

GALLERIA BORGHESE  
10.06 - 14.09.2025

Piazzale Scipione Borghese, 5  
00197 Rome  
T +39 06 67233753  
ga-bor@cultura.gov.it  
galleriaborghese.it



**PRESS CONTACTS**

**REIBER PR**

Alix Roché  
(UK and US media)  
M. + 44 7512 679639  
alix@reiberpr.com

Josephine Giachero  
(European media)  
M. + 39 344 049 3093  
josephine@reiberpr.com

—

**LARA FACCO P&C**

T +39 02 36565133  
press@larafacco.com

Lara Facco  
M +39 349 2529989  
lara@larafacco.com

Camilla Capponi  
M +39 366 3947098  
camilla@larafacco.com

Marianita Santarossa  
M +39 333 422 4032  
marianita@larafacco.com

Alberto Fabbiano  
M +39 340 8797779  
alberto@larafacco.com

*Rome, June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2025.* **From June 10 to September 14, 2025**, Galleria Borghese presents, for the first time within the residence of Cardinal Scipione, a solo exhibition by Kenyan-American artist **Wangechi Mutu**, titled *Black Soil Poems*, curated by Cloé Perrone. Like the recently concluded exhibition dedicated to the Baroque poet Giovan Battista Marino, this project also stems from the museum's ongoing interest in poetry. Conceived as a site-specific intervention, it unfolds throughout the museum's interior galleries, its façade, and the Secret Gardens. It challenges classical tradition through suspensions, fragmented forms, and newly imagined mythologies, establishing a multilayered dialogue between the artist's contemporary language and the symbolic institutional authority.

The title evokes the dual nature of **Mutu's practice: poetic and mythological, yet deeply connected to contemporary social and material contexts.** "Black soil" — rich and malleable under the rain, almost like clay — appears across multiple geographies, including the Secret Gardens of the Galleria Borghese, which resonate with the artist's imagination. From this soil, the sculptures seem to emerge, as if molded by a primordial force, giving shape to stories, myths, memories, and poems. The metaphor underscores the generative and transformative power of her work: rooted in materiality, yet open to multiple future interpretations.

Wangechi Mutu's intervention introduces a new vocabulary into the historical and symbolic architecture of the Galleria Borghese. **Through sculpture, installation, and moving image, the artist proposes an innovative approach to the museum space — one that challenges hierarchy, permanence, and fixed meaning.** Her works question the visual weight and authority of the collection through strategies of suspension, fluidity, and fragmentation. In doing so, the museum is no longer presented as a static container of objects, but as a **living organism, in continuous transformation**, shaped by loss, adaptation, and reconfiguration.

The exhibition is structured in two complementary sections. Inside the museum, Mutu radically reconsiders spatial orientation: **her sculptures never obscure the Borghese collection; rather, appear as subtle additions** — ethereal presences that hover in the air, float lightly, or rest on horizontal surfaces. Works such as *Ndege*, *Suspended Playtime*, *First Weeping Head* and *Second Weeping Head* defy gravitational logic, delicately hanging from the ceilings and framing new lines of sight. This act of suspension is not merely formal: it introduces a shift of historical narratives and material hierarchies. **The museum's visual field is redrawn, opening new modes of perception to our gaze.**

The materials — bronze, wood, feathers, soil, paper, water and wax — are central to the exhibition's ethos. Bronze in particular is stripped of its traditional connotations to become a vessel of ancestral memory, of recovery, and of multiplicity. **By inserting organic, fluid, and mutable substances into a context traditionally dominated by marble, stucco, and gilded surfaces**, the artist reaffirms the poetic of transformation and becoming — thus anticipating a theme that will be central to the museum's 2026 exhibition program: metamorphosis.

*Black Soil Poems* invites us to transcend fixed perspectives, shifting our gaze to allow the coexistence of multiple narratives and revealing **the museum not only as a space of memory, but as a site of imagination and transformation**. Wangechi Mutu's interventions urge viewers to inhabit the museum differently — to look not only at what is on display, but also at what has been removed, silenced, or rendered invisible.

Outdoors, on the museum's façade and in the Secret Gardens, a series of bronze sculptures populate the landscape: *The Seated I* and *The Seated IV* — two contemporary caryatids originally created for the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 2019 as part of *The Façade Commission* — mark a significant moment of engagement between the artist and a major public institution. Also present are *Nyoka*, *Heads in a Basket*, *Musa* and *Water Woman* bronzes that reinterpret archetypal vessels as sites of transformation. With *The End of eating Everything*, Mutu expands her sculptural language into video, adding a temporal and immersive dimension to her ongoing exploration of myth. These works introduce **new hybrid forms, part human, part mythological, part symbolic vessel**, drawing on the traditions of East Africa and global cosmologies, as if emerging from a symbolic ground. In their quiet occupation of the gardens and architectural thresholds, they offer a **counterbalance to the site's classical order, challenging idealized form and linear narrative in favor of ambiguity, otherness, and spiritual presence**. Sound, whether audible or implied, and its trace play a subtle but pervasive role in the exhibition: from the suspended rhythm of *Poems by my great Grandmother I*, to the lyrics resting in *The Grains of Words*, drawn from Bob Marley's song *War*, references Haile Selassie, the last emperor of Ethiopia (1930–1974) and a key figure in anti-colonial movements, whose 1963 speech at the United Nations called for an end to racial injustice. Language becomes sculptural, and sound becomes a form of memory.

“A fragmented world and time, whose material details are observed with metaphorical resonance: Mutu's work presented at the Galleria Borghese encourages us to look more intensely and attentively not only at contemporary creativity, but also at the space and the works of the Museum. Raising or lowering our gaze, we encounter Mutu's sculptures and installations, which do not interrupt the view of the permanent collection, but enrich the visitor's experience by referring to an attempt to establish a relationship with the history of the place. They invite us to search for spirits, ghosts, transformation, and poetry, to not stop at the visible or even at our horizon and its usual beauty” states Francesca Cappelletti, Director of Galleria Borghese.

The exhibition continues at the **American Academy in Rome**, where *Shavasana I* is on view. This bronze figure, lying down and covered by a woven straw mat, takes its name from the yoga pose “shavasana” (corpse pose) and is inspired by a real-life incident. Its placement in the Academy's atrium, surrounded by ancient Roman funerary inscriptions, amplifies themes of death, surrender, and the dignity of life.

With this exhibition, Galleria Borghese continues its commitment to contemporary art, following recent exhibitions such as *Giuseppe Penone Universal Gestures* (2023) and *Louise Bourgeois. Unconscious Memories* (2024), fostering renewed way of seeing space, enriched with new connections and perspectives through the vision of a major international artist.

The exhibition is made possible thanks to the support of **FENDI, official sponsor of the show**.

The Public Program of the exhibition, titled *Esistere come donna*, is organised by Electa with Fondazione Fondamenta and develops with prestigious institutional partners, through dialogues and lectures, the themes explored in the exhibition.



POEMI DELLA TERRA NERA  
**WANGECHI MUTU**  
BLACK SOIL POEMS

GALLERIA BORGHESE  
10.06 - 14.09.2025

Piazzale Scipione Borghese, 5  
00197 Rome  
T +39 06 67233753  
ga-bor@cultura.gov.it  
galleriaborghese.it



**PRESS CONTACTS**

**REIBER PR**

Alix Roché  
(UK and US media)  
M. + 44 7512 679639  
alix@reiberpr.com

Josephine Giachero  
(European media)  
M. + 39 344 049 3093  
josephine@reiberpr.com

—

**LARA FACCO P&C**

T +39 02 36565133  
press@larafacco.com

Lara Facco  
M +39 349 2529989  
lara@larafacco.com

Camilla Capponi  
M +39 366 3947098  
camilla@larafacco.com

Marianita Santarossa  
M +39 333 422 4032  
marianita@larafacco.com

Alberto Fabbiano  
M +39 340 8797779  
alberto@larafacco.com

**BIOGRAPHY**

**Wangechi Mutu**

Wangechi Mutu's work deals with the very idea of human representation; how we perceive and reproduce images of what we believe we are, how we view others and create images of what we think of them. In her ongoing conversations with figuration, what Mutu's work looks at our value systems in Art and beyond, that either obscure or elevate our image and reflections. Internationally renowned for a practice that encompasses various techniques and mediums including sculpture, painting, film, installation and collages, Wangechi Mutu's work features female hybrid creatures and vivid dystopian dreamscapes.

Mutu has participated in several major solo exhibitions in institutions worldwide, most recently, "Wangechi Mutu: Intertwined" at both the New Museum in New York (2023) and New Orleans Museum of Art (2024); "Thinking Historically in the Present" at the Sharjah Biennial, Arab Emirates (2023); "Wangechi Mutu" at Storm King Art Center, New York (2021); "The Façade Commission: Wangechi Mutu, The NewOnes, will free Us" at The Metropolitan Museum Art, New York (2019-2020); and "Wangechi Mutu: I Am Speaking, Are You listening?" at The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco Legion of Honor Museum (2021).





