



inspired by a tale about Leba's grandmother, who was bitten by a chameleon—a creature favored by the colonizers for its ability to change colors and blend with the environment. Once bitten, she was poisoned, but she eventually transformed into flowers, so that her integrity was restored. While Leba's fable lends a rich narrative to the work, the figure captures more generalized conditions of the laborers' lives. Her archetypal form, not characteristic of any one person, represents "every woman" of her generation in the Congo. Her stooped figure attacked by the chameleon symbolizes centuries of suppression.

Mbuku Kimpala's *Self Portrait without Clothes* (2014) also pays tribute to the strength of women. Although inspired by a self-portrait, a relatively young, naked woman is emblematic of the residents in her village. Her ease and comfort in her naked body convey a sense of pride. (Kimpala's

Above: Thomas Leba, *Poisonous Miracle*, 2015. Chocolate, 54.7 x 22.4 x 33.9 in. **Right:** Wangechi Mutu, installation view of "Ndoro Na Miti," 2017.

work, like Leba's, comes from a place of deep conviction.) The essence of the sculptures lies in how their nude, rudimentary forms channel the artists' emotions. Even Djonga Bismar's *The Spirit of Palm Oil* (2014), which shows a gesticulating naked woman, her body marred with warts of some kind, underscores defiance through the defenselessness of the nude body. As in 12th-century Indian temple sculptures, these works use nakedness as a symbol

of purity. In stark contrast, Jeremie Mabila and Djonga Bismar's *The Collector* (2014) showcases a vile-looking man in a suit—who presumably collects materials from the plantations—seated on a plinth entwined by creepers and snakes.

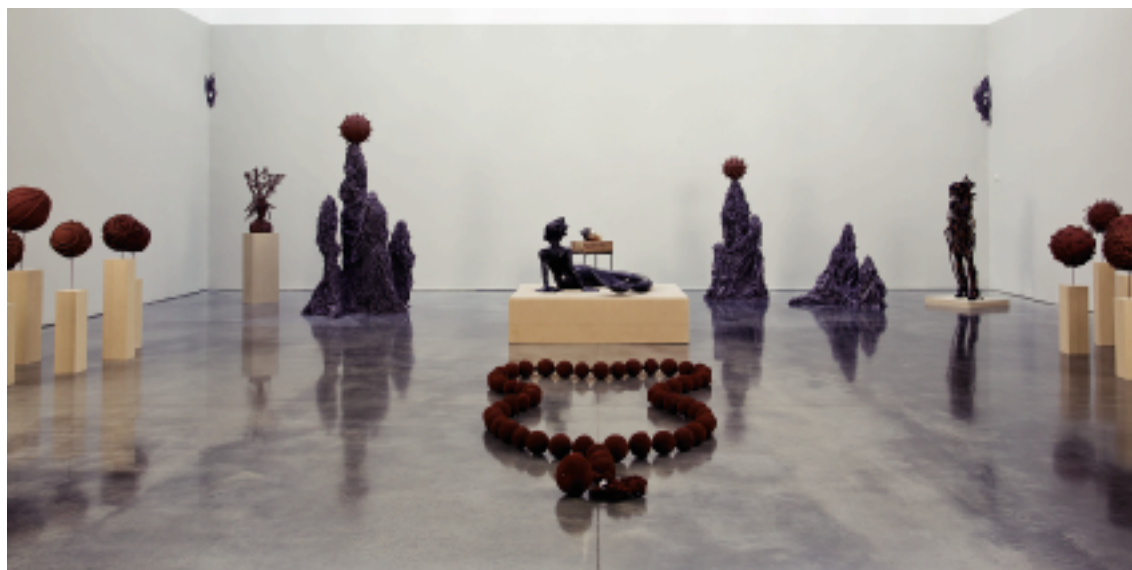
Perhaps CATPC's most laudatory project is the production of chocolate versions of these sculptures in Amsterdam. First made to circumvent the logistics of transporting the clay sculptures overseas, the chocolate reproductions also reinforce the fact that Amsterdam is one of the largest importers of cocoa from Congolese plantations. Leba's sculpture, along with the works by Kimpala and Bismar, were displayed in three shades of chocolate brown. The chocolate is worked to resemble the texture of clay, and editions of these works have been displayed in galleries all over Europe. By entering Western commerce through the sales of their sculptures to white-cube galleries and institutions like Tate Modern, where Unilever often supports exhibitions, the artists have found a way to gain access to their exploiters' wealth. Comeuppance for the oppressor, in this case, also translates into better lives and self-reliance for the oppressed.

