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Wangechi Mutu

ABOUT

Born

1972 (Nairobi, Kenya)

Education

Cooper Union for the Advancement of Arts and
Science, BFA
Yale University, MFA

Lives and Works

New York City and Nairobi

About the Artist

Wangechi Mutu's collages, drawings, sculptures, and films center the female body to create powerful and self-possessed figures that are hybrids of human, plant, animal, and machine forms. Sampling from a diverse array of sources—from natural materials to fashion magazines, medical diagrams, and traditional African arts—the artist creates otherworldly realms that examine cultural identity, the feminine, colonial history, and global consumption.

TEACHING CONNECTIONS

Media and Materials

collage
drawing
sculpture

Key Words and Ideas

colonize	hybrid
consumption	identity
femininity	memory
home	nature

Related Artists

John Akomfrah	Kimsooja
Laylah Ali	Zanele Muholi
Janine Antoni	Catherine Opie
Ida Applebroog	Cindy Sherman
Firelei Baez	Shahzia Sikander
Leonardo Drew	Kiki Smith
LaToya Ruby Frazier	Nancy Spero
Ellen Gallagher	Carrie Mae Weems
Doreen Garner	

"I've always been a city girl with
a nature brain." —Wangechi Mutu

How to Use This Guide

Art21 encourages active engagement when teaching with our films. The questions and activities below are recommendations for incorporating Art21 films featuring Wangechi Mutu into your classroom. Each class will likely require different adaptations for best results.

NOTE: Please view all films before sharing them with your students. In the film *Between the Earth and the Sky*, there are suggestions of nudity.

Before Viewing

Establish key ideas, in anticipation of viewing the film(s):

- ① What kinds of things do artists have to think about and plan for when creating works that are intended to be seen outdoors?
- ② Choose a memory that has helped to shape the way you live or work. Why has this memory affected you this way?
- ③ Describe a female role model or hero. What makes this person a role model or hero in your eyes?

While Viewing

Support active viewing, and pause the film to clarify particular ideas:

- ① How is Mutu's work connected to nature in different ways?
- ② What kinds of memories inform Mutu's work? How?
- ③ List adjectives that describe the female figures Mutu creates.

After Viewing

Follow-up on key ideas and synthesize information learned from the film(s):

- ① Mutu says, "I want to make work that sits within nature." Why do you think she intends for some works to be viewed this way?
- ② Discussing works such as *The New One*, *Will Free Us* and *Sentinels*, Mutu states, "The way we worship the image of a woman but denigrate the actual human being—that schism bothers me." What do you think she means by this?

Related Activities

Engaging in creative activities after watching Art21 films can reinforce learning and stimulate ideas. Art21 encourages educators to adapt these activities to their classrooms.

- ✓ Design a work of art that, as Mutu says, "sits within nature," and create a plan that will protect the work from inclement weather. Photograph your work in the setting you choose and share with classmates your process for not only making the work but also choosing the space to display it.
- ✓ How might you share a memory using methods aside from storytelling and art making? Compose a song or write a poem that is inspired by a particular memory.
- ✓ Use a role model or hero as a starting point for a work of visual art, a written story, or a performance. What kinds of details about this person will influence the work and be communicated to the audience?