

MODERN PAINTERS

ADAM PENDLETON

BEHIND
BLACK DADA

Introducing:
Ofri Cnaani
Natalie Frank

BJARNE MELGAARD'S
BLOODY OUTRAGEOUS
PORTFOLIO

- > **MICKALENE THOMAS**
- > **TOBY ZIEGLER**
- > **CARRIE MAE WEEMS**
- > **LEOS CARAX**

THE RISE OF
THING THEORY:
DOCUMENTA (13)



LUC TUYMANS

WHAT'S NEXT?

OCTOBER 2012

\$9.95US/CAN

10>





54

ABOVE:
Natalie Frank
in her Brooklyn
studio.



96

LEFT:
Jimmie Durham
*Jesus (Es geht um die
Wurst)*, 1992. Mixed
media, 58½ x 43 in.

23

BELOW:
Mickalene Thomas
*Interior: Two Chairs
and Fireplace*,
2012. Rhinestones,
acrylic, oil, and
enamel on wood
panel, 96 x 72 in.



82

RIGHT:
Museum
Fridericianum,
the main venue of
Documenta (13).



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NEWSMAKER

MICKALENE THOMAS

DESPITE HER GLITTERING portraits of unflappable, seductive black women—often decked out in passels of crystals and rhinestones—Thomas makes more than just eye candy. In her first major museum show, “Origin of the Universe,” at the **Brooklyn Museum**, Thomas takes on the trope of the female nude in art history, tackling race, gender, sexuality, and constructions of beauty. Meanwhile, her third show at **Lehmann Maupin Gallery**, which focuses on Thomas’s landscapes and interiors, opens on November 1. Chloe Wyma talks to

the artist about her two shows, her family, and the power of the gaze in her work.

CW: *The title of your exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum, “Origin of the Universe,” is an allusion to Gustave Courbet’s notorious nude.*

MT: I was interested in Courbet’s *Origin of the World* as a conceptual idea related to the female body, and I used that as a central focus for the show. For me that painting is very controversial, and it was very controversial for its time. I wanted

to reclaim that pose by using my own body as the subject. I felt a little exposed, because I’m revealing a part of my body that one will never see unless they get very close to me. Putting myself in that vulnerable position allowed me to understand the positions that I put my own models and sitters in. I used to use myself a lot in my earlier works, but those felt more narcissistic. In this work, it wasn’t necessarily important for the viewer to know that it was *me*, the artist.

CW: *And you did a second version with your wife, Carmen McLeod.*

NEWSMAKER

MT: Yes. It was a sort of call and response, dealing with the nature of sexuality on a different level, romanticizing the nature of relationships and intimacy—and also having this connection with a black body in relation to a white body. Beauty is so much about a particular type of construct, and I wanted to have that dichotomy be a subject to talk about.

CW: *It's an interesting coincidence that Jacques Lacan owned the original Origin of the World at one point, since Lacanian psychology is something you're drawing on in your work.*

MT: To see yourself, and for others to see you, is a form of validation. I'm interested in that very mysterious and mystical way we relate to each other in the world. I was in India many years ago and thinking about photography and photojournalism before there was digital photography. People would go to these countries and photograph kids; nobody ever went back and said to those they'd photographed, "Hey, here's the image." On my trip I had a digital camera, and to show people what they look like gives them great power. And so those philosophical notions of Lacan relating to the mirror are so deep, in the sense of "I see you, therefore you exist."

