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Laylah Ali, *Untitled*, 2006-7, ink and pencil on paper.
Image courtesy the artist and 303 Gallery, New York.



Annie Pootoogook, *Composition (Mother & Child in Amautik)*, Cape Dorset, 2006/07, pen, pencil crayon.
Image courtesy the artist and Fehely Fine Arts, Toronto.

Upcoming Exhibition: *Pandora's Box*

An Interview with Crystal Mowry, Curator of Exhibitions and Collections

Crystal Mowry, KW|AG's Curator of Exhibitions and Collections, is collaborating with Amanda Cachia, Curator of the Dunlop Art Gallery, to bring Pandora's Box to KW|AG. Communications Coordinator, Tracy Smith, interviewed Crystal about some of the ideas behind this touring exhibition.

Why did you want to bring *Pandora's Box* to KW|AG?

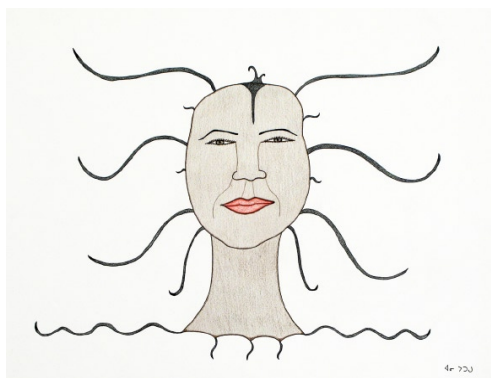
Allan MacKay (KW|AG's former Curator of Exhibitions and Collections) and I first talked about bringing this show to KW|AG in 2008. We had an interest in showing work by many of the artists in the show prior to them being assembled together for the *Pandora's Box* exhibition. So when we saw that the Dunlop Art Gallery was circulating *Pandora's Box*, we knew it was a great opportunity to show works by some very high-profile artists in North America in a context that was quite different from other recent investigations of work by female artists. For instance, [Shary Boyle](#) is one of the most recognized contemporary artists in Canada. She won the 2009 [Gershon Iskowitz Prize](#) at the AGO for her outstanding contribution to visual arts in Canada. She was also commissioned to create new work for the re-opening of the AGO. Although Shary has shown elsewhere in the Region, *Pandora's Box* is a very different thematic context for seeing her work. Kara Walker has also been commissioned by the AGO, and it is very rare to see her work in Canada. Many of the artists in this exhibition are at the forefront of contemporary art, and are receiving tremendous critical attention around the world.

How does the show examine assumptions about gender, the body, sexuality and spirituality?

Not unlike our [Being Magnified](#) exhibition, *Pandora's Box* is about story-telling and myth-making. These two exhibitions complement one another in unexpected ways. The exhibition looks at different ways that the female body can be present in certain stories, how sexuality, motherhood and the feminine experience is evident in both artistic practice and narratives. The artists challenge myths and fairy tales, and make them a more accurate mirror of what it means to be female in our modern complex world.



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Annie Pootoogook, *Face Transformation, Cape Dorset* 2001/02, ink, pencil crayon, pencil. Image courtesy the artist and Feheley Fine Arts, Toronto.



Kara Walker, *Testimony: Narrative of a Negress Burdened by Good Intentions*, 2005, photogravure print, edition 19/40. Image courtesy the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York.

How might some of the art work be uncomfortable for some viewers?

The exhibition is not provocative for the sake of being provocative. Translated from Greek, “pan” means all and “dora” means gifts, or “all-giving”. I hope that visitors, too, will be all-giving and open-minded when they visit the exhibition. The exhibition should stimulate dialogue as it is sharing some long overdue stories over the course of women’s lives. Art takes many shapes and forms. Art can challenge us and sometimes we’re not quite sure what to do with it. Engaging in art is a wonderful experience when we walk away seeing some of ourselves in it or with a sense of familiarity that is somewhat unexpected. Sometimes examining and looking at other stories can help you think about how your own story might be told.

I like to think that visitors to the Gallery are more open than we sometimes give them credit for or that they give themselves credit for. What kind of a world would we live in if everything was beautiful in a traditional sense? *Pandora’s Box* does challenge us, but we hope to give viewers something to think about, something to respond to.