GALLERIA BORGHESE  
10.06 - 14.09.2025

Piazzale Scipione Borghese, 5  
00197 Rome  
T +39 06 67233753  
ga-bor@cultura.gov.it  
galleriaborghese.it



**PRESS CONTACTS**

**REIBER PR**

Alix Roché  
(UK and US media)  
M. + 44 7512 679639  
alix@reiberpr.com

Josephine Giachero  
(European media)  
M. + 39 344 049 3093  
josephine@reiberpr.com

**LARA FACCO P&C**

T +39 02 36565133  
press@larafacco.com

Lara Facco  
M +39 349 2529989  
lara@larafacco.com

Camilla Capponi  
M +39 366 3947098  
camilla@larafacco.com

Marianita Santarossa  
M +39 333 422 4032  
marianita@larafacco.com

Alberto Fabbiano  
M +39 340 8797779  
alberto@larafacco.com

**INFORMATION**

**Wangechi Mutu.**  
**Black Soil Poems**

**Press preview**  
June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
10 am – 1 pm

**Opening**  
June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
6 pm – 9 pm

**Open to visitors**  
June 10<sup>th</sup> – September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2025

**GALLERIA BORGHESE**

Piazzale Scipione Borghese, 5  
00197 Rome, Italy

**Opening days and hours**  
From Tuesday to Sunday:  
from 9 am to 7 pm  
(No entry after 5.45 pm)  
Closed every Mondays  
The visits last 2 hours  
and admission is every hour

**TICKETS**

**Regular € 15**  
**Reduced 18-25 years old € 2**  
**Free**  
**Obligatory-reservation charge,**  
for all kinds of ticket € 2

**TICKET OFFICE  
AND RESERVATION**

Reservation is mandatory and the  
ticket office closes 30 minutes ahead  
of museum closing time

**Reservation**  
+39 06 32810  
www.galleriaborghese.it

**Groups and school reservation**  
+39 06 32810  
info@tosca.it

Call center from Monday to Friday:  
9.30 am to 6 pm

**EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES  
ABOUT THE EXHIBITION**

Activities for families: Saturdays and Sundays  
4 pm, only in Italian.

Cost is €5 per child and accompanying adult in  
addition to the ticket price and reservation fee.

Mandatory reservation +39 06 32810  
or www.galleriaborghese.it

**PUBLIC PROGRAM  
OF THE EXHIBITION**

*Esistere come donna* is the program  
of 6 talks organised by Electa  
with Fondazione Fondamenta that develops  
the themes explored by the exhibition  
with prestigious institutional partners  
through dialogues and lectures.

The program takes place between June and July  
in the museum's portico. Free admission subject  
to reservation and availability

More info on [www.galleriaborghese.it](http://www.galleriaborghese.it)



GALLERIA BORGHESE

10.06 - 14.09.2025

ENTRIES by Cloé Perrone



*The Seated I*

2019

Bronze

201 × 107 × 80 cm

(79 ½ × 42 ¼ × 31 ¾ in.)

The Rachel and Jean-Pierre Lehmann Collection

Courtesy of the Artist and Gladstone Gallery

*The Seated IV*

2019

Bronze

204 × 93 × 85 cm

(80 ½ × 36 ¾ × 33 ¾ in.)

Courtesy of the Artist and Gladstone Gallery



Placed at the threshold of the Galleria Borghese, *The Seated I* and *The Seated IV* are two monumental bronze figures installed at the museum's entrance. Unlike traditional caryatids, which serve an architectural function by supporting a structure, these figures are grounded, autonomous, and unburdened, holding space with authority. They do not follow classical ideals of proportion or form. Their bodies are elongated, their faces stylized, their surfaces adorned with abstract details that recall jewelry, armor, or ritual markings. Their designs reference the elaborate body adornments of high-ranking women in East African societies—beaded bodices, circular necklaces, and lip plates—merged with visual echoes of caryatids, a sculptural form that spans continents and centuries, from ancient Greece to West and Central Africa. They appear otherworldly—part woman, part supernatural being. Their posture is upright and composed, but their form suggests potential movement, watchfulness, and power. They do not illustrate classical mythology, nor do they reconstruct the past. Instead, they suggest another way of being, rooted in ancestral memory, oriented toward imagined futures.

The bronzes introduce new sculptures to the façade of the museum, intervening in a space long shaped by absence. In 1807, Camillo Borghese sold a significant part of the villa's collection to Napoleon, including many of the sculptures that once adorned the façade and the gardens. While the architecture still bears traces of where these works once stood, most were never replaced. Mutu's intervention does not seek to restore this historical loss, but instead adds forms that carry different genealogies, ones shaped by hybridity, dissonance, and reimagined power.

The sculptures are part of the artist's ongoing inquiry into race and gender representation. *The Seated* are not figures made to bear weight, they embody it. Their tall and potent bodies are not tasked with heavy gestures. The structure is their identity, not something they hold.



*The End of eating Everything*

2013

Single-channel animated video with sound, 8:10 min.

Courtesy of the Artist and Gladstone Gallery

In *The End of eating Everything*, Mutu constructs a mythic allegory of gargantuan excess, physical mutation, and environmental collapse. The work is projected on the south terrace of the Galleria Borghese, facing toward the main entrance to the park, and remains fully visible to visitors of the gardens. This positioning allows the piece to reach beyond institutional confines, inviting a broader audience into its urgent ecological reflection.

The video follows a monstrous, airborne creature—part woman, part machine, part carrion bird—devouring everything in its path. Its body pulsates, swells, and decomposes as it consumes the swarms of flying creatures in its path. They soar, pursue, and taunt it, as it effortlessly devours them in turn with a gaping mouth. Its tentacle-like arms flail around as it gradually implodes through a smoky cycle of grotesque, self-consuming metamorphosis. Played by artist and musician Santigold, the creature drifts across an environment of detritus and fading life.

Originally created as a reflection on global systems of overconsumption and environmental devastation, the video stands as a universal call to preserve not only human artifacts but also soils. Projected into this historical landscape, *The End of eating Everything* becomes a call for awareness—a reminder that nature is not infinite, and that our urban, cultural, and botanical environments are in need of protection.

The work's soundscape, dense and immersive, merges distant animal cries with deep breathing and atmospheric noise, creating an environment that is both planetary and overwhelming. In this loop of hunger and collapse, Mutu delivers a visual fable that asks: What happens when our desire to consume overrides our capacity to preserve?

***Ndege I***

2025

Red soil, wood, and mixed media

10 × 60 × 81 cm (4 × 23 7/8 × 32 1/8 in.)

Courtesy of the Artist and Gladstone Gallery

***Ndege II***

2025

Red soil, wood, and mixed media

6 × 66 × 84 cm (2 1/8 × 26 × 33 1/8 in.)

Courtesy of the Artist and Gladstone Gallery

***Ndege III***

2025

Red soil, wood, and mixed media

28 × 89 × 105 cm (11 × 34 7/8 × 41 1/2 in.)

Courtesy of the Artist and Gladstone Gallery

***Ndege IV***

2025

Red soil, wood and mixed media

13 × 74 × 72 cm (5 1/4 × 29 3/8 × 28 3/8 in.)

Courtesy of the Artist and Gladstone Gallery

***Ndege V***

2025

Red soil, wood and mixed media

13 × 48 × 103 cm (5 1/8 × 18 7/8 × 40 1/2 in.)

Courtesy of the Artist and Gladstone Gallery

***Ndege VI***

2025

Red soil, wood and mixed media

10 × 47 × 90 cm (4 1/8 × 18 3/4 × 35 3/8 in.)

Courtesy of the Artist and Gladstone Gallery

***Ndege VII***

2025

Red soil, wood and mixed media

11 × 52 × 94 cm (4 3/8 × 20 1/2 × 37 in.)

Courtesy of the Artist and Gladstone Gallery

*Ndege*, Swahili for “bird,” is a flock of hybrid, birdlike forms suspended in flight across the portico of the Galleria Borghese. Their bodies, assembled from branches, paper pulp, horn, and other organic materials, suggest fragile, skeletal creatures caught mid-motion. Suspended in the transitional space between interior and exterior, the portico—both a place of welcome and passage—becomes a threshold between a bird cage and the open air. Visitors encounter the work right at the entrance of the Villa, under a ceiling where these birds appear to soar across a softened light and altered atmosphere. Their arrangement evokes a moment of lift-off, an unsettled motion, as if the flock were sensing wind but not yet released into it. Yellow-toned curtains transform the portico into a new physical and visual experience, where the bright white light is softened into a warmer, more diffused environment.

Below the *Ndege* lie fragments of antiquity: Roman sculptures and excavated artifacts that have emerged from the soil. Mutu stages a contrast between the subterranean and the aerial, between the weight of history and the weightlessness of flight. Her birds do not stand still, they hover and vibrate. Some seem bound or restrained by threadlike elements, as if caught in the tension between capture and escape. In this liminal architecture, *Ndege* reframes the portico not only as an architectural threshold, but also as a symbolic one. The birds occupy a state of in-betweenness: not yet inside, no longer outside. They float in the space of becoming; where histories remain unsettled, and futures are still unfolding.

---

*The Grains of Words*

2025

Coffee tea and paper

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the Artist and Gladstone Gallery

*The Grains of Words* is a poem: each letter is sculpted in coffee and tea, transforming language into material form. Drawing from the tradition of concrete poetry, Mutu gives physical presence to words, gently placed on the floor of the Salone Mariano Rossi. Coffee connects the work to land—specifically Ethiopia—where the plant originates and its cultivation is deeply tied to cultural, spiritual, economic, and colonial histories. It is used in rituals, moments of reflection, and as a vehicle for gathering and conversation. Here, coffee is more than a material; it is a medium of memory, bearing the trace of resistance, social practice, and political history. Unlike the carved inscriptions on the pedestals of Roman sculptures surrounding the installation, coffee dissolves, blends, and reemerges in another form. Like language itself, it carries meaning across time, absorbing and releasing histories as it moves between states.

The passage, drawn from Bob Marley’s song “War,” references Haile Selassie, the last emperor of Ethiopia (1930–74) and a key figure in anti-colonial movements, whose 1963 speech at the United Nations called for an end to racial injustice. This act of transposing speech into song and then into organic materials asserts that words are not only spoken, sung, or written; they can be planted, ingrained into history itself. Mutu’s work insists that language, like land, holds memory, continuously resurfacing in new contexts.

The artist’s invocation of Ethiopia is deliberate. The country is not only the birthplace of coffee, but also one of the only African nations to resist colonization, despite Italy’s brutal occupation from 1936 to 1941. The artist insists this history must not be erased or softened. *The Grains of Words* asserts that these entangled legacies of empire, resistance, and survival still underlie the cultural institutions we walk through today.