—Bansie Vasvani

NEW YORK Wangechi Mutu Gladstone Gallery

The work in Wangechi Mutu's recent exhibition—installed to create a loose circle inside a square space—was aesthetically sophisticated, empathic, and symbolic. On the surface, Mutu's 23 new sculptures are formal and classical, a visual contrast to her sensorial mixed-media installation, *A Fantastic Journey*, which traveled to four U.S. museums during 2013–14. The elegant, finished surfaces in burnt sienna, brown, gray, and black conjure the earth—its wounds and diseases, people, and species nearing extinction. Mutu's core message, which includes a hope that we might help the planet and each other, is stronger than ever.

Water Woman and *This second Dreamer* transform personal, mythological, and ethnological elements into stunning bronzes. Similar to a mermaid or a naiad, *Water Woman* is a water spirit, specifically an East African *nguva*, a combination of a woman and a dugong, a water mammal from the order Sirenia (and an endangered species). The literal, figurative, and abstract qualities of this sculpture—from the strong tail and webbed fins to the lithe, sensu-





ous body and human head, breasts, and arms—give it grace and power. *Water Woman* began life as an edible chocolate form and later became a small-scale bronze and a ceramic sculpture before it became a life-size bronze.

This second Dreamer, a golden, Brancusi-like head with the artist's face and hair, updates and personalizes the African sculptures that inspired so many early Modernists. Here, Mutu's visage becomes part of the 21st-century canon. The stylized hair evokes contemporary looks while nodding to ancient Etruscan, Greek, and Roman heads, somehow conjoining African and Western traditions.

More than half of the sculptures were made primarily from red soil

Above: Wangechi Mutu, *Black Pearl*, 2016. Paper pulp, wood glue, wood, and red soil, 27 x 14 x 17.5 in. **Right:** Pipilotti Rist, *Gnade Donau Gnade (Mercy Danube Mercy)*, 2013/15. Mixed media, installation view.

and paper pulp, while most of the rest used tree roots and branches as a base. These materials reflected the show's title "Ndoro Na Miti," the Gikuyu words for mud and trees. The works, all created in 2016, combine human, mountain, and circular shapes. Iron-rich red soil comes from

volcanic and fertile regions, including Mutu's birthplace in Kenya.

Prayer Beads, a giant curving necklace of large, rust-red spheres, sat on the floor at the center of the entrance, blessing the space. The other sculptures circled around. *Giver* depicts a kneeling female figure with an outstretched open palm and a palm tree growing from the top of her head. The scarification on her body turns her into an object of contemplation. On both sides of *Prayer Beads*, two sets of globe-like forms covered in emblematic patterns—*Small Pox* and *Untitled (Virus)*—stood on slender wooden plinths and stakes. Each pattern echoes a virus, such as influenza, polio, or Ebola. Two *Untitled* works show virus spheres on top of wrinkled gray mountains made of packing blankets. The mountain shapes, like everything in this exhibition, invited the eye to enter their curves and creases.

Mutu's globe symbols (one looks like a cross) are also synecdoches and metaphors suggesting that diseases, perhaps like Africa's precious minerals and the world's toxic wastes, present hidden dangers and costs. These works draw on her studies of everything from round forms in nature to the Makonde tradition

of carving interconnected, distorted forms out of ebony, to East African folklore, to art histories from around the world.

—Jan Garden Castro

NEW YORK Pipilotti Rist New Museum

These days, theater and spectacle rule public discourse—a perfect moment for Pipilotti Rist's startlingly prescient critique. Sexy and seductive, soothing and even therapeutic, this survey of Rist's work from the mid-1980s to the present sought to disrupt the normalizing effect of today's mediated, digitalized state of being and its accompanying desire for pleasure and entertainment.

The exhibition's subversive purpose was evident in the single-channel videos that initiated Rist's career. Hung at shoulder height from the wall, triangular boxes constructed from wood insisted that viewers stick their heads inside, where they discovered video and sound chambers filled with scenes of excess and abjection. In one, an out-of-focus woman with exposed breasts dances in dizzy fast-forward, while a high-pitched voice repeatedly sings, "I'm not the girl who misses much,"



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