



Mickalene Thomas
Installation, 2017, Multimedia
Courtesy the artist, Lehmann Maupin,
New York and Hong Kong and
Artists Rights Society.
Photo by Glen McClure

***Muse: Mickalene Thomas Photographs
and tête-à-tête***
At Virginia MOCA
May 12-August 13, 2017

Muse features renowned artist Mickalene Thomas. Using photography as her medium, Thomas explores the complex world of identity, race, and class. Thomas often invokes in these pictures the classical female nudes seen in art history, but replaces objectification with a visible connection to the subject. In tandem with her own work, Thomas has selected fifteen photos from artists she admires or takes inspiration from. She titles this part of the exhibit *tête-à-tête*, which is French for a private conversation between two people.



Photo by Mickalene Thomas

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Mickalene Thomas was born and raised in Camden, New Jersey, by her mother Sandra Bush. Thomas received her BFA from the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York, followed by her MFA in Painting from Yale University School of Art in 2002. Through her art she reveals a multi-layered vision of what it means to be a woman and builds upon common definitions of beauty. Her work often explores notions of black female celebrity and identity. Her subjects are sometimes well known figures such as Oprah Winfrey, Eartha Kitt, and Condoleezza Rice. Her portrait of Michelle Obama was the first individual portrait done of the first lady. With inspiration from the Hudson River School, Édouard Manet, Henri Matisse, and Romare Bearden, Thomas delves into ideas of beauty from a contemporary perspective combined with more recent developments in popular culture and pop art.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- The display on the cover is an embellished recreation of a 70s living room; Thomas's shoots are typically done in self-produced settings such as this. What do you think of the living room display in the cover photo? Is it similar to any you've seen before?
- Is it a room you'd want to spend time in? Why or why not?
- Do you think the space you are in can influence your thoughts and feelings? Why or why not?

MINI LESSON

- The image on the right is featured in *tête-à-tête*. Do you like the clothes pictured? How do you think style of dress influences others' idea of you?
- Do you pick out your own clothes? Do your parents? Are most of them hand-me-downs? If you could wear whatever you wanted to, what would it be? Draw or write about your outfit.
- Have you or has anyone you know ever made their own clothing? If so, describe it. With a parent's help, try cutting, dyeing, and/or sewing your own shirt.



Hank Willis Thomas
Look Natural 1970, 2010
Edition 1/5 and 1 artist's proof
Digital C-print
Courtesy Hank Willis Thomas and
Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

RESOURCES

***Teachers, be sure to check the appropriateness before showing to students.**

[Artist Website](#)

[Video Interview with Mickalene Thomas](#)

[Vogue Interview](#)

For more information or to book a tour contact Rebecca Davidson, Manager of School and Educator Programs at Rebecca@VirginiaMOCA.org or 757-425-0000 x323.