The poem is installed upon ancient Roman mosaics depicting gladiators locked in combat with one another and with leopards. These figures, once enslaved and forced into battle for public spectacle, are emblematic of histories of human exploitation. By placing these words within this visual framework, Mutu reveals the persistence of systemic oppression, still present in today’s global inequalities. *The Grains of Words* does not merely recount the past; it makes clear that these struggles are still embedded within the very foundations of culture.




---

*Subterranea Falling flames*

2023

Ink, paper cutouts, and emulsion paint on photographic print

182 × 122 cm (71 5/8 × 48 in.)

Courtesy of the Artist and Gladstone Gallery

Part of Mutu’s *Subterranea* series, *Subterranea Falling flames* delves into themes of spirituality, transformation, and the sacred renewal. Built through a collage of ink, paper cutouts, and emulsion paint layered onto a photographic print, the work evokes both religious iconography and natural phenomena.

In the composition, a bird descends toward a human figure, powerfully touching the crown of the head, as if imparting light or knowledge. The interiors of both the bird and the human are visible, illuminated by a vibrant yellow glow that suggests the transmission of consciousness, the shared breath of two living souls. Around them, flames cascade downward like tears, evoking both destruction and purification, a spiritual combustion where sorrow and illumination coexist. A serpent coils through the scene, its sinuous form anchoring the imagery to ancient cycles of sin, forgiveness, and change of skin. The reference to religious iconography and scene of the crucifixion of body, the Holy Spirit as flame, and the revelation of inner truths is evident. Yet it is filtered through a new cosmology—one grounded in earth, ancestral rituals, and the porous borders between species.

Like many myths, *Subterranea Falling flames* taps into a perpetual human desire for metamorphosis, either spiritual or physical. In the biblical tradition, David, in the room portrayed by a young Gian Lorenzo Bernini, embodies the unlikely force capable of overturning what once seemed unshakable: the triumph of the overlooked over the invincible. Mutu’s work, too, gestures toward the possibility of transformation, not by confrontation but instead an inner combustion, a slow and profound reimagining that makes space for new forms of existence. *Subterranea Falling flames* proposes a vision of transcendence not through separation from the material world, but a deeper inhabitation of it. Spirit and matter, human and animal, body and landscape are not opposites. They ignite each other, revealing a sacred geography where suffering and illumination are inseparable.



*Prayers*

2020

Red soil, wax, wooden beads and mixed media

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the Artist and Gladstone Gallery

Suspended from the ceiling like an expanded rosary, *Prayers* evokes a mystical, meditative presence. Composed of dark red beads strung together in a long, undulating line, the work recalls devotional practices, ritual objects, and the quiet gesture of threading beads, a repetitive, contemplative act found in spiritual traditions across the world and widespread in East African craftwork. The red soil, paper pulp, and wax materials suggest modulation and transformation, grounding the piece in both earthly and ephemeral registers. Beads are among the oldest cultural objects; made of bone, shell, or stone, they predate sculpture and painting. Carried on the body and used in funerals, fertility rituals, and ornamentation, they contain both personal and collective memory. For Mutu, threading them becomes a form of delicate, rhythmic, and meditative inscription.

In the ornate Emperors' room of the Galleria Borghese, *Prayers* reframes the space. The room is dominated by marbles: the white of Bernini's *The Rape of Proserpina*, the colored surfaces that cover the floor, walls, and consoles, and the busts of Roman emperors in porphyry. These intense sculptural compositions command the viewer's gaze, drawing it vertically across the room. *Prayers*, suspended from above, disrupts this visual rhythm and shifts attention upward: to the ceiling and the atmosphere above. A new tone enters the space, filtering through the dark red spheres that hover between stillness and motion, weight and weightlessness.

*Prayers* also invites reflection on how we assign value to materials. In this room, marble and porphyry have long signified prestige, permanence, and imperial power, most notably in the busts of Roman emperors sculpted in deep red stone. Mutu, by contrast, uses soil, wax, and paper pulp, materials traditionally seen as fragile or impermanent, yet drawn from the same earth. Her suspended beads reclaim red not as a symbol of conquest, but as a mark of spirit, ritual, and ancestral knowledge. *Prayers* questions the hierarchies we inherit—between materials, between histories, between what is preserved and what is allowed to dissolve.



*Older Sisters*

2019

Bronze

Head one: 25 × 40 × 30 cm (10 × 16 × 12 in.)

Head two: 23 × 38 × 28 cm (9 × 15 × 11 in.)

Courtesy of the Artist and Gladstone Gallery

The two heads in *Older Sisters* lie horizontally, facing one another in quiet proximity. Their stylized features and elaborate hairstyles recall East African braiding practices, where hair becomes a living archive of identity and lineage. One is crowned with a spiral of braids, rendered in bronze as if fossilized. Anthropology plays a central role in Mutu's practice, not as documentation but as a form of excavation into shared origins. The title suggests a bond between siblings, but also invokes a wider sense of solidarity among women; sisterhood as a shared structure of care, resistance, and survival. Mutu describes the work as a kind of self-portrait in two voices: a conversation between women, or between two parts of herself. They do not speak, but they are in dialogue in silent language, embodying care, solidarity, and resilience.

The heads are displayed on an eighteenth-century dodecagonal table by Luigi Valadier, originally designed to exhibit decorative objects. Beneath them, a mirrored surface reveals their underside: the back of the neck, the coiled volume of the hair, the sculptural fullness of the forms. This detail recalls traditional African wood sculptures, where roundness and volume, especially around the neck, signify abundance, nourishment, and continuity. The mirror allows the viewer to see what is often hidden, completing the figures not with symmetry, but with reflection. This doubling effect draws a continuous visual thread from ceiling to floor, building a dialogue between the historic ceiling fresco, the suspended beams, and the bronzes displayed on mirrored surfaces below. Everything reflects, everything connects, everything sees and is seen.

In *Older Sisters*, Mutu continues her long exploration of Black portraiture. The work resists monumentality, asserting instead a different kind of presence: relational, grounded, and intergenerational, not idealized but shared.



***Underground Hornship***

2018

Bronze

60 × 81 × 20 cm (23 ½ × 32 × 8 in.)

Courtesy of the Artist and Gladstone Gallery

*Underground Hornship*, composed of three polished bronze horns that twist and interlock in a compact, grounded form, evokes ancient animal structures. The horns do not rise but bend inward, moving like tendons, roots, or a subterranean organism. Mutu's interest in anthropology here shifts toward the animal world: a reflection on instinct, continuity, and ancestral force. The horns form an apparatus, a root system designed not to penetrate power, but to reach into knowledge. It functions as a symbolic instrument; not to recover archaeological artifacts, but to access buried forms of knowledge. The artist reminds us that humans are intrinsically intertwined with soil, grains, and the natural world and cannot be dissociated from it. By evoking the agricultural, ecological, and spiritual practice embedded in the land, and in the bodies that labor on and with it, Mutu reveals the power of digging for a common understanding of the global traits that interconnect cultures, each rooted in land.

Displayed on an eighteenth-century dodecagonal table by Luigi Valadier, the sculpture is in quiet tension with the ornate marble and gilded bronze of its base. In a museum dominated by white and colored marble, the presence of black bronze is significant. Bronze has long been associated with imperial authority, yet here it is redirected toward ancestral continuity, instinct, and endurance. Mutu does not use bronze to monumentalize dominance, but to give lasting form to cultural practices and bodily knowledge that have long been overlooked. If *Older Sisters* speaks in relation, *Underground Hornship* grounds that relation in the earth and complex interconnected systems.



***Poems by my Great Grandmother I***

2017

Red soil, wood, aluminum pots, pencil, and mixed media

101 × 66 cm (39 ¾ × 26 in.)

Courtesy of the Artist and Victoria Miro

*Poems by my Great Grandmother I* is an act of inscription—not on paper, but on a domestic object, a cooking pot. The work stages a dialogue between writing and everyday life, transforming a vessel for nourishment into a site of mark-making. A delicate, repetitive etching inscribes circular motions onto the surface, as if to suggest that history is also written through daily gestures, like writing, like cooking. Yet this inscription is not silent. The movement of the tool against the metal produces a sound, faint but persistent, a vibration that lingers within the pot, resonating in its interior.

The pot itself is significant. It is a *sufuria*, a common aluminum cooking pot used across East Africa, coming from India. Unlike traditional clay pots, often made by hand, the *sufuria* is a manufactured object introduced through trade and exchange, replacing vernacular forms. Its very presence speaks to the transformation of domestic practices and symbols of cultural displacement and exchanges.

The title evokes the presence of family, of intergenerational knowledge passed down through objects, actions, and words, evoking a poem Mutu has never heard, from a great grandmother she never knew. The lines do not transcribe an existing memory or language but imagine one, an invented gesture of connection. The aluminum pot, bearing the traces of past use—of cooking, gathering, and sharing—becomes a symbolic container of cultural transmission, where conversations and unspoken histories accumulate over time. As the tool etches into its surface, the pot transforms into a resonant body, amplifying the act of inscription into an almost imperceptible but continuous reverberation. The sound, like poetry, is not fixed; it shifts, fades, and returns, quietly marking its surface. Yet the poem itself remains elusive. The artist inscribes but does not fully reveal, leaving behind traces rather than declarations. In *Poems by my Great Grandmother I*, writing is both a personal ritual and a fragmented archive, an act of remembrance that resists erasure, ensuring that what is written, like sound, continues to resonate.



