

Staff. "Artist Saya Woolfalk's Retrospective Is a Portal to a New Dimension," *Artnet*, 5 June 2025.

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Artist Saya Woolfalk's Retrospective Is a Portal to a New Dimension

Marking artist Saya Woolfalk's first retrospective, the artist invites visitors into her creative world.



Saya Woolfalk, *Star Composition* (2012). Photo: Jenna Bascom, courtesy of the Museum of Arts and Design, New York.

New York-based artist Saya Woolfalk has spent the better part of two decades dedicating her practice to world building. By leveraging the traditions of science fiction and fantasy she creates alternate dimensions wherein ideas of race, science, anthropology, and identity can be critically examined through new lenses. Thematically wide ranging and materially multidisciplinary, Woolfalk's practice questions many of the facets of everyday life that are otherwise assumed.

For the first time in her career, the artist is the subject of a retrospective, staged at New York's Museum of Arts and Design (MAD), titled "Saya Woolfalk: Empathic Universe," and curated by the museum's own curator of modern and contemporary art, craft, and design, Alexandra Schwarz.

On view through September 7, 2025, the show emphasizes the artist's penchant for psychedelic aesthetics, and introduces visitors to Woolfalk's "Empathics," a fictional race of women who populate some of her alternate dimensions. The Empathics are noted for their ability to change

their genetics and fuse with plants, foregrounding ideas around hybridity—a concept she is known to return to time and again in her work.

The overall show is organized into chapters, with each focusing on a major project from the course of Woolfalk's career and allowing for the full range of her material output to go on view. Juxtaposing various bodies of work, her use of symbolism and folkloric imagery showcase Woolfalk's research into African, African American, Japanese, European, and Brazilian cultural traditions, including craft and storytelling. Producing sculptures that are also garments, video, painting, and works on paper, the various sources of inspiration and mediums ultimately go from discordant to harmonious, lending themselves to the creation of a new type of reality.

One of the highlights of the exhibition is *Utopia Within*, a commissioned audio drama produced in collaboration with the Atlantic Theater Company and NYU's Tisch BFA Acting program, which can be accessed free via the Bloomberg Connects app or QR codes throughout. Further animating the show is a series of live dance performances scheduled to take place inside the gallery spaces throughout the summer, created with the Alvin Ailey/Fordham BFA Dance Program.

Schwartz said, "With its sumptuous handmade aesthetic, interdisciplinary approach, and searching examination of how craft shapes and reflects global cultures, 'Saya Woolfalk: Empathic Universe' offers both an environment for meditation on the complex times in which we live, and a hope for a better, more compassionate way toward navigating the turbulence together."