

**NICOLA  
VASSELL**

Opening Sept 5, 6–8 pm  
Sept 5 – October 19, 2024

**WANGARI MATHENGE**

BEDIMMED BOUNDARIES:  
BETWEEN WAKEFULNESS  
AND SLEEP



Gallery Hours

Tuesday–Saturday, 10 am–6 pm

138 10th Ave. New York, NY 10011

For Press Inquiries

For press inquiries, please reach out to the team at [ALMA](#).

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Nicola Vassell is pleased to present *Bedimmed Boundaries: Between Wakefulness and Sleep*, a new series of paintings and video installation by Wangari Mathenge in which she observes her own sleeping body in order to derive profound, personal insights into the nature of altered states of consciousness. This recent work depicts her experience of two particular psychological phenomena: *hypnagogia*, the transition from wakefulness to sleep, and *hypnopompia*, the transition from sleep to wakefulness. Amidst semi-lucid dreams, her senses distort, even merge, the physical and fantastical, incurring a heightened sensation of euphoria.

To develop the visual vocabulary of her hypnagogic and hypnopompic journeys, Mathenge began collecting textual and visual records; she arranged cameras in her home to film her late-night movements and kept a notebook to recount the details of her recent and recurring dreams. Through a series of self-portraits, she depicts her body in fluctuating states of repose across multiple, durational panels. She images her fluttering eyes and restless spasms as if windows into her subconscious with the curtains drawn—gestures that imply, rather than illustrate, her vivid hallucinations.

Mathenge is interested in subverting conventional associations with the body at rest, bringing expressive form to scientific research that reframes sleep as an activation of the brain—comparable to the metabolic stimulation the brain produces in consciousness. Citing recent studies by the neuroscientist Rahul Jandial, she considers rest a signifier of nuanced, abstract neural impulses that stimulate creativity, memory, and situations unrestrained by the logic required for executive functioning. Through twisting and turning pictorial planes, boundaries between wake and rest are dismantled; in each image, she deftly collapses diametric poles of the same reality.

As the hours pass from panel to panel, her palette drifts from bright shades of yellow and green to deep tones of ochre and moss. While her paintings offer austere scenes of stamina, stillness, and sleepwalking, animated brushstrokes infuse her domestic surroundings with enigmatic vibrations—swirling gestures that convey the uncanny experience of perceiving her ecstatic aura from a bird's-eye view. Cloaked in slumber, Mathenge's compositions are mesmerizing and perplexing—portraits of her mind as it pursues equilibrium between empirical and imaginary realms.

June 27—August 9, 2023

About Wangari Mathenge

b.1973 Nairobi, Kenya

Wangari Mathenge lives and works in Chicago, IL. She holds degrees from Howard University and Georgetown University Law Center and an MFA in Painting and Drawing at the School of The Art Institute of Chicago.

After a career in international business and law, Wangari Mathenge began pursuing her painting practice professionally in 2019. Mathenge's work is a visual testimony to the black female experience of existing simultaneously within two cultures—traditional African society and the Diaspora. Figurative, patterned, and brightly-hued, her paintings are lively and generative. Her rich compositions, emboldened with gestural strokes and mark-making, often depict close friends and loved ones. Mathenge's portraits are slices of life, offering an intimate view into her subjects' interiority.

The artist's recent solo exhibitions include *A Day of Rest*, Pippy Houldsworth Gallery, London (2023); *Tidal Wave of Colour*, Roberts Projects, Los Angeles (2023); *Perspectives*, Monica de Cardenas, Milan (2021) and *The Expat Studies: Impressions on Paper*, The Sacristy Gallery, Chicago (2021). Selected group exhibitions include *When They See Us: Visibility in Contemporary Art/History*, Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX (2024); *When We See Us: A Century of Black Figuration in Painting*, Zeitz MOCAA, Cape Town, South Africa and Kunstmuseum Basel, Switzerland (2022-24); *Black American Portraits*, Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, Spelman College Museum of Fine Art, Atlanta, GA and Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Memphis, TN (2021-2023); *The Power of Portraiture*, Nasher Museum of Art, Durham, NC (2022) and *Rested*, Nicola Vassell, New York (2021). Mathenge's work is held in prominent international collections, including Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX; Nasher Museum of Art, Durham, NC; Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, CA; Weisman Art Museum, Minneapolis, MN; Kistefos Museum, Oslo, Norway; Rubell Family Collection, Miami; Jorge M. Pérez Collection, Miami; Elie Khouri Art Foundation, Dubai and Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin.

About Nicola Vassell

Nicola Vassell is a contemporary art gallery committed to discourse that widens the lens of the history and future of art. Its focus is on developing an intergenerational, cross-disciplinary program of international artists and thinkers.