

# Maharam Supports Entryways: Nontsikelelo Mutiti at Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania

This spring Maharam is proud to partner with Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) at the University of Pennsylvania on an installation with artist Nontsikelelo Mutiti that transforms the building's facade into an expansive, 2,000-square-foot work of art as part of its inaugural *Entryways* commission. Interweaving visual histories and patterns of ironwork with African hair braiding designs, *Entryways: Nontsikelelo Mutiti* explores concepts of beauty, labor, and protection. On view through December 2024, the new installation is visible to passersby, advancing ICA's history of commissioning artworks and installations that extend outward from the galleries into public space.

"This expansive new commission transforms the main point of access into our building, serving as both an inviting entryway for the public into ICA and an exciting point of departure into new art and ideas," said Zoë Ryan, Daniel W. Dietrich II Director of ICA Philadelphia. "This project builds upon ICA's history of partnering with Maharam to transform public spaces within our building and marks the inaugural iteration of the ongoing *Entryways* series of commissions that will activate our facade. It is fitting to be launching this new series at the start of our 60th anniversary season as we look ahead to our next chapter at ICA."

Born in Zimbabwe and based in New Haven, Connecticut, Mutiti has developed an artistic practice that explores the relationship between modern design and its roots in the African diasporic visual culture. For the *Entryways* commission, the artist incorporates African braid renderings with symbols traditionally found in decorative architectural features first created by enslaved blacksmiths from West Africa. These designs are now found across the United States and the larger diaspora, including the ironwork forms on windows, railings, and doors across Philadelphia, creating a shared diasporic visual language.

The installation features the printed ironwork and braid motifs on a gradient background, with gold barrettes arranged at an exaggerated scale throughout the pattern. Mutiti implicitly draws a connection between the protective functions of both ironwork and hair braiding, while bringing to the fore the often-invisible labor that goes into these designs.

Noted Hallie Ringle, ICA's Daniel and Brett Sundheim Chief Curator, "Expanding across our facade, Nontsi's work simultaneously highlights overlooked aspects of our collective history and visually connects the modernist design of ICA's building with the history and architectural legacy of the city we inhabit. The work is both site-specific and resonant with global meanings, and we hope it will become a welcoming beacon for our communities."

Mutiti and Maharam worked closely to explore materials and printing techniques that would integrate the artwork with the building's architectural features, including substantial window frames, tinted glass, and use of natural light to offer different views of the work and the space. The design enlists a clear film that was printed—and in some instances die cut—to optimize the impact of the artwork's motifs. The application of Mutiti's artwork on ICA's windowed facade embraces the space's varied light conditions. In daylight, the artwork's ombre background enhances the intricate artwork as viewed through the tinted windows and casts the motifs on the entrance's floor. By night, the design appears as though on a lightbox, lit from within.

## **Exhibition Organization and Credits**

*Entryways: Nontsikelelo Mutiti* is commissioned by The Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania (ICA) and developed in partnership with Maharam as an initiative of Maharam Digital Projects. The series is curated by Hallie Ringle, ICA's Daniel and Brett Sundheim Chief Curator. Creation of the installation is supported by Nontsikelelo Mutiti's design and production assistant Jiani Liu.

## **About Nontsikelelo Mutiti**

Nontsikelelo Mutiti is a Zimbabwean-born visual artist and educator. She is invested in elevating the work and practices of Black peoples past, present, and future through a conceptual approach to design, publishing, archiving practices, and institution building. Major recent projects include a large-scale floor mural for the 2023

exhibition O Quilombismo at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin; a wall mural, “KUDUDUNURA,” installed at Animal Farm, Harare; and an exterior mural, “BLACK THANG MURAL,” installed at Stable in Washington, DC in 2021. Mutiti is the Director of Graduate Studies in Graphic Design at Yale School of Art. She has held academic positions at Zimbabwe Institute of Vigital Arts (ZIVA), SUNY Purchase College, and VCUarts at Virginia Commonwealth University. Mutiti holds a diploma in Multimedia from the Zimbabwe Institute of Vigital Arts (ZIVA) and an MFA from the Yale School of Art, with a concentration in Graphic Design.

#### **About Maharam**

Founded in 1902 in New York, Maharam is a leading creator of textiles for commercial and residential interiors. Recognized for its rigorous and holistic commitment to design, Maharam embraces a range of disciplines from product, graphic, and digital design to art and architecture. Maharam textiles are included in the permanent collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Stedelijk Museum, among others. Maharam is the recipient of the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum Design Patron Award for its longstanding support of art and design.

#### **About Maharam Digital Projects**

Maharam Digital Projects is an ongoing series of digitally printed, large-scale wall installations designed in partnership with emerging and established artists. Initiated in 2009, the collection has grown to include over 100 projects with artists including Polly Apfelbaum, Teresita Fernández, Spencer Finch, Liam Gillick, Marilyn Minter, and Sarah Sze and renowned designers such as Hella Jongerius, Karel Martens, and Paul Smith.

#### **About the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania**

The Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania (ICA Philadelphia) is a global hub for contemporary art and ideas. Free and open to all, ICA Philadelphia is dedicated to presenting innovative artistic practices across disciplines and to serving as a laboratory for risk-taking, community-building, and knowledge-creation. As a kunsthalle (non-collecting institution), ICA Philadelphia does this through commissions, exhibitions, and programs. Over the past 60 years, ICA Philadelphia has championed the University’s commitment to cultivating the next generation of imaginative creators and thinkers as a launchpad for the careers of artists and arts professionals.

For more information, contact [press@maharam.com](mailto:press@maharam.com).

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