Center, the department of African American studies, Multicultural Student Affairs and One Book One Northwestern, among others.

• **Opening Day Celebration, 2 to 5 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 27, Artist Talk at the Josephine Louis Theatre, 20 Arts Circle Drive.** Mutu will provide an overview of her work and participate in a conversation with Northwestern’s [Huey Copeland](#), associate professor of art history.

• **Block Cinema Fantastic Voyages Series Screening: “Space Is the Place” (John Coney, 1974, United States, 35mm, 85 minutes), 7 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 16, at the Block Museum, 40 Arts Circle Drive.** This Afrofuturistic extravaganza, directed by Coney, stars the

inimitable jazz musician and far-out futurist Sun Ra, who travels through space and time to save the black race while pursued by the FBI.

• **Block Cinema Fantastic Voyages Series Screening, “Fantastic Planet” (Renee Laloux, 1973, France and Czechoslovakia, 35mm, 72 minutes), 7 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 30, at the Block Museum.** Rene Laloux’s animated cult classic “Fantastic Planet” -- which inspired artist Mutu’s video ‘The End of eating Everything’ -- shows a terrifying future in which human-like beings are kept as pets or exterminated by giant blue creatures. **Please note: Due to its violent and sexual content this film may be unsuitable for younger audiences.**

• **Panel Discussion, Voyaging the Fantastic, “Afrosurrealism and Afrofuturism in Wangechi Mutu and Contemporary Black Art,” 2 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 1, at the Block Museum.** Moderated by Northwestern faculty member [Alexander Weheliye](#), this roundtable will bring together preeminent Chicago-based black artists D. Denenge Akpem, Krista Franklin and Cauleen Smith for a conversation that takes Mutu’s work as a springboard for consideration of the place of Afrosurrealism and Afrofuturism in contemporary black art.

• **Panel Discussion, “Deploying and Shattering Stereotypes,” 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 12, at the Block Museum.** Joy Bivins, curator, Chicago History Museum and organizer of the recent exhibition, “Inspiring Beauty: 50 Years of Ebony Fashion Fair;” Maud Lavin, faculty member and cultural historian, School of the Art Institute of Chicago; and [Kathleen Bickford Berzock](#), the Block’s associate director of curatorial affairs and an expert on African art, will explore Mutu’s work as a starting point for considering and challenging stereotypes around women and the body, blackness and what it is to be African.

• **Interdisciplinary Gallery Talk, 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 19, at the Block Museum.** Join [Melika Bass](#), Northwestern faculty member, department of radio/television/film; Antawan Byrd, Northwestern Ph.D. candidate in art history; and Sakhile Matlhare, Northwestern Ph.D. in sociology, as they bring their diverse perspectives to an in-gallery conversation about the exhibition “Wangechi Mutu: A Fantastic Journey.”

CONSTRUCTION ALERT

A long-term construction project on Northwestern’s south campus has limited access to the Block Museum and Arts Circle Drive. Free parking is available after 4 p.m. in the lot directly south of the museum. For directions and additional parking information, visit www.blockmuseum.northwestern.edu/visit/directions-and-parking/index.html.

ABOUT THE MARY AND LEIGH BLOCK MUSEUM OF ART

The Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art is the fine arts museum of Northwestern University and Chicago’s North Shore. It serves the academic and cultural needs of the University and community with thought-provoking exhibitions, a rich and diverse permanent collection, and dynamic educational and cultural programming.



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