

Mickalene Thomas (b. 1971, Camden, NJ) lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. Recent solo exhibitions of her work have been organized at the Dayton Art Institute, OH (forthcoming, 2018); Henry Art Gallery, Seattle (forthcoming, 2018); Pomona College Museum of Art, Claremont, CA (forthcoming, 2018); Georgia Museum of Art, Athens, GA (forthcoming, 2017); Newcomb Art Museum, Tulane University, New Orleans (2017); Spelman College Museum of Fine Arts, Atlanta (2017); Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2016); and Aspen Art Museum, CO (2016). Thomas’s work is in numerous international public and private collections including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Art Institute of Chicago; MoMA PS1, New York; Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York; Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Yale University Art Collection, New Haven, CT; and Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo. Thomas has been awarded multiple prizes and grants, including the USA Francie Bishop Good & David Horvitz Fellow (2015); Anonymous Was A Woman Award (2013); Brooklyn Museum Asher B. Durand Award (2012); and the Timerhi Award for Leadership in the Arts (2010). Thomas received an MFA from Yale University School of Art.

This exhibition is generously supported by Barrett Barrera and Lehmann Maupin.

Mickalene Thomas: Mentors, Muses, and Celebrities was organized by the Aspen Art Museum. The exhibition at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis is organized by Lisa Melandri, Executive Director.

All images courtesy the artist; Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong; and Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Related Programs

Perspective: Artist on Artist
Vivian Watt
Thursday, September 21, 6:00 pm

Artist Talk: Mickalene Thomas
At Saint Louis Art Museum
Friday, October 6, 7:00 pm

Special Event
Art Up Late: Mentors, Muses, and Celebrities
Friday, October 20, 9:00 pm–midnight

Lit: Do I Look Like a Lady?
Thursday, November 9, 6:00 pm

Film Screening: The Color Purple
Thursday, November 16, 5:30 pm

Film Screening: What Happened, Miss Simone?
Thursday, December 7, 6:00 pm

Gallery Guide
Contemporary Art
Museum St. Louis

September 8–
December 31, 2017



Mickalene Thomas Mentors, Muses, and Celebrities



Mickalene Thomas, *Ms. Celie's Blues*, 2016. Silkscreen ink and acrylic on mirrored acrylic mounted on wood panel.

Known for her expressive paintings and collages, Mickalene Thomas builds upon previous explorations in portraiture for *Mentors, Muses, and Celebrities*. The artist recasts and reconfigures notions of beauty, gender, and race in powerful new and recent works. Employing film, video, photography, and installation, she focuses on black women who inspire, who represent, and who express a wide range of possibilities and desires.

Thomas’s large-scale, two channel video, *Do I Look Like a Lady?*, presents a chorus of powerful female icons—including Jackie “Moms” Mabley, Wanda Sykes, Whitney Houston, and Eartha Kitt—their images woven together, reflecting an interplay of power through gender and language. Kitt is an especially important figure as Thomas gives the controversial actress and singer a thoughtful re-consideration as a rebellious, sensual, talented, and compelling force. Likewise, the principal female figures in the 1985 film *The Color Purple*—Shug, Sofia, and Celie, the latter portrayed by Whoopi Goldberg—are central to the exhibition. The film deeply affected Thomas when she was a young

woman. For CAM, Thomas has created a major new work for the Project Wall, *No Good is Going to Come to You Until You Do Right by Me*, a 60 foot-long vinyl print featuring a collaged screen capture of Celie reaching out beyond the wall.

Thomas has designed lounges for the main galleries, reminiscent of the 1970s period décor of her childhood. These nostalgic recreations of her domestic environment serve as communal spaces where audiences may engage with the artwork and each other.



**Contemporary Art
Museum St. Louis**
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Audio Tour
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Sisterhood: An Interview with Mickalene Thomas

Mickalene Thomas on The Color Purple, Eartha Kitt, and collage. Selected excerpts from an interview with the artist and Courtenay Finn, who organized the exhibition for the Aspen Art Museum.

On The Color Purple My relationship to The Color Purple started when my mother took me to see the film when I was fourteen years old. I remember it vividly; we went to see it at a Times Square theater, and I remember crying during the film. Looking back, it was because, in some way, I related to Celie, or maybe it was because she was separated from her sister. It wasn't a direct, familial relationship, but it ignited a strength and spirit in me that has stayed until this day.

It is the interplay of power between all of the women through gender and language that is something I'm interested in exploring in my own work. The unheard stories of the women in my work relate to that similar search within The Color Purple....

All of these women [the principal characters Celie, Shug, and Sofia] oscillate at various moments in their lives, believing or not believing that they are worthy, smart, or beautiful.



