

Sant'Andrea de Scaphis

WANGECHI MUTU

CLEANING EARTH

SEPTEMBER 10 - OCTOBER 25, 2025

Wangechi Mutu Solo Exhibition, *Cleaning EARTH*, Opens September 10th, 2025 at Sant'Andrea de Scaphis in Rome. Presentation brings together works from throughout Mutu's career in a collective sense of contemplation, transformation and ritual.

On September 10th, Sant'Andrea de Scaphis presents a solo exhibition by Kenyan-born, New York-based artist Wangechi Mutu. The presentation brings together two sculptures and one video work from a range of points in Mutu's more than 25-year career, with the aim to instill a sense of prayer and ritual sacrifice through rhythm, chanting, and depictions of the body. This exhibition grows out of Mutu's longstanding experimentation with themes of femininity, Afrofuturism, identity and spirituality. *Cleaning EARTH* is on view September 10 through October 25.

The presentation is anchored by *Mountain Mama* (2024), a powerful guardian figure who embodies ancestral memory, resistance, and rebirth, and also one of Mutu's latest sculptural works that debuted at the 15th Dakar Biennale as part of her site-specific installation *A Palace in Pieces* (2024). Rising from a tiered base, wrapped in deep red ribbons, the sculpture appears to grow organically from the earth beneath her, molded from volcanic soil that echoes the land and labor that sustain her people. Draped in flowing red-soil, colored forms and folds, *Mountain Mama* resembles both a mountain and a maternal figure—an enduring symbol of shelter, fortitude, and defiance. The title of the work is inspired by the location of the Mau Mau freedom fighters, who waged a strong anti-colonial struggle. Mutu's installation at the Dakar Biennale included the figure standing as a sentinel against the former Supreme Court chamber, a place that once enforced colonial rule, and in this instance, reclaimed by this elemental, feminine force.

In conversation with *Mountain Mama* is a video work depicting a woman whose action embodies the ferocity and futility of work and war waged against powerful forces both human-made and natural. In *Cleaning Earth* (2006), projected on an altar inside the historic gallery, this character appears on her hands and knees laboriously scrubbing a dirt floor with water and a brush. The effort becomes increasingly futile as she becomes dirty from merely pushing the mud around in sweeping circles.

Imposing a divine oversight onto the presentation is one of Mutu's earliest known sculptural works, *Maria* (1997), a contemporary/de-colonial interpretation of the Holy Virgin Mary created during the artist's years as a student at Cooper Union and exhibited at the 2nd Johannesburg Biennial in 1997, curated by Okwui Enwezor. Incorporating found objects, such as a doll head Mutu found on the city streets, the small-figure draws inspiration from the aesthetics of Vodún, Santería, Candomblé, and other African diasporic religions, as well as "minkisiminkondi"—Kongo statues that are believed to host spirits. Framing *Maria* on the façade of the church, a traditional *khanga* textile bears a message in Swahili: "*Vita umevipiga mwendo umeumaliza amani umeilinda*" ("You've fought the war / You've finished your journey / You've guarded your peace"), a reference to Timothy 4:7.

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Wangechi Mutu (b.1972, Nairobi, Kenya) lives and works between Brooklyn and Nairobi. She received her MFA from Yale University (2000) and BFA from Cooper Union (1996). In 2019, she inaugurated The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Facade Commission, with an exhibition entitled *The New Ones, will free Us*. Her work has been the subject of numerous solo shows, including, *Intertwined*, at the New Museum, New York (2023) and traveled to the New Orleans Museum of Art, Louisiana (2024). Other solo exhibitions include: Storm King Art Center, New Windsor, New York; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Weatherspoon Art Museum at UNC Greensboro, North Carolina; Brooklyn Museum, New York; Nasher Museum of Art, Durham, North Carolina; Museum of Contemporary Art North Miami; Block Museum, Evanston, Illinois; Institute of Contemporary Art Boston; The Contemporary Austin, Texas; SITE, Santa Fe; Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; Musée d'Art Contemporain de Montréal; Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin; Wiels Center for Contemporary Art, Brussels; Art Gallery of Ontario; Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego; Kunsthalle Wien; and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Mutu is the recipient of Deutsche Bank's "Artist of the Year" award, the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Grant, the Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters & Sculptors Award, and the American Federation of Arts' Leadership Award.