

Mickalene Thomas (b. 1971 Camden, NJ; lives and works in Brooklyn, (NY) received her MFA from Yale University and her BFA from Pratt Institute. She has been awarded multiple honors and grants, including the Pratt Legends Honoree (2022); Newark Museum of Art Artistic Impact Award (2022); Yale School of Art Presidential Visiting Fellow in Fine Arts (2020); Pauli Murray College Associate Fellow at Yale University (2020); Meyerhoff-Becker Biennial Commission at Baltimore Museum of Art (2019). She has been honored by a number of institutions and organizations including the Aperture Foundation, SFMoMA, MoMA PS I, and the Hirshhorn Museum at the Smithsonian Institute. She has exhibited at prestigious institutions across North America including the Brooklyn Museum, MoMA PS I, Seattle Art Museum, SFMoMA, National Portrait Gallery and Baltimore Museum of Art. Her work is in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum, Whitney Museum of American Art, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum,

the National Portrait Gallery, among other public and private institutions and collections. She is the cofounder of the Pratt>FORWARD “Artist in the Market” mentorship incubator for post-graduate students, serves on the Board of the Trustees for the Brooklyn Museum and MoMA PS I.

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Mickalene Thomas, *Le Jardin d'Eau de Monet*, 2022, color photograph, mixed media paper and rhinestones on hot press paper mounted on dibond, 44.5 x 55 in. (113.03 x 139.7 cm). © Mickalene Thomas / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Graphic C. Lebrun, direction de la communication, EPVO. Printing Alliance Partenaires graphiques, sept. 2022.



MICKALENE THOMAS: AVEC MONET

Musée de l'Orangerie

October 13, 2022 – February 6, 2023



Mickalene Thomas is a distinguished visual artist, filmmaker, curator, best known for her paintings, collages, photographs, videos, performance and large-scale installations.

Thomas has cultivated a distinct visual vocabulary of Black erotica, Black sexuality, and Black queer aesthetics centered around leisure, joy and beauty. For this exhibition, the artist has created works that represent the breadth of the visual language she has developed over the past twenty years while revisiting the time she spent as an artist-in-residence at Claude Monet's home in Giverny, France in 2011.

Each work draws on and critiques art history and popular culture that offers a more complex representation of femininity, sexuality, desire and power through a dialogue with the work of Monet. By creating her own depiction of the spaces the Impressionist artist designed for herself – la maison, salle à manger, le jardin d'eau – and her own contemporary interpretation of the well-known work *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (firstly painted by Manet then

reinterpreted by Monet), Thomas constructs complex portraits, landscapes, and interiors that subvert notions of beauty and femininity. *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe: les Trois Femmes avec Monet* (2022) borrows the composition of the Manet's work in which three Black women are sitting amidst a dense field of flora and fauna gazing directly at the viewer with a sense of strength, power, and authorship. The work is composed of collaged elements taken from photographs the artist took in Monet's garden along with prints and lithographs from her archive. The women are adorned with Afros, intricately braided hair, and high fashion that nods to the 1970s, the height of the Civil Rights and Black is Beautiful movements in America. "My residency several years ago in France at Giverny, the cradle of Impressionism, made a powerful impact on me... I learned important elements that allow me to understand formalism and, more importantly, that sense of rebellion that cultivates artists." While inspired by the formal rebellion of her predecessors,

Thomas takes this notion further to encompass Black beauty, desire, and power.

Me as Muse, a sculptural video, offers a framework of reflection and contemplation around the subject of the odalisque. As an immersive garden, the work is composed of twelve stacked TV monitors depicting the artist reclining nude in the pose of an odalisque. Thomas' form morphs and merges with abstract gestures and depictions of women from history that have informed ideals around beauty and desire – François Boucher's *Leda and the Swan*, Amadeo Modigliani's *Reclining Nude*, Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres' *Grand Odalisque* along with key Black figures such as Saartjie Baartman (the Hottentot Venus) and Grace Jones.

The images are accompanied by an interview audio recording of Eartha Kitt speaking on the Terry Wogan show, describing traumatic experiences of abuse and discrimination. This multimedia installation offers the conceptual framework for the exhibition that invites a more expansive reading



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of the work of artists like Monet and examines how identity, gender, and subjectivity have been informed by the fetishization of the female body throughout history.