Sister: Shug Avery Breakfast, 2016. Silkscreen ink and acrylic on mirrored acrylic mounted on wood panel.

The truth is developed through their sisterhood relationships as they become mirror images of each other, allowing one another to fully see themselves in order to embody the strength of self to celebrate life and beauty. In the title Mentors, Muses, and Celebrities, I'm hoping to present these complicated threads in order for us to see ourselves through all of these different notions.

On Eartha Kitt Eartha Kitt is everything. I had the opportunity to see her perform at Café Carlyle, in New York, in October 2008. My admiration for her developed simply by learning of her personal trials and tribulations as a performer and activist. Despite her speaking the truth and losing work, she persevered and continued to become an icon. She's one of the first celebrities I made a painting of. She inspired me as an artist, so she embodies all of these forces: mentor, muse, and celebrity. I think of her role as the foundation and impetus to the title and body of work in the show. She's like the mother god of goddesses. And, unlike most of the celebrities or characters in the exhibition, she displays interdisciplinary talent. The title came from thinking about how strength and knowledge of self is governed by such ideologies in society.

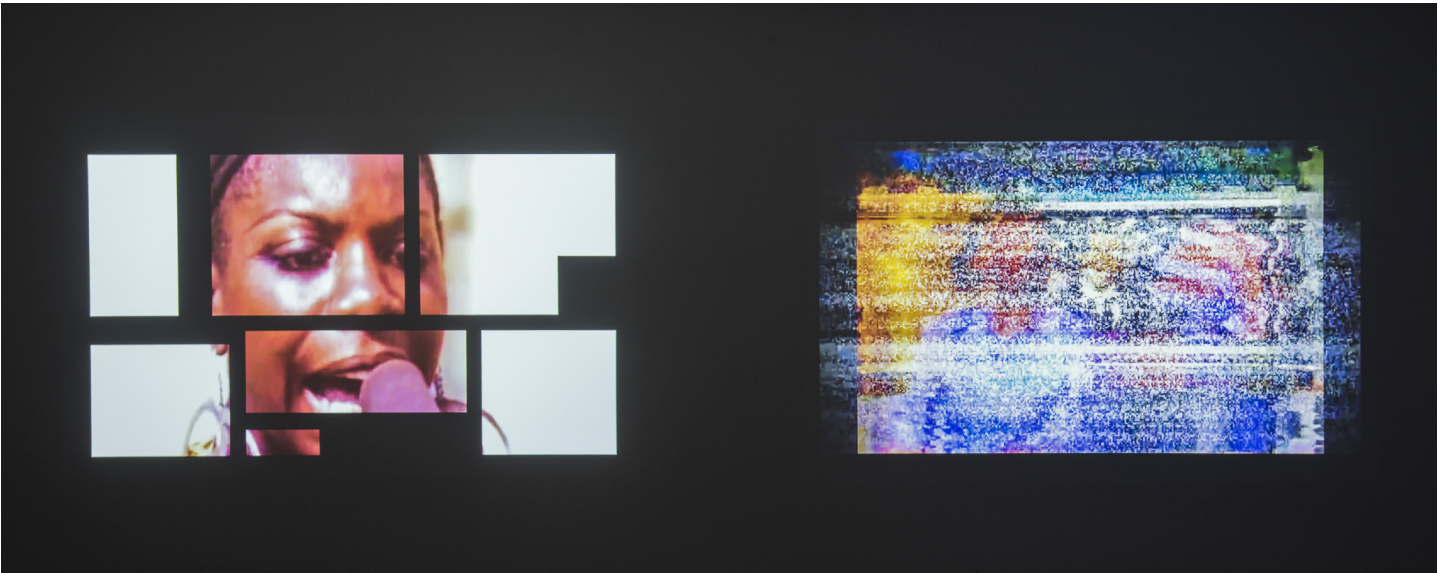
A Collage of Women All of the videos and films were made differently in order to portray the collage of women from various aspects. In Comedians and Singers [from Do I Look Like a Lady?], I collected many video clips over a period of three years from YouTube.... My selection of images and women were chosen based on their similarity to Celie, Shug, and Sofia in The Color Purple. The women embody fortitude, power, vulnerability, and creativity by embracing and persevering through their personal challenges and obstacles. Their stories are timeless and necessary, and strengthen the images being viewed.



Polaroid Series #13, 2016. Polaroid C-Print.



Angelitos Negros #1, 2016. 2-channel HD video 23:09 minutes.



Do I Look Like a Lady? (Comedians and Singers), 2016. 2-channel HD video projection, 12:34 minutes.