

## 'A Fiction of Authenticity: Contemporary Africa Abroad'

CONTEMPORARY ART MUSEUM

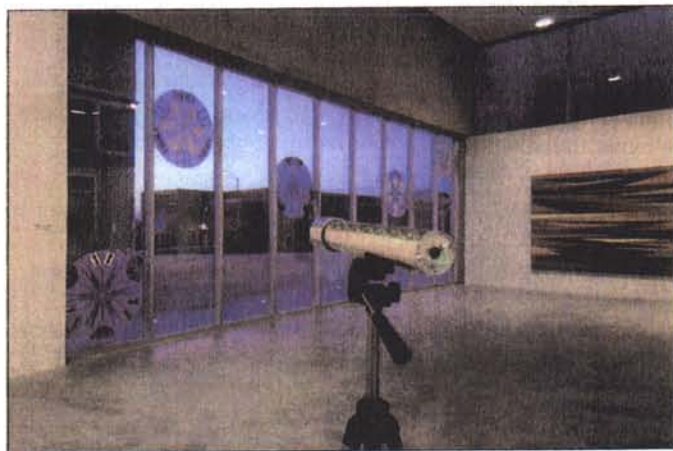
St. Louis

Passersby could get a feel for the inaugural exhibition at the Contemporary Art Museum before they even entered the building. They could see South African artist Kendall Geers's neon sign flickering the words *slaughter* and *laughter* on a building across the street and Nigerian artist Mary Evans's laser-cut snowflake-like vinyl glyphs mounted on the museum's street-level windows, all part of the show "A Fiction of Authenticity: Contemporary Africa Abroad." Evans's installation, one of the more compelling works in the exhibition, took full advantage of the unusual situation: the artist placed a telescope near the windows so viewers could see the street life pulsing through the glyphs like a life-size kaleidoscope.

Organized by Shannon Fitzgerald, the Contemporary Art Museum's curator, and Tumelo Mosaka, an assistant curator at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the well-conceived, thought-provoking show featured paintings, sculpture, drawings, videos, and installations by eleven artists from Africa and the African diaspora. Many of the works seamlessly fused traditional African themes, such as origin myths and ancestral ties, with a critical awareness of Western stereotypes and institutional practices.

Among the standouts were South African artist

Siemon Allen's mural-size grid of newspapers, which brought a cool, analytical bent to the media's treatment of events in his country; the photographs and videos of the Algerian-born, Paris-raised Zineb Sedira, which personalize the artist's effort to dispel stereotypes about Muslim women and Islam; and Kenyan-born, Germany-based Ingrid Mwangi's dramatic autobiographical video projection on fabric celebrating the power and individu-



Mary Evans,  
*Scope*,  
and  
Odili Donald Odita,  
*Power Line*,  
both 2003,  
installation view.  
Contemporary Art  
Museum.

ality of African women.

Fortunately, the exhibition wasn't overwhelmed by the museum's new design. The 25,200-square-foot, boxy, mesh-covered concrete structure designed by Brad Cloepfil of Allied Works Architecture in Portland, Oregon, is a model of architectural understatement that gives visual right-of-way to the art. —Alice Thorson

The exhibition will be at the Regina Gouger Miller Gallery at Carnegie Mellon University from September through December.