

# MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS ST. PETE

**ART ON FILM: "WASTE LAND" DOCUMENTARY SCREENING AT THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, ST. PETERSBURG (MFA) SHEDS LIGHT ON ARTISTIC ALCHEMY AND ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY**

*In conjunction with the upcoming 'The Nature of Art' exhibition, the MFA is pleased to announce a special screening of the award-winning documentary 'WASTE LAND,' featuring the renowned artist Vik Muniz, scheduled for November 2, 2023.*



**ST. PETERSBURG, FL (October 12, 2023)** — [The Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg](#) (MFA), is pleased to announce the continuation of the popular **Art on Film** series with a screening of the award-winning documentary **WASTE LAND** on Thursday, November 2 at 6:30 p.m. Presented by Arthouse Films, WASTE LAND, an Almega Projects, and O2 Filmes Production, is a 98-minute uplifting feature documentary highlighting the transformative power of art and the beauty of the human spirit. Directed by Lucy Walker and Co-directed by João Jardim and Karen Harley,

WASTE LAND is set on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro at **Jardim Gramacho**, the world's largest landfill, where men and women sift through garbage for a living. Artist Vik Muniz produces portraits of the workers and learns about their lives. This special screening of WASTE LAND is part of a series of public programming events designed to illuminate the MFA's forthcoming exhibition, [\*The Nature of Art\*](#), which looks at the myriad ways humans have used art to navigate and mediate our environment.

*The Nature of Art* looks at the disparate ways humans have engaged in artistic expression to understand our environment, mediate our relationship with nature, and attain a more profound comprehension of our role within the world. This exhibition is a celebration of the highest aspirations of humankind—our intellectual and creative activities that reflect and shape the world in which we live. Our mission is to preserve art objects in perpetuity. The pleasure and honor we have in doing so is our collective ability to “interpret” these objects and to use them as prompts *to engage, educate, and excite* our community.





## ABOUT THE FILM

Filmed over nearly three years, *WASTE LAND* follows renowned artist Vik Muniz as he journeys from his home base in Brooklyn to his native Brazil and the world's largest garbage dump, Jardim Gramacho, on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro. There he photographs an eclectic band of “catadores”—self-designated pickers of recyclable materials. Muniz’s initial objective was to “paint” the catadores with garbage. However, his collaboration with these inspiring characters as they recreate photographic images of themselves out of garbage reveals both the dignity and despair of the catadores as they begin to re-imagine their lives. Director Lucy Walker (known for films like *DEVIL’S PLAYGROUND*, *BLINDSIGHT*, and *COUNTDOWN TO ZERO*), along with co-directors João Jardim and Karen Harley, have expansive access to the entire process and, ultimately, offer stirring evidence of art’s transformative power and the magical essence of the human spirit.



“The themes explored in *WASTE LAND* resonate profoundly with The Nature of Art exhibition, particularly in its examination of human resilience and ingenuity amidst environmental adversities,” noted Senior Director of Collections & Exhibitions Dr. Stanton Thomas. “This powerful documentary ultimately conveys a vital message of perseverance and optimism.”

## ARTIST BACKGROUND

Brazilian-born, Brooklyn-based illusionist and innovator **Vik Muniz** lives for the moment when all our fixed preconceptions fail us, and we are forced to enter a dialogue with the world we inhabit. In this moment, we are confronted with chaos otherwise hidden from view. It is precisely through his artwork (both in product and process) that Muniz harnesses the generative possibility of disorder. Like dumpster diving and freeganism, Vik Muniz's latest project, "Pictures of Garbage," is invested in the excavation of garbage. However, a key distinction is that his exploration moves beyond questions of utility—he isn't simply interested in finding and salvaging the secret treasures within trash heaps (iPods, sealed fruit bowls, jewelry) but rather in using garbage as an art medium.



“The beautiful thing about garbage is that it’s negative; it’s something that you don’t use anymore; it’s what you don’t want to see,” says Muniz. “So, if you are a visual artist, it becomes a very interesting material to work with because it’s the most non-visual of materials. You are working with something that you usually try to hide.”

