



Miu Miu Women's Tales Episode Centers on Black Female Representation

WWD sat down with French filmmaker Alice Diop, director of the 30th installment of the brand's film series, to discuss her episode "Fragments for Venus" premiering at Venice Film Festival. BY SANDRA SALIBIAN

MILAN – A Black woman wanders through the halls of a museum, stopping to examine paintings while a voiceover cites titles and descriptions, revealing the place that Western art has often reserved to Black female bodies.

Another Black woman moves across the streets of Brooklyn, spending the day observing fellow Black women around her, her gaze moving from a crossing guard to a commuter in the subway, from a musician playing a flute to a lady painting on a bench – all living incarnations and modern interpretations of the new Venus.

These are the two main segments of "Fragments for Venus," the latest short movie in the Miu Miu Women's Tales series, which Miuccia Prada launched in 2011 as a commissioning platform exclusively for female filmmakers, who here were invited to express their own point of view and investigate the plurality of femininity with no subjects briefed beforehand so as to avoid restrictions.

Repairing a deformed representation of Black women is the focus of the 30th installment of the ongoing series, for which the brand tapped Alice Diop. The acclaimed French director has been behind documentaries examining marginalized communities, including "La Permanence" and "Vers la tendresse" in 2016, before her breakthrough feature "Saint Omer" inspired by a real-life infanticide trial of a Senegalese woman was presented in Venice in 2022, where it received accolades.

Now Diop is back to the Italian lagoon to unveil the 21-minute movie commissioned by Miu Miu, which will premiere at the Venice Film Festival's "Giornate degli Autori" on Saturday, before being released on the brand's digital channels and, like the other Tales, made available to stream on Mubi globally from Sept. 15.

"This is the first time I have accepted a collaboration of this kind...because, for me, a commission is not enough of a motor to drive a project. I need something more

intimate, more visceral," Diop told WWD in a Zoom interview on the eve of the premiere.

"But it's hard to say no to the offer to join such a prestigious team because most of the filmmakers who have participated in the [Miu Miu] Women's Tales are among those who are the most interesting to me and inspire me the most," she continued, citing the likes of Lucrecia Martel, Agnès Varda and Alice Rohrwacher and defining "all the women who participated in this series the most important of our contemporary era."

Miu Miu first reached out to Diop more than two years ago, after "Saint Omer" played in Venice. The director found the time was now ripe to embark on the project as she has been spending a year teaching in the U.S. and been working on a free adaptation of the oeuvre of the American poet and artist Robin Coste Lewis.

Her Miu Miu episode was sparked by her interest in Coste Lewis' 2015 poem "Voyage of the Sable Venus," "which is basically revisiting or questioning the place that is given to Black women's body in the history of Western art. This is something that's always been central to my work and seemed particularly pertinent to me to be able to question these issues in the form of this film," she said.

"We – Black people – come from this history of painting in which we have been marginalized, objectified," said the director, whose film wants to show that "we – artists, writers, thinkers – are here now. It attests to the way in which we are now ready to express ourselves."

To this end, the film includes a tracking shot of contemporary art, paintings, sculptures and photography that is an "homage to all the contemporary female artists who inspire me the most and sharpen my days as a filmmaker." Tributes additionally include Meshell Ndegeocello's song "Thus Sayeth the Lorde," which turns American poet Audre Lorde's ideas against injustice into a poignant canticle that closes the film.





"I've been making films from the margins, with a political intention of filming those margins, because those are the people I come from. That's my territory, my history," said Diop. "It's why I work. I've been working on these questions today, yesterday, always. This is my path...if it happens to coincide with the zeitgeist, that's great. But...it's been the same way the whole time and I suspect I'll be working on these questions still in 10 years."

Describing it as "my most simple and radical work to date," Diop sees the short movie as important as "Saint Omer." To be sure, there's a consistency in the two, not only in the themes but also in the cast, as Rwandan-Swiss contemporary artist and actress Kayije Kagame features in both.

"I always approach my films in the same way, which is to resolve specific questions that each film raises. And to me, there's no difference between a three-hour film or 20-minute film, between a fiction and a documentary," said Diop when asked if there were different challenges this time around.

Ditto for her time in Venice. "When you're presenting a film, what's important is not whether the film is a commission from a clothing brand or not...it's how the film will be received, how people are going to talk about it," said the director. "You're kind of on edge, there's something feverish about it because you don't know how the discourse is going to be shaped around the film. So in that way, there's been no change between the two experiences."

As for the reaction she hopes to elicit, Diop has no specific expectation. "Maybe for people to teach me things that I hadn't suspected I wanted to say, or for them to experience revelations that they hadn't

imagined they might have," said Diop.

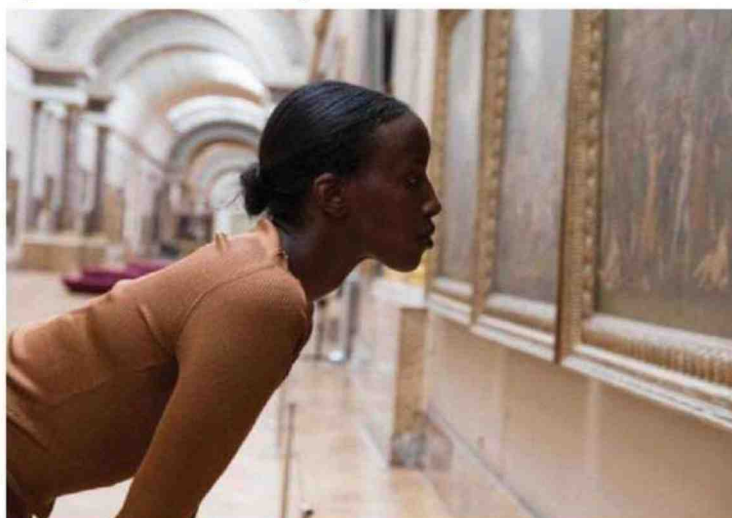
"When I make a film, I'm looking to be nourished, expanded, made more lucid. And that's what I want for the people who see it, too....It's something that you can't predict... One could also expect silence – a reaction that is so deep that there is no speaking. That's very beautiful, as well."

"The film is a form of thought that is sent out to be received in every way. What's magnificent about making them is that what you've put into it, it is given back to you when people tell you what they've felt, seen and thought," said Diop. "I make my films for other people to speak."

Sparking a conversation is also what Miu Miu is all about. As per its Venice tradition, following the premiere and celebratory dinner at Palazzo Cà Corner della Regina – which houses Fondazione Prada's Venetian outpost – the brand will have Diop take part in a panel on Sunday. She will be in talks with fellow director Joanna Hogg, who worked on the previous installment of the Tales series, titled "Autobiografia di una Borsetta," or "Autobiography of a Handbag," and presented in London in February.

The event will be flanked by another talk between Miu Miu's longtime ambassador Emma Corrin and Maggie Gyllenhaal, who's part of Miu Miu Women's Tales Committee that includes talents from across the film industry, along with Prada. On Monday, it will be the turn of actresses Alisha Boe, Sarah Catherine Hook and Myha'la Herrold to take part in a conversation.

Next up, Miu Miu will return as official partner of Art Basel Paris' Public Program for the second year, bringing the "30 Blizzards" show by experimental British artist Helen Marten to the Palais d'Iéna from Oct. 22 to 26.





Here and above: A behind-the-scenes image of the 30th episode of Miu Miu Women's Tales, "Fragments of Venus" by Alice Diop.