I think Amanda Cachia, the Curator of *Pandora’s Box*, would agree that galleries do not aspire to indifference. If visitors are motivated to respond, to engage in dialogue, it’s a good thing. Artists want people to leave feeling something about their work and the Gallery does too.

What plans are there to alert visitors that the works contain nudity?

The exhibition space will be well signed. In addition, the temporary walls in the Main Gallery will be reconfigured to create a more intimate entrance into the space.

What can visitors expect to see?

The works in the show include depictions of the female body, but they are not the passive nudes of art history. They are active, dynamic female bodies. Ghada Amer’s practice explores images of women in erotic magazines and reinterprets them through a craft traditionally associated with women. They are sexualized in

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Wangechi Mutu, *Histology of the Different Classes of Uterine Tumors*, 2006, digital prints and mixed media collage. Image courtesy the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York.



Chitra Ganesh, *Inside Pandora #2*, 2008, mixed media. Image courtesy the artist and Thomas Erben Gallery, New York.

unexpected ways and represented –often ambiguously – through threads on the reverse side of embroidered panels. So in essence, seeing the reverse side of the embroidery is like being exposed to a hidden world. She also explores censorship of women’s bodies through her own experience of Islamic culture.

Wangechi Mutu creates collages from 19th century textbook images of the female anatomy, and erotic and magazine images to create hybrid female creatures. There is this curious juxtaposition of ideal female bodies with tumourous, grotesque elements - so an odd combination of the ideal and abnormal.

The theme of hybridization shows up in different places in the show. Certain works are informed by different historical sources or allude to a hybrid culture. This blurring of boundaries can be uncomfortable because we are seeing the body in unexpected ways. The viewer is charged with the task of deciphering the story for themselves.

Annie Pootoogook’s works stem from her Inuit experience. Her works examine the the socio-economic reality of life in the Canadian North. Story-telling through images has been in her family for generations. Her practice reconciles the culture of her ancestors with contemporary Inuit life.

Kara Walker’s art work subverts the silhouette portraiture of 18th and 19th century elites to tell grotesque stories about race, power, and love that are usually left untold. [Chitra Ganesh](#) references the imagery of Hindu, Buddhist, and Greek myths to create surreal goddess-like creatures.

What do you hope visitors to the Gallery will take away with them?

The hopes that I have are fundamentally the same hopes that I have with all of our exhibitions. I hope viewers are challenged to look at the world in a different way– to take the time to parse what they see and continue to think about it long after they exit the gallery doors.

Pandora’s Box is a wonderful opportunity to engage in powerful work. For most of our viewers, this will be the first time that they have ever seen this work because much of the art has been borrowed from private galleries and collectors outside of the

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Amy Cutler, *Colette's Conversion*, 2002, gouache on paper. Image courtesy the artist and Hebrew Home at Riverdale.

region. So *Pandora's Box* is opening up what is otherwise usually hidden from our view.

What are some of your community engagement initiatives for this particular exhibition?

We will be collaborating with students in Wilfrid Laurier's Community Service-Learning program to create a response or dialogue in relation to the show. We are in the initial planning stages of this partnership, but the idea is to engage a team of students and have them share their responses with the greater public in an online format of some sort. The Gallery is a site of exchange. Inviting collaboration and encouraging exchange is what we are all about. So the prospect of developing a relationship with the students in response to the show is really exciting to me.

We are also thrilled to have the exhibition curator, **Amanda Cachia**, join us for a **Public Curator's Talk on January 28th at 7 p.m.** This is a great opportunity to hear Amanda describe the evolution of the show.

Where is the show touring to after being at KW|AG?

Pandora's Box is circulated by the Dunlop Art Gallery (Regina, SK) and was recently exhibited at Winnipeg's [Plug-In ICA](#). It will be on view at [KW|AG](#) until March 21, 2010. After showing here, it will tour to [Kamloops Art Gallery](#) in BC.

For more information on *Pandora's Box*, you can visit the [Coming Exhibitions](#) page on KW|AG's web site before January 29th and then the [On View](#) page once the show opens.