

Alex Greenberger, "The 100 Best Artworks of the 21st Century," *ARTnews*, March 5, 2025

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The 100 Best Artworks of the 21st Century



BY The Editors of ARTnews, Art in America
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A global recession, a pandemic, 9/11, the Arab Spring, Brexit, the rise of Web 2.0, unrest in the face of economic stability, wars in Afghanistan, Ukraine, Gaza, and elsewhere: these were but a few of the many events that have defined the past 25 years, a period characterized by tumult and uncertainty. That all may explain why art appeared to change faster than ever all the while, with artists burning through styles and tendencies with each coming year.

With the 21st century now at the quarter point, we've taken the opportunity to pinpoint the **greatest artworks of the past 25 years** ourselves, it was no small task—one made more difficult by the restless creativity of artists during this period.

The joy of an epic list like this one is that it can't encapsulate everything: we know we've left some artworks off, simply because there was no shortage to choose from. We hope you'll **discover some amazing pieces here**, reflect on some the merits of others. And moreover, we hope to learn of new artworks through the conversations we hope our list inspires.

Below, a look back at the greatest 100 artworks of the 21st century so far, as selected by the editors of ARTnews and Art in America.

65 Wangechi Mutu, *Yo Mama*, 2003



Wangechi Mutu: *Yo Mama*, 2003.

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Wangechi Mutu had in mind a specific mother while creating this collage: Funmilayo Anikulapo-Kuti, whose son was the pioneering Nigerian musician Fela Kuti. Yet the woman shown here is just as easily a stand-in for many more women, specifically “all the mothers who give us our voices and empower us to be who we are and believe in our talents,” as Mutu put it in an interview published alongside her 2023 New Museum retrospective. Her subject is shown sinking a stiletto into the neck of a severed serpent, a “monster that managed to span two ... continents,” per Mutu, who has also said that the work shows opposites colliding: “African/European, archaic/modern, religion/pornography.” The result is a fantastical world filled with disco balls and gigantic jellyfish, with implicit critiques, unglued from reality, laying the ground for a whole new world. —A.G.