

ARTIST WANGECHI MUTU RECEIVES NATIONAL GALLERY CONTEMPORARY FELLOWSHIP WITH ART FUND

2026 National Gallery with Art Fund Contemporary Artist Fellowship Exhibition

The National Gallery, London (9 October 2027 - 5 March 2028) /

The Whitworth, Manchester (31 March - 10 September 2028)



Wangechi Mutu Contemporary Fellowship artist photographed in the National Gallery © Photo: The National Gallery, London

Internationally renowned artist Wangechi Mutu is to receive the second Contemporary Fellowship, awarded by the National Gallery, and supported by Art Fund and delivered in partnership with the Whitworth, The University of Manchester.

Wangechi Mutu (born 1972) is a Kenyan/American visual artist, known primarily for her painting, sculpture, film, and performance work. Born in Kenya, Mutu now divides her time between her studios in Nairobi and in Brooklyn, New York, where she has lived and worked for over 20 years.

The National Gallery Contemporary Fellowship with Art Fund is a pioneering, peer-to-peer collaboration with a non-London collecting institution, which this year is the Whitworth, a leading university art gallery in the north of England with exceptional collections of art and design. The Fellowship, which is awarded to an artist of

international standing and renown with a major body of work that has significantly contributed to 20th and 21st century art, is part of the National Gallery's Modern and Contemporary Programme, and a partnership with the Art Fund. The two-year programme will allow Mutu to work in close collaboration with the National Gallery and the Whitworth to study their collections to create new art work during 2026–28 for her first UK institutional exhibition. The Fellowship will be documented in a publication.

In collages, films, sculptures and installations Mutu reflects on a broad range of subjects that explore and reshape the narratives of womanhood, challenging misogynist tropes and violent representations of women, especially of Black women, that persist in the contemporary world. The images of women across art history, from mothers, virgins and goddesses, provide Mutu with potent source material for her work, reflecting cultural references as broad as science-fiction, mythology and Afro-futurism. More recently, Mutu has been producing images of worlds within worlds, populated by powerful female figures that represent the relationship to an ailing planet and ever-resilient ecosystems. Her practice has been described as engaging in her own unique form of myth-making, in which fact and fiction interweave to open up possibilities for another group of symbolic female figures, distinct from those that appear in either classical history or popular culture. Mutu was honoured by the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution in 2019 and by the Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in 2018. Her work will feature in the 61st International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, In Minor Keys by Koyo Kouoh.

The National Gallery Contemporary Fellowship is supported by Art Fund, which enabled an open call to public collecting institutions outside London to become the partner institution. The National Gallery's Modern and Contemporary Advisory Panel selected the Whitworth as the partner institution in recognition of the quality and international ambition of its programmes and collections. The Fellowship will culminate in an exhibition the National Gallery in October 2027 and at the Whitworth, in March 2028. Following its UK run, the exhibition will be available to tour internationally.

Dr Gabriele Finaldi, Director of the National Gallery, London, says: *'I am delighted that Wangechi Mutu is the recipient of the National Gallery's second Contemporary Fellowship. This appointment reflects the Gallery's longstanding commitment to contemporary artists. We look forward with great excitement to working with Wangechi, Art Fund and our partner institution in this year's Fellowship, the Whitworth in Manchester.'*

Dr Sook-Kyung Lee, Director of the Whitworth, The University of Manchester, says: *'We're delighted that the National Gallery has recognised the ambitious transnational programme at the Whitworth and we're delighted to be partnering on this project. Like the National Gallery, the Whitworth is committed to engaging new audiences by building bold exhibitions and creating new perspectives on our collections, centred on the voices of leading contemporary artists. We're incredibly excited to see what Wangechi Mutu develops and presents for all our audiences.'*

Jenny Waldman, Director of Art Fund, says: *'Wangechi Mutu is a remarkable artist whose powerful work fascinates audiences around the world, and we are delighted she's been selected for the second National Gallery Contemporary Fellowship with Art Fund. Inviting living artists to create work in conversation with public collections is an opportunity for the artist, the institution and the public to gain new perspectives on the art of the past and the present. I can't wait to see what Mutu will create over the next two years as she works closely with the inspiring collections in the Whitworth in Manchester and the National Gallery in London.'*

Wangechi Mutu is the second artist to be chosen for this Fellowship which has been created as part of the Gallery's Modern and Contemporary Programme. The inaugural Fellowship was awarded to Nalini Malani who had exhibitions of new work at the National Gallery and its partner for that Fellowship, the Holburne Museum, Bath. Malani's exhibition was one of the most visited in the National Gallery's history.

The National Gallery's Contemporary Fellowship is supported by Art Fund.

Art Fund

Exhibition supported by



Modern and Contemporary Art Partner
of the National Gallery

Notes to Editors

TOUR:

2026 National Gallery with Art Fund Contemporary Artist Fellowship Exhibition, Admission free

The National Gallery, London (9 October 2027 - 5 March 2028)

The Whitworth, Manchester (31 March - 10 September 2028)

About Wangechi Mutu

Born in 1972 in Nairobi, Kenya, Wangechi Mutu works in painting, collage, sculpture, film, and performance. In exploring and subverting visual tropes from popular culture, Mutu challenges dominant narratives around race, sexuality, ecology, and global politics to create her own form of mythmaking. Her work often counters the misrepresentation and oppression of women: hybrid figures, referencing cultural history, science fiction, and folklore, recur in her work as emblems of feminine agency.