CW: *You've also talked before about the importance of Carrie Mae Weems's piece*

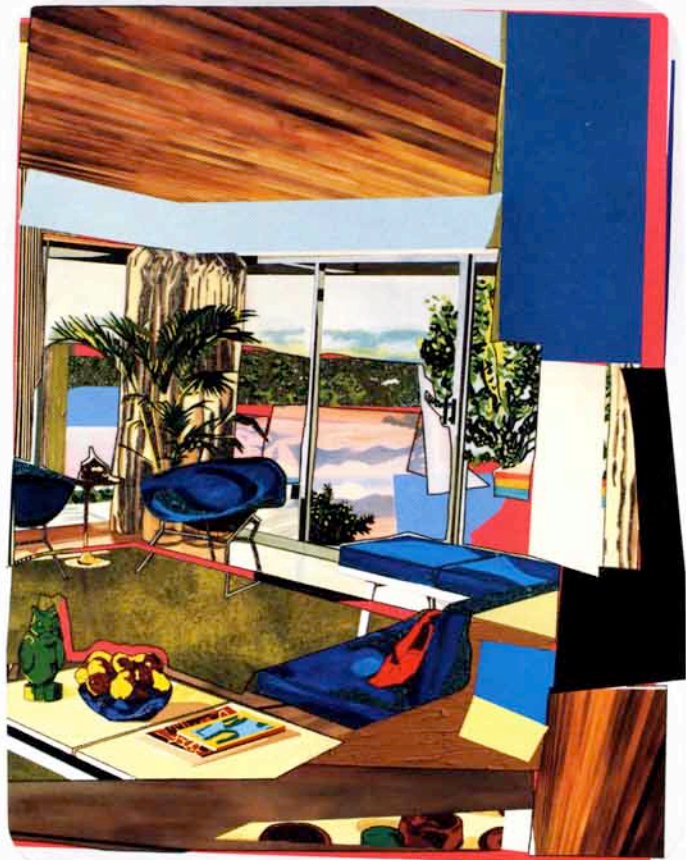
Mickalene Thomas

Interior: Blue Couch with Green Owl, 2012. Rhinestones, acrylic, oil, and enamel on wood panel, 9 x 7 ft.

BELOW:

Sleep: Deux Femmes Noires, 2012. Rhinestones, acrylic, oil, and enamel on wood panel, 9 x 20 ft.

due to illness. The film gives the viewer a slow, methodical way of looking at her beyond what you would see in a photograph or a painting. I hadn't photographed my mother since 2010, and she's always been someone that I use in my work. At my last show she said she was sad not being a part of the work; I wasn't using her because she was sick. And I thought, why should I stop using her because she's sick? She has an uncanny beauty that has come upon her due to an illness.



Mirror, Mirror (1987).

MT: What Weems did, depicting family and gender, those social roles, really hit home—the dynamics in these relationships, dealing with beauty and intimacy. The mirror is a powerful tool because it forces you to deal with yourself on a deeper level. Conceptually, paintings are like mirrors. They're an expression from the artist: "This is how I view the world—I'm presenting it to you."

CW: *Your show at the Brooklyn Museum will also include your first film, Happy Birthday to a Beautiful Woman.*

MT: It's a documentary about my mother as a muse and how her beauty has transformed

CW: *You're expecting a baby soon. Has the experience affected your work at all?*

MT: No, but what it has affected is my understanding and appreciation of time. I'm preconditioning my behavior. I can't stay out late. I don't drink as much anymore. It's interesting how your brain just switches into "you need to be an adult." And I hope the baby will teach me how to be a kid again.

CW: *Can we talk about your show at Lehmann Maupin? Most of the work focuses on interiors and exteriors.*

MT: The interiors are based on this book that I found at a Goodwill called *The Practical Encyclopedia of Good Decorating and Home*

Improvement. I thought, These are like my own interior spaces. The works in the exhibition are a combination of images from that book and photographs. I was in Giverny last year for three months. While I was there, I had the opportunity to photograph inside Monet's house. A lot of the works at Lehmann Maupin will be a combination of those images.

CW: *One of your new paintings, Sleep: Deux Femmes Noires, with its fragmented composition, represents a shift in your work.*

MT: It's so different from what I've done before, especially when it comes to the abstracted figures. It's exciting that it doesn't matter if the figures are blue or green or yellow or pink—they still convey my message.

CW: *Is there anyone you dream of painting one day?*

MT: That's a good question. I would have loved to paint Eartha Kitt, but she's no longer here. I'm so glad I had the chance to meet her. Some friends of mine took me to the Carlyle for my birthday to see her perform. She represented the beauty, charisma, and strength that I really like about women. She'd gone through so much in her life as a person, as a spokesperson, as an artist, as a musician, and she's so universal and powerful. I would have loved to paint her. **MP**

For an exclusive video of our studio visit with Mickalene Thomas, visit blouinartinfo.com.