

MONICA DE CARDENAS

Wangari Mathenge *Perspectives*

Opening

Thursday 29 September 2022
6 pm

On view

from 29.09.2022
to 26.11.2022

Hours

Tuesday – Saturday
11 am – 7 pm

We are delighted to announce *Perspectives*, the first solo show by Wangari Mathenge in Italy.

The Kenya-born artist creates powerful paintings confronting issues regarding the visibility of the black female in the context of both the traditional African patriarchal society and the Diaspora.

In her work, Mathenge uses loose, expressive, bright saturated brushstrokes to present intimate images of figures in domestic spaces. Her subjects, mostly women, are surrounded by everyday objects that act as markers of time, location, and culture. The canvases display images of the artist herself and relatives in poses of relax or contemplation, evoking a sense of leisure and yet also defiance: they are captured in ordinary moments, often gazing at the viewer with great self-possession, sprawled across the sofa and lost in thought. Family pictures pinpoint individual narratives, while the brightly patterned East African kanga fabric and the recurring statuette of a Masai celebrate a wider inheritance.

Mathenge's works privilege introspection and a visceral cohabitation with her subjects. The exhibition displays twelve works and each one extends a very private conversation into a public sphere, all the while maintaining a deeply intimate connection. The artist's dialogue is one of personal strength, humility, and majesty. Each of her figures are characters for whom the experience of being alive is a fabulous tapestry of possibility, yet the traces of struggle are evident in their body language and expression.

The show is titled *Perspectives* and refers to a series of works that deal with two divergent meanings associated with the word. Perspective can refer to one's point of view, suggesting that the subjects bring with them experiences and ideas shaped by their environment and conditioning the way they see things or meanings they are capable of attributing to experiences. Alternatively, "perspective," can also refer to the angle in which the viewer witnesses a scene due to their vantage point. The broader context points to the fact that the viewer contributes to their experiencing of a scene. Moreover a scene captured within a frame necessarily omits what lies beyond it and this act can either be intentional or unintentional - limits are placed on what the physical eye or a camera can perceive and what it is attracted to in a given moment.

Wangari Mathenge (*Nairobi, Kenya 1973) grew up in London and Nairobi, then moved to the USA to study law. She holds degrees from Howard University and Georgetown University Law Center, Washington, DC and an MFA in Painting and Drawing from the School of The Art Institute of Chicago, IL (2021).

Mathenge's first solo project, *Aura of Quiet*, was presented at Roberts Projects, Los Angeles in 2019. Other recent exhibitions include: *You are here* at Pippy Houldsworth Gallery, London (2021) *The Expats Studies: Impressions on Paper* (solo) at The Sacristy Gallery, Chicago (2021) as well as *Witness: Afro Perspectives from the Jorge M. Pérez Collection*, El Espacio 23, Miami (2020 – 21) and *Stretching the Body* at Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin, in the Fall of 2021.

Mathenge was commissioned by *The New York Times Style Magazine* to make work for their 2021 Culture issue. She has also been featured in publications including *Artforum*, *The Financial Times* and *Artsy*. Collections include Weisman Art Museum, Minneapolis, MN, and Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin. Mathenge lives and works in Chicago.