Over the past two decades, Mutu has exhibited extensively in international forums. Recent solo exhibitions include Saint Louis Art Museum (2024), New Orleans Museum of Art (2024), New Museum, New York (2023), Storm King Art Center, New Windsor (2022), Legion of Honor, San Francisco (2021), and University of San Diego (2020). In 2019, Mutu was awarded the Metropolitan Museum of Art's inaugural Façade Commission. Her work was featured at the 56th Venice Biennale and has been presented in numerous exhibitions across Europe, including in London, Paris, Rome, Munich, and Vienna. Mutu was the Artist Honoree at the Smithsonian Institution in 2018 and the Hirschorn Museum in 2017. From June 10 to September 14, 2025, she becomes the first living female artist to exhibit at Rome's Galleria Borghese with *Black Soil Poems*.

About the National Gallery Contemporary Fellowship with Art Fund

Awarded to an artist of international standing and renown, the National Gallery Contemporary Fellowship with Art Fund is a two-year programme of research and development towards an exhibition. In partnership with a non-London collecting institution, the culminating exhibition will be presented at both venues and is accompanied by a catalogue, including newly commissioned work inspired by the collections at the National Gallery and partner institution. The inaugural Contemporary Fellowship was awarded to Nalini Malani in 2020 and culminated in the exhibition *My Reality is Different* and supporting catalogue, which was presented at the Holburne Museum, Bath, and at the National Gallery, London in 2022-23 and was seen by over 260,000 visitors. The next iteration of the Contemporary Fellowship coincides with the National Gallery's bicentenary and is a collaboration with the Whitworth, The University of Manchester. The Whitworth and the National Gallery share ambitions to exhibit the work of contemporary artists in dialogue with their historic collections and galleries.

The National Gallery Contemporary Fellowship with Art Fund was awarded by the National Gallery's Modern and Contemporary Advisory Panel who considered a list of nominated artists. These artists were proposed by internationally based nominators: Naomi Beckwith, Deputy Director and Chief Curator of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Diana Campbell Betancourt, Artistic Director for the Dhaka Art Summit, Dhaka, Donatien Grau, Head of

Contemporary Programmes, Musée de Louvre, Paris, and Andrea Lissoni, Director of Haus der Kunst, Munich, in dialogue with curators at the National Gallery and the Whitworth.

About the National Gallery's Modern and Contemporary Programme

Since its foundation, the National Gallery and its collection have been a source of inspiration for artists from all over the world. Established in 1824, the Gallery now holds a collection of over 2,500 paintings predominantly in the West European tradition dating from the mid-13th century to the early 20th century. With a strong commitment to showing international modern and contemporary art in conversation with its historic collection, the Contemporary Fellowship programme is at the heart of the Gallery's Modern and Contemporary Programme.

For nearly two centuries, the National Gallery's Collection has provided inspiration to contemporary artists. The National Gallery's Modern and Contemporary Programme continues this tradition through exhibitions, displays, commissions, and residencies. 2019 saw the unveiling of Bridget Riley's monumental wall painting *Messengers* in the Gallery's Annenberg Court. Other exhibitions within the programme have included *Kehinde Wiley: The Prelude*, *Sea Star: Sean Scully at the National Gallery* (13 April – 11 August 2019), *Young Bomberg and the Old Masters* (27 November 2019 – 1 March 2020) and *Rachel MacLean: The Lion and The Unicorn* (29 November 2018 – 3 February 2019). As well as the inaugural Contemporary Fellowship of Nalini Malani there have also been three National Gallery Artists in Residence, a new residency supported by the Contemporary Art Society and aimed at mid-career artists which replaces the Gallery's previous Associate Artist scheme. The first Artist in Residence in 2019-20 was Rosalind Nashashibi and the second was Ali Cheri whose residency exhibition opened with its residency partner for that year, the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry. The third Artist in Residence for 2023 was Céline Condorelli with its residency partner the Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery (RAMM) and the Gallery's fourth Artist in Residence, for 2024, is Katrina Palmer.

About the Whitworth, The University of Manchester

The Whitworth is proudly part of The University of Manchester, operating as a convening space between the University and the people of the city. Founded in 1889 for "the perpetual gratification of the people of Manchester" it continues this mission today in new contexts. The gallery, its park and gardens are home to an internationally significant collection of over 60,000 works of art, textiles, sculptures and wallpapers. It provides a platform for artists from around the world and has an established history of developing extraordinary exhibitions and commissions by leading contemporary artists including Cornelia Parker, Ibrahim Mahama, Suzanne Lacy, Raqs Media Collective, William Kentridge and Barbara Walker. The Whitworth is driven by a vision to actively seek and manifest connections between art, creativity, and their role in developing a more resilient and caring society through its exhibitions and award-winning civic engagement programme.

Gallery opening times: Tuesday to Sunday 10am-5pm, Thursday late opening until 9pm www.manchester.ac.uk/whitworth.

About Art Fund

Art Fund is the national charity for museums and galleries. For over 120 years, it has helped institutions across the UK to develop and share their collections, invest in people and expertise, grow their audiences and inspire the next generation.

Art Fund connects museums and people with great art and culture through funding, advocacy and initiatives, because access to art is vital for a healthy society. It champions the sector through the prestigious Art Fund Museum of the Year award - the world's largest museum prize - and supports museum professionals through dedicated training and grant programmes.

Independent and people-powered, Art Fund is supported by 142,000 members who buy a National Art Pass, as well as generous contributions from individuals, trusts and foundations. The National Art Pass offers free or discounted entry to hundreds of museums, galleries and historic places in the UK, 50% off major exhibitions, a subscription to Art Quarterly magazine and Art In Your Inbox newsletter.

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