
Mickalene Thomas*Femme au divan I*

September 11 - October 28, 2014

**Press release**

The Nathalie Obadia gallery is very pleased to present the first solo exhibition of American artist Mickalene Thomas in France. A group of paintings and photographs will be exhibited along with a series of 4 collages and a video created during the artist's residency at the gallery in July, 2014.

Mickalene Thomas sublimates a contemporary vision of the Afro-American woman, which she re-contextualizes in staged domestic scenes permeated with the spirit of the 60's and 70's. She sets the stage, an environment of paintings and collages consisting of skillful juxtapositions and materials cleverly gleaned from the Baroque and Rococo, evoking both the ancestry of the models and portraits by 19th century painters such as Ingres, Courbet and Manet, as well as the rise of 20th century painting: Picasso and Matisse at the beginning of the 1900's and later David Hockney. Her work takes its place in the tradition of important Afro-American artists like Romare Bearden or Jacob Lawrence, to whom she makes eloquent reference.

Thomas' paintings are preciously painted with gleaming rhinestones and enameled paint. The models' afros are the architectural determinants of the make-up and jewelry they are wearing. The transparent use of acrylics lends a polished look to the black skin and renders the forms abstract in the solidly-painted areas. The collages were developed using personal photographic resources as well as scanned images of the 18 volumes of *The Practical Encyclopedia of Good Decorating and Home Improvement* – the bible of interior decorating in the US, published in 1971. Mickalene Thomas' photographs use materials, textured papers and motifs that the artist collected during her residency in Paris. The re-composition of disparate elements recreate fictional, albeit realistic spaces and situations reminiscent of Pop Art's founding collage *Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?* (1956) by Richard Hamilton.

In Thomas' work, a resolutely pictorial treatment assembles the elements of the compositions: retro floral patterns on the clothes, leather, wicker and bamboo furniture, African batik wall hangings, painted wooden panels, embroidered tapestries and house plants, richly-textured Scandinavian lampshades, and crocheted cushion covers. Mickalene Thomas' photographs, inspired by the postures of the odesques, courtesans and actresses found in the earliest photographs from the second half of the 19th century, staging black women in poses of frontal nudity, whose lustrous skin along with the lush arrangement of textiles in the décor constitute a vibrant homage to Courbet.

Transcending aesthetic influences and evoking the invisibility of black bodies in a subjective art history, Mickalene Thomas' works consist of a political commitment of positioning the black American woman as the central subject at the heart of her paintings and photographs. The figure occupies the integrality of the space to affirm itself with panache as one of the essential constituents of American society. As a complement to the rigorously framed postures, the artist gives these women a force of seduction and attraction that is accomplished through an extremely precise formal approach: the complex mastery of rhythm, form, color and pattern lends to the establishment of a space which enables the immediate deconstruction of the possibilities of reality.

Born in 1971 in Camden (New Jersey),
Mickalene Thomas lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

Having attended Southern Cross University (Lismore, Australia, 1998), she received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in painting from the Pratt Institute in 2000 and a Master of Fine Arts from the Yale University School of Arts in 2002. Mickalene Thomas is one of the most visible artists of the contemporary art scene in the US. She has recently been granted large-scale solo exhibitions at: The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (2012), the Santa Monica Museum of Art in California (2012), the Brooklyn Museum in New York (2012). She has created specific projects for *On-Site*, P.S.1/MoMA in New York (*Le Déjeuner Sur l'Herbe: Les Trois Femmes Noires*, 2010), *Better Days* (Volkshaus Art Basel, 2013 and soon Berlin in 2014), as well as *Femme au Divan II*, at the Bosio Pavillion in Monaco (2014).

Her work is included in many prestigious private and public collections such as those of The Art Institute of Chicago, The Brooklyn Museum, The Guggenheim Museum New York, The Whitney Museum of American Art, MOMA PS1, The Smithsonian American Art Museum, The Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal, Canada, The Rubell Family Collection, the Sender Collection, and the Taschen Collection.

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