***Suspended Playtime***

2008

Plastic bags, string, wire

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the Artist and Gladstone Gallery

*Suspended Playtime* is a modular installation that activates the Salone Lanfranco in an unexpected way. The spheres, handcrafted from plastic bags, string, and wire, recall the makeshift soccer balls fashioned by children in Mutu's native Kenya and across many parts of the world. These objects, born from scarcity and necessity, speak to resilience and creativity, transforming discarded materials into tools of joy and collective play. Soccer is a unifier, a common language across borders and, in this context, the balls introduce motion, informality, and shared cultural experience. They remind us that joy, like art, can emerge from what has been thrown away. Highlighting the power of children's creativity, the acts of assemblage are not only resourceful but also profound; they point to the ongoing reinvention of the self, the refusal to be defined by lack. Here, plastic waste becomes a landscape of suspended fragile and chaotic forms full of rhythm.

Suspended in midair, they introduce a new kind of movement into the museum. They float just above the ground, generating a sense of weightlessness that resists fixity. The delicate threads holding them in place may intertwine, the spheres may sway, generating a faint rustling sound, an interaction that contrasts with the highly structured, choreographed theatricality of the space. This subtle choreography disrupts the museum's material density, inserting a dancing presence that is both agile and defiant.

Hung in the Lanfranco Loggia, these imperfect spheres break away from the painted illusionism of the surrounding frescoes. While the Galleria Borghese's collection of paintings presents a vision of opulence and pictorial mastery, *Suspended Playtime* introduces a different kind of visual field, one shaped by movement, improvisation, and personal memory. The work's positioning disrupts the traditional balance of the space, inviting active engagement with the room's historical and artistic layers. It reminds us that history is not only written in stone and canvas, but also in the continuous traces of play, motion, and sound.

***First Weeping Head***

2025

Red soil, wood, and mixed media

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the Artist and Gladstone Gallery

***Second Weeping Head***

2025

Red soil, wood, and mixed media

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the Artist and Gladstone Gallery

Suspended in the Aurora room, a space devoted to the passage of time and cycles of nature, *First Weeping Head* and *Second Weeping Head* enter into a dialogue with its layered cosmology. Surrounded by allegories of dawn, dusk, the seasons, and the zodiac, Mutu's suspended busts suggest an emotional and fractured temporality. Where time is measured in celestial rhythms, these heads drift in a more intimate continuum: one shaped by transformation and connection with the natural world. At once ancient and otherworldly, these forms reject the stability of classical portraiture. They expose their interiors, suggesting permeability rather than permanence. These are not traditional portraits, but hybrid beings, creatures from another world suspended in a state of transformation. These are not commemorative busts, they are roots in bloom. The expression of weeping is not literal, but structural: sunken features, hollow mouths, and incised lines speak of rupture rather than display. Beads are added to the heads, not as simple embellishment, but as symbolic, emotive elements. They function like marks or scars, like branches woven into skin—expressive extensions of feeling, almost like drawing directly into matter.

Where the Renaissance painting allegorizes female beauty through symbolic duality, Mutu introduces a different tradition: one in which identity is unstable, emotion is material, and the body is fragmented rather than idealized. Through their materials and form, *First Weeping Head* and *Second Weeping Head* propose another way of seeing, not through clarity and closure, but through dissonance, emotion, and fragmentation. The portrait becomes not a mirror, but a threshold.



***Bloody Rug***

2022

Silk

366 × 270 cm (144 × 106 in.)

Courtesy of the Artist and Gladstone Gallery

A reflection on absence and violence emerges in *Bloody Rug*, which transforms a domestic item into a silent yet insistent record of struggle. Rather than depict conflict, Mutu allows its traces to surface through material: saturated color, dense texture, and the imprint of an unspoken wound. Violence is not illustrated but absorbed. No bodies, only traces. A wound held in fabric.

A carpet lies across the floor—marked with red stains and steeped in silence. It appears as a familiar domestic object, but its surface tells another story. Pigment seeps into the textile like paint into canvas, yet the gestures are not pictorial but physical. Circular taches evoke forceful movement, recalling Mutu's early performances where gesture, repetition, and bodily trace were central. The action is no longer visible, but its presence remains.

The colloquial raw title, almost punk, suggests cleansing and rebellion. The carpet's rigid geometry evokes formality and control, but the artist's gestures push against that constraint. The circular marks seem to strain the edges, disturbing the symmetry, creating a vortex of motion within the frame. The tension between formality and movement is tangible: the rug holds both structure and rebellion. Displayed directly on the floor, the work asserts presence in a space where textiles are today peripheral.

Installed beneath Domenichino's *The hunting of Diana*, it confronts a tradition of gendered spectacle. In the painting, women are interrupted by hidden male observers, an allegory of intrusion. Here, the scene is gone. The image is withheld. Violence is no longer visual; it is structural, embedded, and enduring, held within the surface. As the painting, the carpet holds tension rather than releases it, transforming silence into a presence that presses against the room.

Through the language of textile, often coded as soft, feminine, and private, Mutu stages an act of resistance. *Bloody Rug* does not recreate violence; it absorbs it, contains it, and offers it back to the viewer as presence without spectacle. In doing so, the work reclaims a space historically dominated by conquest, proposing another way of remembering, one stitched with silence, weight, and refusal. At once political and intimate, *Bloody Rug* evokes broader forms of violence, like wars, wounds, and disappearances, carried not in grand gestures, but in what quietly persists.

***Throned***

2023

Red soil, wood, and mixed media

173 x 86 x 110 cm (68 1/8 x 33 7/8 x 43 1/4 in.)

Courtesy of the Artist and Gladstone Gallery

*Throned* presents a seated figure, whose posture alone suggests the idea of a throne. There is no visible seat, no sculpted structure: it is the half-vertical, half-reclining form that evokes a position of authority. The figure's pose recalls classical models, such as portraits of Agrippina, where power is conveyed through body language rather than adornment. Thrones are so deeply embedded in cultural memory that we instinctively recognize them, even in the absence of any literal representation. Composed of red soil, natural pigments, paper pulp, and wood glue—materials drawn from the earth—the sculpture resists conventional notions of permanence and opulence. Here, power is not monumentalized through precious materials, but emerges from elemental matter, challenging the hierarchies that traditionally link durability with value.

The atmosphere of the work is suspended between elevation and emersion, as if the figure were captured in an ambiguous moment: asserting presence without grandiosity. Mutu reflects on how power has been historically imagined, not only through structures of wealth and display but also through posture, memory, and gesture. Her presence quietly rewrites that visual order. Installed among Renaissance allegories of virtue and beauty, *Throned* proposes another kind of presence. Its seated figure does not embody idealized grace, but insists on material resilience, ancestral continuity, and the dignity rooted in posture rather than adornment.



**Nyoka**  
2022  
Bronze  
207 × 185 × 115 cm (81 ¾ × 73 × 45 ½ in.)  
Private collection  
Courtesy of the Artist and Gladstone Gallery



**Water Woman**  
2017  
Bronze  
91 × 165 × 178 cm (36 × 65 × 70 in.)  
Courtesy of the Artist and Gladstone Gallery

The animal world, both real and imagined, is central to Mutu's work. Her creatures are never simply symbolic; they are powerful beings, represented with force and presence and occupy a space where biology meets mythology.

In *Nyoka*, Swahili for "snake," a serpent appears curled inside a bronze basket. The head and tail are hidden, the body partially exposed, looped, resting, and unreadable in its full extent. It suggests an animal out of scale, an enormous snake. The serpent is one of the oldest and most enduring symbols across cultures associated with knowledge, protection, danger, and healing. But above all, it is a creature that survives by shedding its skin, an act of transformation that often goes unseen, yet leaving behind a discarded shell as a sign of renewal. In *Nyoka*, this moment is suspended. The transformation has not yet begun, but its possibility remains held, contained in stillness.

*Water Woman* is a Black mermaid. Cast in dark bronze, she sits upright, her tail coiled beneath her like an anchor. She draws from the figure of the *nguva*, a coastal spirit from Swahili lore, and echoes other aquatic deities across African and diasporic cosmologies. Her form suggests deep ancestry and speculative futures, a body shaped by memory and water within an aquatic world where fluidity—both physical and of identity—is central.

Together, the two works do not represent fixed symbols, but forms that remain in flux. They do not illustrate hybridity; they inhabit it. Installed in the gardens of Villa Borghese, where cultivated nature coexists with artifice and time is measured in cycles rather than permanence, *Nyoka* and *Water Woman* introduce open-ended beings in perpetual motion like plants and humans.



**Musa**  
2021  
Bronze  
138 × 98 × 73 cm  
(54 ½ × 38 ½ × 28 ¾ in.)  
Courtesy of the Artist and Gladstone Gallery

**Heads in a Basket**  
2021  
Bronze  
122 × 108 × 64 cm (48 × 42 ½ × 25 ¼ in.)  
Additional Eggs:  
40 × 23 × 23 cm (16 × 9 × 9 in.)  
40 × 23 × 19 cm (16 × 9 × 7 1/2 in.)  
Forman Family Collection  
Courtesy of the Artist and Gladstone Gallery



*Musa* and *Heads in a Basket* evoke the profound symbolism of baskets and water across cultures and histories. In African traditions, baskets are essential vessels designed to carry, protect, and sustain life. They are not only functional objects but also bearers of memory and belonging, tied to the land, seasons, and rhythms of daily life. Both *Musa* and *Heads in a Basket* take the form of palm-leaf baskets, albeit cast in bronze—a hard, dense, and enduring material. This creates a visual and tactile contradiction: objects traditionally associated with lightness, domesticity, and organic function become heavy, permanent, metallic. Inside these bronze baskets is water, an element that would be impossible to carry in woven palm. The materials no longer correspond to their intended purposes, generating a subtle sense of dislocation. The baskets no longer contain reality; they generate new myths—sealed worlds that escape the present, held together by paradox and material illusion.

