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2014/2015

The Original Nine Daughters (6 of 9)

Wangechi Mutu

Not on display

Title/Description: The Original Nine Daughters (6 of 9)

Artist/Maker: Wangechi Mutu

Born: 2012

Object Type: Print

Materials: Ink, Paper

Technique: aquatint, Collage, Etching

Measurements: h. 476 x w. 254 mm (unframed) h. 524 x w. 298 x d. 22 mm (framed)

Inscription: 2012 Wangechi 28/30

Accession Number: 50845f

Production Place: Africa, Kenya, North America, The Americas, USA

Copyright: © Wangechi Mutu

Credit Line: Purchased with support from the Art Fund, 2020

The Nine Daughters are part of the Kenyan creation myth, our Adam and Eve. The nine original tribes and clans come from there. They are all freakish poetic hybrids, not literal. Some prints make connections between Renaissance and Victorian etchings, but they are all esoteric. None of the scientific information is accurate. They also have pins in the body as markers of body parts and body types, which recur in my work. [1]

Wangechi Mutu

In the Kenyan creation myth, the daughters are the origins of the nine Kikuyu tribes. The myth resonates with the mythology of other cultures, for example the nine daughters of Zeus in Greek mythology. But by referencing the Kenyan creation myth, Mutu is situating the black woman as the origin. As Ashley Stull Meyers writes of this series:

They're described for their poetic hybridity - for being a combination of human women and goddesses with animal-like cleverness and understanding of the earth. They are mothers of black civilization. [2]

These daughters have claws, feathers, wings or antennae. Some are adorned with high boots or on stilts. They are variously seductive or comical. All are endearing and powerful.

Mutu's aesthetic encompasses science fiction and Afrofuturism. Afrofuturism explores the intersection of the African diaspora with technology, commenting on the black experience and the legacies of slavery. Afrofuturism often encompasses space imagery, a reminder of how immigrants are termed aliens and a response to the desire for liberation. Mutu is interested in the representation of extra-terrestrial aliens, pointing out that their image is always based on the most exotic immigrant at that time - always based on a human image, but one that is other to the white experience. [3] The figures in *The Original Nine Daughters* have pins and annotations marking out body parts, which are suggestive of Victorian scientific diagrams. This reference is a reminder of the racism underpinning much anthropology until the latter half of the twentieth century.

The Original Nine Daughters layers different printmaking techniques and materials. They are etchings with relief, letterpress, digital printing, collage, pochoir, hand colouring and handmade carborundum appliques. They have an incredible physicality. Mutu uses collage to repurpose images, extending their story and giving them another life. [4] In her works she has sourced images from books, magazines, scientific journals, nineteenth century prints or pornography. She comments on how the depiction of women is untruthful, even in commonly found contemporary magazines such as the National Geographic or fashion magazines. She creates new, powerful images of women.

Wangechi Mutu is a Kenyan-American artist and activist with studios in New York and Nairobi. She trained in sculpture and studied anthropology but came to prominence with her collages depicting fantastical, surreal female figures, fusing human, animal and vegetal parts. Her practice now encompasses printmaking, sculpture, installation, video and animation. Her work is a response to the trauma of colonialism and the violence and misrepresentation placed on black bodies. She says, that through the act of mutating the bodies, her depictions are 'some part disguise, some part camouflage, some part battle gear'. [5]

Wangechi Mutu made *The Original Nine Daughters* in an edition of 30 for Pace Editions.

Tania Moore, May 2021

[1] Wangechi Mutu in conversation with Zoé Whitley, 'International Geographic: Wangechi Mutu on Paper, Print and Printmaking', *Art in Print*, Volume 4, Number 4, 28 August 2014.

[2] Ashley Stull Meyers, 'The Poetics of Wangechi Mutu's Hybrid Human', in *Arts.Black*, 17 March 2016.

[3] 'Women and the Critical Eye - A Conversation with the Artist Wangechi Mutu', The Met, 28 July 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TMUFl_m1KI

[4] 'From Nairobi to New York: Advancing Afrofuturism with Wangechi Mutu', *Brilliant Ideas*, Episode 21, 2016: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUHEL8YLB9Q>

[5] 'The Light-Filled "Dream Studio" of Kenyan-American Artist Wangechi Mutu' in *WSJ Magazine*, 4 February 2021.

Exhibitions

'UnNatural History', Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, 28/05/2021 - 22/08/2021

Provenance

Bought from Victoria Miro Gallery 2020, with the New Collecting Award from the Art Fund, given to acquire sculptors' works on paper by contemporary women artists.

Previously owned by the artist.
