

Mickalene Thomas

je t'adore

September 9 – November 11, 2023



This fall, multidisciplinary artist Mickalene Thomas will unveil a collection of new work in the exhibition *je t'adore*, at Yancey Richardson from September 9 through November 11, 2023. In *je t'adore*, Thomas presents 14 large-scale mixed media photo collages inspired by her research into the imagery of Black female erotica featured in the calendars of *Jet* magazine and the pages of the 1950s French publication, *Nus Exotique*. The exhibition will be Thomas' first solo exhibition at Yancey Richardson, the culmination of a decade of collaboration begun in 2012 with the gallery's presentation of *tête-à-tête*, a group show curated by Thomas. *je t'adore* at Yancey Richardson coincides with an exhibition at the Yale University Art Gallery entitled *Mickalene Thomas / Portrait of an Unlikely Space* from September 8, 2023, through January 7, 2024.

Debuting these new works, Thomas investigates the notion of desire, memory, sexuality, and transformation through images of everyday, familiar Black women positioned and posed as alluring beauties. Thomas was inspired by the exhibition *Black Womanhood* (2009) and the book *The Black Female Body* by Deborah Willis and Carla Williams, a photographic history of the fascination of western cultures with the Black body. These

two references have informed the artist's long exploration of the *Jet* beauties of the month and inspired her personal engagement with an array of familiar, yet anonymous women, simultaneously reflecting the complexities imposed on the artist's own body. The exhibition expands upon Thomas' existing series of collages that reference the status of *Jet* calendars within the history of African American art while challenging society's traditional notions of beauty, erotica, and sensuality.

Throughout her career, Thomas has combined abstraction and figuration, and pushed the conventions of painting, photography, collage, and printmaking beyond their traditional limits, often incorporating unconventional materials in her work. In these new photo collages, each figure is surrounded by abstract shapes of decorative patterns suggestive of the era from which the photographs derive. Printed directly on metal using a dye sublimation process, the individual elements of each work are cut out and layered one on top of another creating a dimensional surface. Applied to the surface are Thomas' gestural drawings highlighted by her characteristic glittering multi-colored rhinestones. The result is a dynamic three-dimensional construction that undercuts any narrative reading and draws attention to the fluidity of identity, collectiveness of culture, and malleability of history in modern society. Rich in materiality and visual appeal, the works celebrate the sexuality and beauty of the female black body.

"This exhibition is a full circle moment for me in many ways," said Thomas. *"The process of creating these new works was an opportunity to revisit topics and mediums that have inspired me for decades with a new perspective. je t'adore, celebrates the beauty and power of Black women through the lens of popular culture and collective history both past and present."*

"The new work Mickalene has created for the exhibition presents an exhilarating development in her practice, combining her career-long interest in photography and collage with new materials and techniques that have not previously been seen," said gallerist Yancey Richardson. *"We are thrilled to debut them at the gallery this fall."*

Mickalene Thomas (born 1971) is one of the most influential artists in the world today. Her innovative practice has yielded instantly recognizable and widely celebrated aesthetic languages within contemporary visual culture. She is known for her elaborate paintings composed of rhinestones, acrylic, and enamel. Her masterful mixed-media paintings, photographs, films and installations command the space they occupy eloquently dissecting the complexities of black and female identity within the Western canon.

Outside of her core practice, Thomas is a Tony Award nominated co-producer, curator, educator and mentor to many emerging artists. In addition to presenting her own monumental solo shows, she has also curated exhibitions at galleries and museums and

collaborates with corporations and luxury brands. In addition to an Honorary Doctorate in Fine Arts from the New York Academy of Art (2018) and a United States Artists Francie Bishop Good & David Horvitz Fellow (2015), she has been awarded multiple other prizes and grants, including the Pratt Institute Legends Award (2022); Rema Hort Mann Foundation 25th Anniversary Honoree (2022); Artistic Impact Award, Newark Museum (2022); Glass House 15th Anniversary Artist of the Year (2022); Yale School of Art Presidential Visiting Fellow in Fine Arts (2020); Legend in Residence Award, Bronx Museum (2020); Pauli Murray College Associate Fellow at Yale University (2020); Appraisers Association of America, Award for Excellence in the Arts, (2019); Meyerhoff-Becker Biennial Commission at Baltimore Museum of Art (2019); Visionary Award, Pioneer Works (2019); Thomas is the Co-Founder of SOULAS House, a cultural hub and retreat for Black women, the Co-Founder of Pratt>FORWARD and founder of Art>FORWARD Artist in the Market incubator for post-graduate students.

Major exhibitions of Thomas' work include *Mickalene Thomas: Better Nights*, Bass Miami Beach Contemporary Art Museum, FL; *Mickalene Thomas: A Moment's Pleasure*, Baltimore Museum of Art, MD; *Mickalene Thomas: Do I Look Like a Lady?*, MOCA, Los Angeles, CA; *Mickalene Thomas: Femmes Noires*, Art Gallery of Ontario, Ontario, Canada; *Figuring History: Robert Colescott, Kerry James Marshall, Mickalene Thomas*, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, WA; *Permanent Collection Highlights | American Art*, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY; *Mickalene Thomas*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA

Work by Thomas is in the collections of numerous institutions including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Brooklyn Museum; Studio Museum of Harlem, New York; International Center of Photography, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.; National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.; Art Institute of Chicago; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Montreal Museum of Fine Arts; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; and the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles among others. Thomas serves on the Board of the Trustees for the Brooklyn Museum and MoMA PS1.

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Image above: *November 1977*, 2023. Rhinestones on dye sublimation prints.