In *Musa*—which means "Moses" in Arabic as well as Swahili—an embryonic alien-like figure rests within a bronze basket, cradled in a position of deathly rest and potential birth. The reference to Moses, saved from peril by water, is not limited to one tradition; it resonates across religious narratives as a story of survival, faith, and the continuity of life against overwhelming forces. Water holds layered meanings as purifier, carrier, and a boundary between life and death. In Catholicism and across many belief systems, water is a medium of cleansing, renewal, and passage, a symbol present in Mutu's world. In *Heads in a Basket*, heavy bronze heads float improbably atop liquid, challenging the expected destiny of metal to sink. They exist between weight and lightness, subverting the symbolism of materials. The artist reimagines bronze—a material traditionally associated with permanence and authority—as a medium of suspension and change. Her figures do not rest in triumph, but in a state of continuous becoming: carried, held, and reformed by forces greater than themselves.



*Shavasana I*

2019

Bronze

211 × 134 × 24 cm (83 × 53 × 9 ½ in.)

Courtesy of the Artist and Gladstone Gallery

At first glance, the work appears as a body covered by a cloth, possibly a homicide victim. But the title, *Shavasana*, shifts the reading. Known as the final pose in yoga, *shavasana* is not a gesture of defeat, but of full release: lying still, eyes closed, body surrendered to the ground. Mutu plays with this ambiguity. The pose is recognizable, but the context alters it. This is both a space of meditation and the scene of a crime.

A female body lies flat, spent, arms at her sides, legs straight, partially covered by a bronze mat that resembles woven palm leaves—an everyday material linked to domestic labor and yoga practice.

“Shavasana,” or corpse pose, is traditionally associated with release and inner calm. Here, the pose suggests something else—a final gesture, irreversible. Only the figure’s feet and hands are clearly visible. The mat becomes a shroud. One red high-heeled shoe has come off, the other remains. Red shoes have become visual shorthand for femicide and gender-based violence. This detail marks the work with gender specificity. The body is not symbolic, it is someone’s. There is no narrative to explain what happened; the image itself speaks.

The figure is cast in dark bronze, a material associated with heroism and permanence. Mutu uses it not to glorify but also to bear physical, emotional, political weight. The body is present, but distant. No name, no gaze, no gesture. It cannot be claimed or aestheticized. This is not about trying to add beauty to pain, but to show dignity in its visibility.

Now installed at the American Academy in Rome, surrounded by archaeological fragments and historical objects, *Shavasana I* introduces a different presence. It does not speak in allegory. It does not ask for empathy or catharsis. It asks to be seen, and not forgotten.



GALLERIA BORGHESE

10.06 - 14.09.2025

**Through Suspended Lines:  
Wangechi Mutu at Galleria Borghese  
Cloé Perrone**

“Ecoute tomber les liens qui te retiennent en haut et en bas”  
“Listen to the falling ties that bind you from above and below”

More than a poem, *La Pluie*<sup>1</sup> is a visual gesture that captures the power of dissolution, the poetics of absence, and the art of shaping emotion. Through its cascading form, it transforms language into movement, suspending meaning. Guillaume Apollinaire’s calligram expands the boundaries of expression, transmuting words into a spatial experience. It is within this same vocabulary of suspension—where forms resist conformity, shifting between presence and transformation—that Wangechi Mutu’s work takes shape.

Mutu’s artworks do not merely enter into dialogue with the historical collection of the Galleria Borghese; they carve through it, displacing its solidity, introducing a weightlessness that unsettles the grandeur of the institution. Her choice of materials—wood, soil, feathers, paper, wax, and bronze—interrupts the language of perpetuity that has long defined the villa’s rich surfaces of marble, frescoes, and mosaics, challenging the idea of durability as a marker of value. These materials do not simply contrast with the classical tradition; they counter its authority, exposing the narratives and omissions embedded within its history.

At the Galleria Borghese, long regarded as the manifestation of idealized wonder, Mutu’s works refuse to settle, subtly destabilizing its opulence and introducing a presence that resists assimilation into the museum’s fixed narratives. To suspend is not simply to defy gravity—it is to shift perspective. In upsetting the museum’s assumed permanence, questioning material hierarchies and challenging the idealized proportions that define beauty, Mutu’s levitating sculptures reveal the invisible forces that shape power within space.

The Galleria Borghese is not just a place for contemplation but an embodiment of political and cultural power. And yet, the very act of institutionalization attempts to crystallize time, to halt the fluidity of meaning, to anchor an era within the walls of a museum. However, time does not stand still—it moves, erodes, transforms. The Galleria Borghese is not the unchanging chamber of Cardinal Scipione’s (1577–1633) vision but a space that is constantly evolving, its materials reshaped, its stories rewritten, its meanings reimagined. To engage with such a place is not simply to inhabit the past, but to recognize its fractures, its silences, its unresolved tensions. Mutu’s work does not offer a passive reflection of history but an active interrogation of it, inviting us to see what is present but also what has been rendered invisible. In this interplay between the material and the immaterial, suspension is not an omission but an as-

<sup>1</sup> Guillaume Apollinaire, “Il pleut,” in *Calligrammes: Poèmes de la paix et de la guerre (1913–1916)*, (Paris: Mercure de France, 1918), 113.

sertion—not an absence, but an invitation to see and move through the world differently.

The renovation of the Galleria Borghese is a story of both loss and adaptation. Once richly adorned with statues and reliefs, the villa’s façades were stripped of much of their sculptural ornamentation following Camillo Borghese’s (1775–1832) sale of his collection to Napoleon Bonaparte in 1808.<sup>2</sup> What remains is an architectural framework marked by absence—an emptiness where figures once stood, their forms removed but their traces still lingering. The Borghese estate, however, was never static. From its conception, the villa was more than a collection of objects—it was a changing landscape, where sculpture and nature were carefully interwoven. Scipione Borghese did not merely decorate it; he curated an expansive sculptural and botanical environment, where antiquities, fountains, and monumental fragments were carefully placed to guide the visitors’ experience, extending his vision beyond the walls of the Casino Nobile.<sup>3</sup> The vast gardens—though privately owned—were open to the public, transforming the estate into a space where history unfolded in real time. The public’s journey began at the grand gate on Via Pinciana, and before even reaching the majestic entrance, they would walk past an orchestrated progression of sculptures, positioned at measured intervals, marking the path with their silent presence. Antiquities were displayed in abundance: vases and sarcophagi, emperors and deities, monumental fragments of the past all carefully staged along the pathways.<sup>4</sup> The theatrical gardens were irrevocably modified when Camillo Borghese’s sale to Napoleon altered the collection, resulting in gaps—both physical and conceptual.<sup>5</sup> While some sculptures were replaced, others were not, leaving the villa’s architecture to bear the marks of time, loss, and transformation. After the sale, the prince spent his final years redecorating the vacant rooms, reconfiguring the interiors with

<sup>2</sup> Clementina Sforzini, “La rinascita del museo” in *I Borghese e l’antico*, ed. Anna Coliva, Fabréga Dubert, Jean-Luc Martinez, Marina Minozzi (Milan: Skira, 2011), 64.

<sup>3</sup> Alberta Campitelli, “La Collezione di sculture nel parco della Villa,” in *I Borghese e l’antico*, 89–96.

<sup>4</sup> “The facades of the Casino Nobile were, as is known, a palimpsest of sculptures, but the park was no exception: everywhere, especially in the first enclosure and in the secret gardens, were scattered reliefs, statues, herms, fountains, colossal vases, altars, statuary groups, in a profusion of iconographies.” Campitelli, “La Collezione,” 89.

<sup>5</sup> “Most of the works sold by Prince Camillo to Napoleon came from the Casino Nobile, its facades and the Gabii Museum, but a considerable number were also placed in the gardens. Thanks to the meticulous work of Marie-Lou Fabré, we know that today in the Louvre there are forty statues, groups, bas-reliefs, vases and altars. The statues included some famous works, such as the two emperors, Marcus Aurelius and Galba, which decorated the façade of the Casino, next to the equally famous Prisoners, in the internal courtyard.” Campitelli, 95.

works sourced from storage, other Borghese properties, and newly commissioned excavations.<sup>6</sup> However, the gardens bore the brunt of these changes—many of their most valuable works were removed and repurposed to redecorate the emptied halls of the Casino Nobile, filling the void left by the sale of masterpieces. Although the villa itself has been refurbished over the years, the disruption of its sculptural composition in the gardens remains profound.

Rather than mourning these absences, Mutu engages directly with the void. Her interventions do not attempt to reconstruct the lost statuary of the Borghese collection; instead, they introduce a new mythology—one shaped by fluidity, metamorphosis, and hybridity. In the Secret Gardens and along the façade, Mutu arranges bronze sculptures—baskets, serpentine figures, aquatic bodies—alongside a video, *The End of eating Everything* (2013), that unravels the threads of legend and transformation. These myths in motion, materialized in bronze and moving images, do not seek permanence; instead, they engage with historical gaps, shifting and adapting, like the myths they invoke.

Wings and tails, eyes set deep in foreheads, and women crowned with serpents weave their way into the enchanted yet symbolically charged worlds crafted by artists. From time immemorial, creatures both human and beast, endowed with supernatural powers, have roamed the boundless terrain of human imagination. Myth is not static, it is an ever-evolving, dynamic structure, continuously adapting to cultural, historical, and existential transformations.<sup>7</sup> Its power lies in its metaphorical nature; it is not defined by established narratives but by its ability to dismantle, reassemble, and reframe reality.<sup>8</sup> Myth is never a closed system but a cyclical structure in perpetual renewal, never fully vanishing but instead returning in new forms, reshaped by each era that inherits it. It does not belong solely to oral traditions or literature; it is embedded in architecture, sculptural representations, and artistic interventions that continuously sustain and transform its meaning over time. Mutu's work dissolves the boundaries between ancient and futuristic mythologies, allowing past and future to merge into unanchored forms that transcend fixed histories.

