



WOMEN ON THE RISE!

## TEACHING INSTRUCTIONS: **Wangechi Mutu**

### THEMES:

- African Culture
- Representation of women
- Fashion / beauty ideals
- Consumerism
- Conflict in Rwanda

### FEATURED WORKS:

Mutu's collage works (no specific pieces—instructor's choice)

### RESOURCES:

#### *Links to images*

- [http://www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/artists/wangechi\\_mutu.htm](http://www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/artists/wangechi_mutu.htm)
- [http://vielmetter.com/artists/Mutu/exhibition\\_mutu\\_2.html](http://vielmetter.com/artists/Mutu/exhibition_mutu_2.html)

#### *Books*

- *Wangechi Mutu: A Shady Promise* edited by Douglas Singleton (2008): Damiani
- *Writing Your Way: Creating a Personal Journal* by Ellen Jaffe (2001): Sumach Press

### DISCUSSION POINTS AND QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS:

- Ask students to tell you what words/images come to mind in relation to “Africa”. List these on a black board or other display device. Generate questions regarding the words/images they provided. Are they stereotypical? How do they represent and imagine life on the continent? Is it modern or “primitive”?
- Do students feel that beauty advertisements/ideals have a significant affect on how individuals and groups view themselves and behave?
- Have they heard about the violence in Rwanda before?
- How would they describe the women in Mutu's collages? Are they monstrous? Victims? Are they free? Do they seem like they are having fun? Are they more human or cyborg? Do they look like they belong on Earth?

## **MATERIALS FOR HANDS-ON PROJECT: Wangechi Mutu**

### ***Cyborg Collage***

- Photocopies of beauty advertisements from fashion magazines
- Watercolors
- Brushes
- Scissors
- Markers of assorted thickness
- Glue
- Watercolor or other heavy paper
- Feathers and other collage materials

### **PROCEDURE FOR HANDS-ON PROJECT:**

Wangechi Mutu's collages that incorporate images culled from fashion magazines inspire this project. Students will be encouraged to create cyborgs using fragments of model's bodies and other images such as jewelry, shoes, and other luxury commodities.

- Students will create a watercolor wash background/pattern on the paper
- As the paint dries they will select the advertisements they will use to create their cyborg
- Students will cut images and arrange a composition prior to gluing them on the page
- Photocopy fragments are glued to the page
- Students will use markers and paints to embellish the image

### **APPLICABLE NATIONAL VISUAL ARTS STANDARDS (GRADES 5 -12):**

- NA—VA.5-8.1 (9-12.1): Understanding and Applying Media, Techniques, and Processes
- NA—VA.5-8.3 (9-12.3): Choosing and Evaluating A Range of Subject Matter, Symbols, and Ideas
- NA—VA.5-8.4 (9-12.4): Understanding the Visual Arts in Relation to History and Cultures



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## STUDENT HAND OUT: Wangechi Mutu

### Wangechi Mutu (born 1972 - Nairobi, Kenya)

Wangechi Mutu is best known for her collages of **hybrid** women made from fragments of advertisements from popular beauty magazines. The works include images of African masks and luxury items such as diamonds and designer-label shoes. Her science fiction inspired bodies are a response to the stereotype that African societies are “cultures of the past.” Although the countries of the African continent have large modern cities, many people view Africa as populated only by “primitive” tribes.

The women in Mutu’s work are symbols of the global influence of beauty ideals and images from the United States and Europe. She purposely disfigures the bodies in her work because she believes that women sometimes hurt themselves in order to achieve a perfect look. By making the idealized images in these advertisements grotesque and uncomfortable to look at, Mutu makes the viewer examine the negative aspects of **consumer culture**.

The artist’s focus on beauty issues is a commentary on the violence that escalated in 1994 in Rwanda in which tensions between the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic tribes resulted in the bloody **genocide** of approximately 800,000 people. One of the sources of the conflict between the tribes was due to the beauty ideals of the colonizing Europeans who believed that the Tutsi were superior because they were tall and slender, which made the Hutu believe they were thought of as inferior. Although it seems that images in magazines don’t pose a serious threat to anyone, Mutu shows how the ideas behind them can spark tragic events.

#### Vocabulary

**Hybrid** – Two or more different things combined into one.

**Consumer culture** – A term used to describe a culture centered on buying things.

**Genocide** - The systematic and planned extermination of an entire national, racial, political, or ethnic group.

