“Filmmaking is about letting expectations go at every step of the way. Hitchcock claimed to have constructed all of his films in storyboards, but his best movies work because he said steps later in the filmmaking process—shooting, editing, scoring—to build on his original idea. In filmmaking, you can’t keep looking back at how you envisioned a story on the page. I’ve only recently undertaken adaptations from novels, from Mildred Pierce to Carol and now Wonderstruck, and I don’t put a lot of energy into navigating readers’ prior expectations. Because, ultimately, the real question is: Why is this a movie at all? Because he used steps but his best movies worked at every step of the way. “Filmmaking is about the silence is real. It protects you from your inability to be free and open. I really worked to get to that point.”

I opened Coi in San Francisco with the intention of creating a neighborhood restaurant, a place where diners felt like they were in someone’s home. But after we were awarded our second Michelin star, we found that customers expected something from the setting—something fancier. We were just a hippest-chic neighborhood place next to a strip club. Over time customers came to understand that our restaurant was different, and we were able to help them reimagine what they could expect out of a fine-dining experience. Understanding people’s expectations is an important part of keeping the experience fresh, vibrant and innovative. Good, caring chefs think about when they’re working for, because we don’t work in a vacuum. The trick is to give people delicious food and great service while showing them something that they don’t expect. The goal is always pleasure.”

As a historian, you’re often at war with cliches, which are something similar to expectations. People have stereotyped images of the past. I seek to make them more complicated. In that sense, any good history book defies expectations because it offers a richer tapestry, a more complicated version of what most people think happened. History can also alter how we think about the future. Although history does not provide a road map of what to expect in the future, it does tell you what kinds of situations should cause concern. Human emotions don’t really change that much. The study of history can tell us how people once reacted to certain kinds of events, and can therefore help us know what to expect. The past is not the 1930s, for example—but if you read about it, you will find elements of the 1930s that have an echo in the present, which should both interest and worry you.”

“Filmmaking is just a matter of why I was born. I’m a writer. I’m a director. I’m very specific in my interpretation of people.”

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“I don’t know what audiences expect from my art. Maybe I resist actually thinking about that, because you don’t want to be entertaining people. Rather, you want to be thinking about things in depth. I try not to worry too much about the applause, if there is any or ever will be. When I first started my professional practice, I was completely alone in my studio. Not many people knew who I was. But as my career picked up it became more obvious to me that there is commentary and expectation, even as I’m tucked away at work in my studio. Outside elements seep in, because you can’t ignore the fact that the world is aware. The gift for me has always been finding the sweet spot where the silence is real. It protects you from your inability to be free and open. I really worked to get to that point.”

Mutu is an artist. She is unveiling a site-specific installation at ICA Boston in January.