In the Galleria Borghese's Secret Gardens, various bronze baskets

animate the space, evoking both cultural traditions and mythological narratives. Among them is *Nyoka* (2002)—the Kiswahili word for “serpent”—a large woven bronze basket spanning almost two meters in width. It recalls the baskets traditionally carried atop the heads of working women, while also echoing the intricately woven forms of Greek caryatids. Yet, in Mutu's vision, the baskets are no longer balanced atop; instead, they rest on the ground, relinquished from duty and transformed into vessels for new, otherworldly beings. In Judeo-Christian tradition, the serpent is the ultimate transgressor, a creature of knowledge and exile, temptation and wisdom. It symbolizes sin and redemption, leading Adam and Eve to expiate their fault upon Mother Earth. In ancient Mediterranean myths, it embodies eternal return, shedding its skin in an endless cycle of death and renewal. Snakes appear everywhere in art, from illuminated manuscripts to Renaissance paintings, their forms charged with ambiguity and power. Caravaggio, Michelangelo Merisi (1571–1610), like many painters, explored the serpent's dual nature. In *Medusa* (1597), the Gorgon's face is frozen in a scream, her hair writhing with live serpents, embodying both terror and transformation. In *The Madonna and Child with St. Anne* (1605–6), the Christ child, guided by the Virgin, presses his foot upon the serpent, enacting the classical Christian motif of victory over sin and evil. In East African traditions, the serpent takes on different meanings, often linked to water, fertility, and spiritual power. Among the Luo people of Kenya, it is a messenger between worlds, a conduit to ancestral spirits.<sup>9</sup> In Tanzanian and Ugandan folklore, the rainmaking python symbolizes the delicate balance between abundance and drought.<sup>10</sup> Inside the woven bronze of *Nyoka*, a black snake lies coiled, its head and tail concealed, its true scale unknowable—an unseen presence that suggests a creature extending far beyond what is visible. *Nyoka* does not simply reference the physical form of the serpent; it extends beyond what is tangible, embodying the layered histories and symbolic weight it carries within.

*Musa and Heads in a Basket*—two bronze baskets filled with water—explore the dual nature of this element as the source of life and a force of dissolution. Embryonic in form, *Musa*—part alien, part siren—rests cradled within the basket, poised and on the verge of emerging. In *Heads in a Basket* heavy bronze heads, modeled in the shape of eggs, should sink under their own weight—except they float, suspended in liquid, existing between materiality and becoming. The shape of the heads recalls Constantin Brâncuși's *Sleeping Muse* (1910), but here Mutu introduces a new ambiguity: Are these faces gazing into the basket, or are they yet-to-be-formed physiognomies, waiting to take shape? Mutu plays with contradictions of weight and buoyancy; these metals should be grounded, heavy, unmoving. Instead, they float, drift, resist gravity. She overturns material expectations, making solid metal appear weightless and soft. This engagement with metamorphosis aligns her work with ancestral mythologies of water deities, including Ganga, Sobek, and Mami Wata. Ganga, the Hindu goddess of the Ganges, is both woman and river, her form merging seamlessly with the *makara*, a mythical water creature—part crocodile, part elephant, part fish. She exemplifies the force of the river: cleansing yet

<sup>6</sup> Carla Mazzarelli, “Camillo Borghese (1775–1832),” in *Villa Borghese I principi, le arti, la città dal Settecento all'Ottocento*, ed. Alberta Campitelli (Milan: Skira, 2003), 35.

<sup>7</sup> “Myth is not a closed system, but an infinite process of transformation and reinterpretation.” Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth (Arbeit am Mythos)*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), originally published in 1979; “Myth is never completed: each epoch rethinks, translates, and reinvents it according to its own questions and needs.” Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), originally published in 1960; “Myth is a living reality that is continuously re-actualized through rites and storytelling.” Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954), originally published in 1949.

<sup>8</sup> “Mythical thought always progresses from the awareness of oppositions toward their resolution.” Claude Lévi-Strauss, “The Structural Study of Myth,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 68, no. 270 (1955): 428–444; “Myth is a type of speech. It is a system of communication, a message. Myth cannot be an object, a concept, or an idea; it is a mode of signification, a form.” Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972).

<sup>9</sup> Parker Shipton, *Blood, Fire, and Word: Luo, Christian, and Luo-Christian Sacrifice* (London: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> Terje Oestigaard, *Rainbows, Pythons, and Waterfalls: Heritage, Poverty, and Sacrifice Among the Busoga, Uganda* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2019).

relentless, carrying both life and time toward eternity.<sup>11</sup> Sobek, the crocodile-headed god of the Nile, merges human will with primal force, embodying both fertility and destruction, mirroring the river's ceaseless evolution.<sup>12</sup> Mutu reimagines these histories through her own interpretation of Mami Wata, the ever-moving water spirit that flows through the mythologies of Africa and its diaspora. Moving between woman and serpent, Mami Wata embodies the paradox of water—offering abundance and healing, but capable of pulling the reckless into her depths. The interplay between organic materials—soil, liquid, plant forms—reinforces the artist's ongoing exploration of transformation, fluidity, and the instability of identity. Just as the statues of the Galleria Borghese have been altered by time, Mutu's figures exist in a state of constant metamorphosis, embodying the shifting relationships between nature, myth, and the human form.

At the entrance, Mutu's caryatids stand as gatekeepers to this renewal. Two sculptures from her bronze series *The Seated*—first exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York—now hold their place at the museum's threshold. They do not simply recall classical precedents but offer a reimagining of them. For centuries, the caryatid has represented women as structural supports, embodiments of endurance and architectural necessity. Mutu subverts this role, presenting them instead as figures of agency, monumental yet unbound.

The caryatid's lineage is extensive, spanning both Greco-Roman and African cultures.<sup>13</sup> In ancient Mediterranean contexts, caryatids were not only architectural elements, they framed sacred thresholds, marked passageways, and embodied divine presence. The most famous example, the Porch of the Caryatids at the Erechtheion in Athens, features six draped female forms in place of columns, replacing traditional supports with solemn sentinels welcoming visitors into a space dedicated to Athena and Poseidon.<sup>14</sup> Over centuries, their distinct shape became a recurring motif in European architecture, from Renaissance palaces to neoclassical façades, reinforcing their status as symbols of stability, heritage, and transition into sacred or monumental spaces. Across societies, women in sculptural form have not simply supported architecture—they have upheld spiritual, political, and symbolic order.

Standing female figures as carriers of symbolic power are not, however, unique to the Mediterranean area. In many African traditions these forms are not bound by any load-bearing function, but instead serve as channels between ancestors and the living, between material and immaterial realms. In Luba culture, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, caryatid-like forms serve as the base of sacred stools, reinforcing the continuity of kingship and ancestral wisdom.<sup>15</sup> In Yoruba cosmology, women appear at the center of shrines, not as passive or-

naments but as active conduits of divine energy.<sup>16</sup> Among the Dogon of Mali, towering wooden reliefs of human figures with uplifted arms invoke fertility, cosmic balance, and spiritual protection.<sup>17</sup> In these contexts, these representations do not serve as mere structural elements but as spiritual and political mediators, guardians of sacred order.

It is within this lineage of ritual and power that *The Seated* stand, reclaiming caryatids as autonomous forces. Her sculptures, crouching yet towering, human yet alien, resist both architectural function and aesthetic containment. Unlike classical caryatids, Mutu's figures do not bear weight—they assert presence, command space, and reflect light. *The Seated* series is composed of kneeling or seated female figures, with elongated limbs and stylized facial features, bejeweled with intricate embellishments: abstract head ornaments, polished disc at the mouth, and horizontal coils wrapping around the body—part garment, part armor.<sup>18</sup> Their designs reference the elaborate body adornments of high-ranking women in African societies—beaded bodices, circular necklaces, and lip plates. Yet these bronzes do not simply echo history—they subvert and reframe it, proposing alternative speculative mythologies. Like the lost sculptural ensembles that once adorned the Borghese façades, they embellish the villa; at the same time, their elongated proportions, otherworldly attributes, and hybrid forms introduce a foreign presence that feels both timeless and futuristic. Their features depart from classical forms and their presence carries the same intention—to mark an entrance, to define a threshold, to invoke a sense of the sacred while refusing to act as mere decoration. They live beyond conventional categories of gender, race, and history, pointing toward an expanded, futuristic mythology. In the artist's universe, women are symbols of resilience and solitary endurance; they are shapeshifters, transcending conventional classifications and creating new ways of inhabiting connoted spaces.

In this exhibition, Mutu transforms the museum space into a performative environment through two primary effects: suspension and sound. Rather than serving as a passive display for artworks, the Galleria Borghese becomes a dynamic space where the artist's interventions unsettle both materials and narratives.

Statues have historically been designed to command space—standing on pedestals, framed by columns, and positioned within architectural niches—reinforcing ideals of monumentality and hierarchy. Mutu disrupts this spatial order, introducing works that descend from above or rest horizontally, creating a counterbalance that shifts perception. Suspension, in this context, alters the perception of space. Sculptures descend from the museum's ceiling like letters dripping onto Apollinaire's blank page, introducing a movement unfamiliar to both spaces. Neither fully integrated into the museum nor entirely detached from it, these works exist in a state of soft tension, undermining their assimilation into the Galleria Borghese's structured narrative. As Georges Didi-Huberman argues in his concept of "images as ghosts," the persistence of images as ghostly traces haunts historical narratives, and art continuously reemerges, carrying the echoes of its past while

<sup>11</sup> Diana L. Eck, *India: A Sacred Geography* (New York: Harmony Books, 2012).

<sup>12</sup> Richard H. Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> I am grateful to Professor Carlo Gasparri for his generous insights on the cultural and architectural significance of caryatids within the Greco-Roman tradition.