First, Muniz traveled to the largest garbage dump in the world, Jardim Gramacho (north of Rio de Janeiro), where he was met with a community of people who scavenge the recyclable refuse of the city—*catadores* in Portuguese—to make a living. An estimated 3,000-5,000 people live in the dump, 15,000 derive their income from activities related to it, and some that Muniz met in Jardim Gramacho come from families that had been working there for three generations. Catadores, like the trash heaps they call home, are shunted to the margins of society, and made invisible to the average Brazilian. And yet, Muniz is not interested in perpetuating a “Save The Children” politics of pity that positions catadores as passive victims. “These people are at the other end of consumer culture,” he says. “I was expecting to see people who were beaten and broken, but they were survivors.” Muniz quickly befriended and collaborated with several catadores on large-scale portraits of themselves including, **Irma**, a cook who sells food in the dump; **Zumbi**, the resident intellectual who has held onto every book he’s scavenged; and 18-year-old **Suelem**, who first arrived there when she was 7.



According to Donald Eubank, “Muniz rented 4 tons of junk and a warehouse, and together they arranged the trash on the ground to replicate photographs of themselves that Muniz had taken earlier. Then, they would climb up to the ceiling and take photos of the compositions from 22 meters high. The portraits of the people are made out of empty spaces, out of what wasn’t garbage.” Calling upon his resources as a world-famous artist, Muniz raised \$64,097 at the esteemed Phillipe de Pury auction in London by selling one of his garbage portraits. 100% of the profits went to the **Garbage Pickers Association of Jardim Gramacho**.

## **PROGRAM DETAILS**

### **ART ON FILM | WASTE LAND**

The popular Art on Film series continues at the MFA on November 2, 2023. Enjoy special evening hours at the museum from 5:00–6:30 p.m. followed by a screening of WASTE LAND from 6:30–8:00 p.m. Cash bar (beer, wine, and soda) and snacks will be available for purchase.

**Date:** Thursday, November 2, 2023

**Time:** Special museum hours from 5:00–6:30 p.m. and WASTE LAND screening from 6:30–8:00 p.m.

**Cost:** Free for MFA Members; \$15 for Not-Yet Members

**Location:** Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg, 255 Beach Drive NE, St. Petersburg, FL 33703

**Registration:** <https://mfastpete.org/event/art-on-film-waste-land/>

*The MFA 2023 Fall Programming Series is presented by Raymond James*

Images:

1. VIEW DOWN ONTO IRMA'S PORTRAIT ON THE FLOOR, Photograph by Vik Muniz, courtesy of Vik Muniz Studio
2. FINAL TIAO PHOTOGRAPHIC PRINT ENTITLED “MARAT/ SEBASTIAO – PICTURES OF GARBAGE,” Photograph by Vik Muniz, courtesy of Vik Muniz Studio
3. VIK AT JARDIM GRAMACHO, Photograph by Fabio Ghivelder, courtesy of Vik Muniz Studio
4. B/W VIK MUNIZ BEHIND CAMERA, Photography by Barney Kulok, courtesy of Vik Muniz Studio
5. B/W PHOTO OF MAGNA, Photograph by Vik Muniz, courtesy of Vik Muniz Studio
6. FINAL MAGNA PHOTOGRAPHIC PRINT ENTITLED “THE GIPSY MAGNA – PICTURES OF GARBAGE,” Photograph by Vik Muniz, courtesy of Vik Muniz Studio

*WASTE LAND*. Directed by Lucy Walker; Co-Directed by João Jardim and Karen Harley. Arthouse Films. 2011.

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### **ABOUT THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, ST. PETERSBURG**

The Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg (MFA) has an encyclopedic collection of art from around the globe and across the centuries, with almost 5,000 years of civilization represented in thousands of objects extending from antiquity to the present. The collection includes works by Georgia O'Keefe, Claude Monet, Berthe Morisot, Auguste Rodin, Kehinde Wiley, Jacob Lawrence, and many others, as well as ancient Greek and Roman, Asian, African, Art of the Americas and Native American art. The Museum's photographic collection is one of the largest and well-respected in the Southeast. The museum's rotating exhibition galleries feature a diverse selection of temporary exhibitions from all over the world, as well as exhibitions curated from the museum's extensive collection. In addition to its robust exhibition program, the MFA engages the community through exciting public programs and events and serves students through youth programs and a partnership with the Pinellas County School System.

### **MEDIA CONTACT**

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