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## "Wangechi Mutu Awarded National Gallery Contemporary Fellowship in Landmark UK Collaboration," *ART PLUGGED*, April 28, 2026

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### ART PLUGGED™

ART NEWS



### Wangechi Mutu Awarded National Gallery Contemporary Fellowship in Landmark UK Collaboration

Art Fund and delivered this year with the Whitworth, The University of Manchester. The initiative pairs leading contemporary artists with public collections, opening a dialogue between historical works and present-day practice.

**Mutu**, born in Nairobi in 1972, has built an international reputation through a multidisciplinary practice that spans painting, sculpture, film and performance. She divides her time between studios in Nairobi and Brooklyn, where she has lived and worked for more than two decades. Her work will feature in the 61st International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, *In Minor Keys*, curated by Koyo Kouoh.

The **Fellowship** forms part of the **National Gallery's Modern and Contemporary Programme** and is awarded to an artist whose work has shaped the trajectory of 20th and 21st century art. Developed as a peer collaboration with a non-London institution, this edition partners with the Whitworth, recognised for its expansive collections and international outlook. Over the course of 2026 to 2028, Mutu will engage closely with both institutions, drawing on their holdings to produce a new body of work for her first UK institutional exhibition. The project will be accompanied by a publication.

Across collage, sculpture and immersive installations, Mutu interrogates the visual language surrounding womanhood. Her work challenges entrenched representations, particularly those imposed on Black women, while drawing from art history's recurring figures such as mothers, virgins and goddesses. These references intersect with science fiction, mythology and Afro-futurism, forming a layered visual vocabulary. In recent years, her practice has turned towards imagined ecosystems, where hybrid female figures inhabit unstable environments, reflecting ecological strain and resilience. Critics have often described her approach as a form of myth-making, where narrative and invention converge.

The Fellowship will culminate in an exhibition at the National Gallery in October 2027, followed by a presentation at the Whitworth in spring 2028. After its UK debut, the exhibition will tour internationally, extending the reach of the collaboration.

Sir 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

Mutu follows Nalini Malani, the inaugural Fellow, whose exhibitions at the National Gallery and the Holburne Museum in Bath drew record audiences. The programme continues with support from Art Fund and LG Electronics, reinforcing its ambition to connect contemporary practice with public collections across the UK and beyond.