<sup>14</sup> Sophie Psarra, "The Parthenon and the Erechtheion: The Architectural Formation of Place, Politics and Myth," *The Journal of Architecture* 9, no. 1 (2004): 77–104.

<sup>15</sup> Mary Nooter Roberts and Allen F. Roberts, *Memory: Luba Art and the Making of History* (New York: Museum for African Art, 1995).

<sup>16</sup> Frank Willett, *African Art* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1971).

<sup>17</sup> Kate Ezra, *Art of the Dogon: Selections from the Lester Wunderman Collection* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1988).

<sup>18</sup> "The Seated I by Wangechi Mutu," Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed March 8, 2025, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/830453>.

shaping new meanings in the present.<sup>19</sup> Mutu's sculptures—like spectral apparitions—drift between presence and absence, subtly unsettling the authority of classical display.<sup>20</sup> This refusal to be grounded questions historical permanence, turning the act of looking into an experience of uncertainty, where meaning changes and history is no longer a stable composition but a space of continual negotiation. Mutu's works embody this paradox: they exist within the museum yet evade its confines, challenging the structures that have long dictated how art is displayed and received.

In the porch, *Ndege*—a spiraling flock of several birds made out of tree branches, horns, and feathers—appears almost skeletal, an ambiguous form oscillating between creatures, fragments of trees, and aerial relics. These hybrid creatures introduce an airborne counternarrative that sharply contrasts with the structured compositions below. Beneath them, a dense array of Roman sculptures, reliefs, portraits, and statues of deities and humans is displayed. *Ndege* hovers above this composition, their skeletal forms suspended in a state between organic remnants and ethereal apparitions. Their presence becomes a dynamic counterpoint to the portico's classical stillness, evoking themes of migration, transformation, and the fluidity of cultural narratives. By placing *Ndege* in the portico—a space of passage and permeability—Mutu shifts not only its spatial logic but also its atmosphere. The room is subtly transformed by a yellowish aura, suffusing the portico with a warmth that departs from the villa's usual clarity—an unexpected chromatic field that reorients perception. The installation immerses visitors in a sensorial environment that contrasts with the luminous brilliance of the surrounding white marbles, shifting the tone of the space and inviting a slower, more embodied form of attention. Yet *Ndege*, even in their elevated position, do not embody dominance; they suggest escape, movement, and an existence beyond the remnants of history.

This suspended movement extends into *Prayers*, forming delicate loops of organic material that float around Gian Lorenzo Bernini's *The Rape of Proserpina* (1621–22). The deep red, wax-dipped beads suspended in midair create a striking contrast against the surrounding colored-marble decoration, introducing a sense of weightlessness that disrupts the sculptural density of the room. The reflections of the beads in the mirrored tabletops further amplify this effect, doubling their presence and echoing an infinite mantra of resilience and transformation. Placed on mirrored tables with antique legs belonging to the Borghese collection are two additional works—*Older Sisters* and *Underground Hornship*—which reinforce this dialogue with the classical past. While Marcantonio IV Borghese (1730–1800) arranged the porphyry busts of emperors on towering pedestals, underscoring their authority through height and frontal positioning, Mutu's two black bronze heads, *Older Sisters*, rest horizontally, their gazes turned toward one another in quiet exchange. Their features, distinctly African, evoke the intricate hairstyling traditions of East Africa, where elaborate braids and coiled forms serve as markers of identity, lineage, and artistry. One of the heads is topped by a spiral of braids, a sculptural detail that renders the hair almost fossilized—an anthropological im-

print, a reminder of humanity's deep entanglement with the earth. On the matching table, *Underground Hornship*, a bronze cast of curved animal horns, reiterates the interconnection between humans, materials, and nature.

The use of bronze, a metal largely absent from the Galleria Borghese's sculpture collection, is particularly significant. Historically associated with durability and value, this metal has also been systematically looted and melted down, its absence in European collections often linked to acts of destruction, colonial extraction, or repurposing for new use. Mutu reverses this trajectory, employing bronze not to glorify power but to recast overlooked histories: the cultural and aesthetic legacies inscribed in hair, a place where history, identity, and resistance converge. In many African cultures, hairstyling serves as a social and political archive, encoding lineage, status, and community affiliations.<sup>21</sup> During the transatlantic slave trade and colonial rule, hair became a site of contention, as enslaved and colonized people were often forcibly shaved, severing them from their cultural identities. In more recent history, natural Black hairstyles such as braids, Afros, and dreadlocks have been at the center of political defiance, challenging Eurocentric aesthetic norms and reclaiming the freedom of self-representation. By casting hair in bronze, historically associated with permanence and authority, Mutu subverts its traditionally ephemeral nature, transforming it into an enduring monument of cultural resilience.

This interrogation of material hierarchies takes on a deeply personal resonance in *Suspended Playtime*, where a constellation of suspended black spheres recalls makeshift soccer balls from the artist's Kenyan childhood. Fashioned from discarded plastic bags and repurposed materials, these forms reflect the resourcefulness of play, embodying both ingenuity and nostalgia. Hung in the Lanfranco Loggia, these imperfect spheres break away from the painted illusionism of the surrounding frescoes. While the Galleria Borghese's collection of paintings presents a vision of opulence and pictorial mastery, *Suspended Playtime* introduces a different kind of visual field, one shaped by movement, improvisation, and personal memory. The work's positioning disrupts the contemplative nature of the gallery, inviting active engagement with the space. A reflection on absence and violence emerges in *Bloody Rug*, a work that transforms fabric into a silent yet insistent record of struggle. Mutu often engages with themes of inequality, revealing how systems of power shape human lives and histories. This dialogue between fabric and violence resonates with classical depictions of mythological struggle, particularly in Domenichino's *The Hunt of Diana* (1616–17), where the scene of an all-female contest unfolds.<sup>22</sup> The women are observed by hidden male intruders, depicting the myth of Actaeon, the hunter punished for spying on Diana and her nymphs as they bathed. The male gaze, intruding on a space meant for women, is present in both *The Hunt of Diana* and in the larger tradition of European academic painting, where women's bodies have historically been sites of both desire and conquest. *Bloody Rug*, however, reclaims this space through its use of material rather than an image. Instead of portraying violence, it embeds the trace of a struggle

<sup>19</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman, "Warburg's Haunted House," *Common Knowledge* 18, no. 1 (2012): 50–60.

<sup>20</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'image survivante: Histoire de l'art et temps des fantômes selon Aby Warburg* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> Elisabeth Johnson, *Resistance and Empowerment in Black Women's Hair Styling* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>22</sup> "The Hunting of Diana," Galleria Borghese, accessed March 8, 2025, <https://www.collezionegalleriaborghese.it/en/opere/the-hunting-of-diana>.

into the very fabric of the work, allowing history to emerge through tactile, woven layers rather than a painted spectacle.

The Renaissance and Baroque masters were renowned for their ability to depict movement and sound—the swirl of drapery, the clashing of battle, the ripple of water, the barking of hounds in the hunt. Their paintings pulse with implied noise, inviting viewers to hear what is not explicitly there. Mutu, in contrast, does not paint sound—she materializes it. Through suspension, shifting materials, and subtle sonic presences, she activates the Galleria Borghese with works that are visually silent yet resonant. In *Ndege*, the flock of birds, though suspended in stillness, evokes the rustling of wings, recalling the invisible soundscape of nature. Even in their immobility, they suggest the murmuring of the wind through branches, the distant calls of birds in flight—an echo of a living world beyond the museum’s walls. Their delicate forms, caught in mid-motion, bridge the silence of sculpture with the memory of movement, making the air itself feel inhabited. Similarly, the black spheres of *Suspended Playtime* tremble like scattered musical notes, responding to the gentle disturbances in the room. Outside in the gardens, *Nyoka* suggests the imperceptible friction of coiled movement, while the surrounding bronze vessels filled with water introduce the soft ripple of moving liquid.

Sound as an invisible form of inscription is most explicit in *The Grains of Words*, where language itself acquires sculptural weight. Mutu molds a passage from Bob Marley’s “War” (1976)—a song inspired by Haile Selassie’s 1963 United Nations speech on racial equality—onto the floor at the far end of the large Mariano Rossi Hall, inscribing it directly atop ancient Roman mosaics that depict scenes of gladiatorial combat and violent animal hunts, and beneath the vaulted ceiling fresco that celebrates Roman imperial virtue and divine ancestry.<sup>23</sup> The text overlays these first-century images, disrupting their narrative and offering a counterpoint that speaks to ongoing struggles against oppression: “*There are no longer first-class and second-class citizens of any nation! Until the color of a man’s skin is of no more significance than the color of his eyes, we say WAR.*”

By carving these words directly above the remnants of an ancient power structure, Mutu reframes the act of looking—compelling viewers to see one history through the lens of another. The act of reading itself becomes auditory, a rhythmic hum that lingers on. As bodies move close to the words, they activate its presence, transforming written language into a felt, almost spoken experience. If *The Grains of Words* inscribes collective struggle, then *Poems by my great Grandmother I* is an act of intimate remembrance. A thin tool delicately etches a continuous circular motion onto a vessel—a quiet, unbroken rhythm of inscription. The gesture, minimal yet persistent, recalls the

act of writing history not through force, but through repetition, care, and memory. The movement of the pen, barely perceptible, echoes the idea that sound does not always need to be loud to be powerful—it can exist in whispers, in murmurs, in the faint etching of time upon a surface.

Mutu’s practice is deeply rooted in collage—not only in her two-dimensional works but also in her approach to form. She does not remove, but adds. She does not erase, but reconstitutes. Her figures are not smooth, idealized portraits but layered and complex, their textures revealing infinite nuances. Whether layering materials, merging human and nonhuman facets, or transforming overlooked fragments into monuments, her work expands beyond solitary narratives in favor of complexity. Even her enthroned figures reinterpret classical ideals of dominance. Instead of asserting power through sheer monumentality, they introduce a different kind of presence—one built upon the accumulation of history, myth, and the interplay of materials. Mutu’s act of piecing together discarded or marginalized elements is not merely a formal technique but an artistic engagement with reclamation.

Across her practice, Mutu reframes classical conventions not by opposing it outright, but by transposing its spatial and physical logic. Rather than conforming to the rigid structures of institutional display, she introduces instability, with works that hover between presence and absence, permanence and impermanence, solidity and dissolution. Whether through the suspended flight of *Ndege*, the organic weight of *Prayers*, the fragmented reflections of *Older Sisters*, or the fluid movements in *Suspended Playtime*, Mutu proposes an alternative way of inhabiting space—one that is unfixed, porous, and in constant negotiation with history. Suspension, in this sense, is more than an artistic strategy; it is an act of resistance. To resist is not always to oppose directly but to refuse finality, to embrace transformation. Mutu’s figures, whether hovering in air, fractured in bronze, or trembling in subtle motion, reject singularity in favor of multiplicity. They subvert the authority of classical ideals not by erasing them but by expanding the frame, making room for new mythologies, new voices, new ways of seeing. This reconfiguration of history extends beyond the physical into the realm of sound, inscription, and physical memory. Mutu’s practice is neither static nor linear—it is continuously rewritten, accumulating like sediment, moving like breath. Her work does not reject history but reimagines it. Through layering, hybridization, and the refusal of fixed identities, she resists closure. Hers is a mythology in motion—fluid, speculative, and open-ended. In this way, resistance is not merely an act of negation but a means of renewal: a way of seeing, remembering, and reenvisioning the world.

<sup>23</sup> “The subject celebrates Roman civilization and the heroic virtue of honour. In the center is the depiction of Romulus welcomed to Olympus by Jupiter to propitiate the victory of Furius Camillus against Brennus, king of the Gauls. The choice of the subject is also connected with the birth, on 8 August 1775, of Marcantonio IV’s first son, Camillo, who was to marry Pauline, Napoleon’s sister. Portrayed around the main motif are Justice, Loyalty, and Honour, which triumph thanks to the action of time over the vices (Slander, Deceit, and Falseness), the Fame of Rome and its Victories (alluded to by the episodes on the margins of the long side of the ceiling).” “Mariano Rossi Hall,” Galleria Borghese, accessed March 8, 2025, <https://galleriaborghese.beniculturali.it/en/il-museo/la-villa/ingresso-salone-di-mariano-rossi/>.



## FENDI: ART & CULTURE

The one between FENDI and the world of art and culture is a deep relationship lasting since 1925, when Edoardo and Adele Fendi founded the luxury Maison in Rome. A bond made of strong values such as innovation, tradition, savoir-faire, creativity, Italian spirit, that has been strengthened in time thanks to a full commitment of the Maison and several partnerships in support of Italian art and culture around the world, with all its outstanding achievements and talent.

On January 2013, FENDI announces the restoration of the Trevi Fountain in Rome under its patronage. This philanthropic act starts an ambitious project for the preservation of cultural heritage of the city of Rome: *Fendi for Fountains*. In addition to the Trevi Fountain, the project also includes the restoration of the complex of the "Four Fountains". In 2016, the Roman Maison confirms its commitment to the patronage for the City of Rome and its fountains with the restoration and/or preservation of the fountains del Gianicolo, del Mosè, del Ninfeo del Pincio and del Peschiera.

In 2015, FENDI gives back to its city, Rome, the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana in the EUR district, chosen as its new headquarter to reinforce its Roman roots. On this occasion, after more than seventy years from its creation, the Maison opens the first floor of the Palazzo to the public and devotes it to temporary exhibitions and installations, among which *Una Nuova Roma. L'Eur e il Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana* (2015), *FENDI Roma – The Artisans Of Dreams* (2016) and *FENDI Studios* (2017).

At Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, FENDI hosts for the first time, from January to July 2017, an exhibition of contemporary art, a solo show by Italian artist Giuseppe Penone entitled *Matrice*. Curated by Massimiliano Gioni, the exhibition features a selection of fifteen artworks that date from the 1970s to the present, including many that are rarely seen and are shown in Italy for the first time.

The collaboration with Giuseppe Penone continues a few months later with the installation in Largo Goldoni, opposite Palazzo FENDI, of *Foglie di Pietra*, a great sculpture commissioned by the Maison as a gift to the city of Rome. This major donation marks the first time in which a significant contemporary artwork is installed permanently in the public spaces of Rome. The initiative was examined and then approved by a jury composed of the Italian Ministry of Culture, the City of Rome, FENDI and the exhibition curator Massimiliano Gioni.

In March 2017, FENDI focuses on youth training, with the creation of a scientific area exclusively dedicated to the students of the 'SAF – Scuola di Alta Formazione' (*School of Professional Training*) of the 'ISCR - Istituto Superiore per la Conservazione ed il Restauro' (*Institute for Conservation and Restoration*), the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism technical body specialized in the conservation-restoration of cultural heritage.

At the same time, the Maison supports the Italian Pavillon at the 57<sup>th</sup> International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, as well as the three artists – Giorgio Andreotta Calò, Roberto Cuoghi and Adelita Husni-Bey – selected by the curator Cecilia Alemani for the exhibition *Il mondo magico (The Magical World)*, confirming its support not only for culture and art, but for Italian excellence around the world.

In September 2017, FENDI announces a three-year partnership with Galleria Borghese. The project sees the support to the exhibitions taking place at the Galleria Borghese for the following 3 years, among which *Bernini*, a solo one with eighty artworks dedicated to Gian Lorenzo Bernini, from October 2017 to February 2018 and *Picasso La Scultura* from October 2018 to February 2019. The exhibition, for the first time in Italy, is included in the international cultural project *Picasso-Méditerranée* initiated by the Musée national Picasso-Paris, presenting 56 masterpieces by Picasso, unpublished studio photographs, and videos telling about the contexts in which the sculptures were created. The

# FENDI

ROMA

third exhibition realized in partnership with Galleria Borghese is "VALADIER. *Splendour in Eighteenth-Century Rome*", dedicated to Luigi Valadier and showcased from October 2019 to February 2020.

The Maison further confirms its commitment to the world of art in June 2018 by supporting the artwork and performance *Revenge* by artist Nico Vascellari, realized at the MAXXI museum in Rome and already winner of the 2006-2007 edition of the *Premio per la Giovane Arte Italiana* award of the MAXXI Arte collection and previously exhibited at the 52<sup>nd</sup> International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia of 2007.

In October 2018, FENDI supports the creation of the most impressive architectural mapping project ever realized in Italy: *Lux Formae* by the Hungarian artist Laszlo Bordos. The project, produced by Solid Light for Videocittà, identifies Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, headquarter of the luxury Maison, as its protagonist. For one night the building is transformed into a palette by the artist using projections as a hi-tech brush 4.0.

In June 2019, FENDI renews its commitment to the city of Rome by supporting and executing the restoration and enhancement works aimed at the protection and fruition of the Temple of Venus and Rome, completed at the end of the year 2021 – an incredible milestone in the Maison's patronage program aimed at bringing some of the most important landmarks of the Eternal City back to their former glory.

In June 2020, FENDI unveils the first episode of *FENDI Renaissance – Anima Mundi*, a series of streaming events presented by the Maison together with renowned musical institutions worldwide with the aim of promoting and supporting inclusivity, diversity, talent and creativity and bring people together with a unique and emotional moment. The first episode featured Antonio Vivaldi's *Estate* from *The Four Seasons* executed by the orchestra of the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, followed by Italian classics executed by the orchestra of Poly Performing Arts in Shanghai, Gioachino Rossini's *William Tell Overture* Finale executed by students of the Tokyo University of the Arts, Antonio Vivaldi's *Concerto No. 3, RV 310* from '*L'estro armonico*' (The Harmonic Inspiration) executed by chamber orchestra Sejong Soloists in Seoul up to an original Jazz score executed by the students of the Julliard School in New York.

In December 2022, FENDI and the French Academy in Rome – Villa Medici unveil their latest collaboration, with the support of the *Mobilier National*, to refurbish six reception *Salons* at Villa Medici – including the majestic *Grand Salon*, *Salon des pensionnaires*, *Salon de musique*, *Salon de lecture*, *Salon Bleu* and *Petit salon* – offering a new décor that encourages creativity and contemporary design.

In January 2023, FENDI and Fondazione Arnaldo Pomodoro announce the launch of a multi-year partnership, a natural evolution of the relationship that was established between the Foundation and the Maison in 2013, when FENDI found its Milanese "headquarters" in the space at Via Solari 35, the Foundation's former exhibition venue which houses *Ingresso nel labirinto*, one of the most significant and representative works in Arnaldo Pomodoro's artistic path. The first appointment marking this renewed collaboration is the exhibition *Arnaldo Pomodoro. Il Grande Teatro delle Civiltà [Arnaldo Pomodoro. The Great Theatre of Civilizations]*, curated by Lorenzo Respi and Andrea Viliani, which is open for visits starting from 12<sup>th</sup> May to 1<sup>st</sup> October 2023 at the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana in Rome.

Following the first collaboration from 2017 to 2020, in March 2023, FENDI renews its partnership with Galleria Borghese by supporting the exhibitions *Giuseppe Penone. Gesti Universali* from March to May 2023, in 2024 for the *Louise Bourgeois. Unconscious Memories* exhibition from June to September 2024, and in 2025 with *Wangechi Mutu. Black Soil Poems* from June to September 2025.

In May 2025, after sponsoring its 2-years conservative restoration, FENDI announces the reopening of the *Grotto of Diana* within the Gardens of Villa D'Este in Tivoli, near Rome, an iconic UNESCO site and a symbolic place for Fountains and water, element dear to the Maison.