

LÉVY GORVY

PRESS RELEASE

THE SECOND CHAPTER OF *BEYOND THE PLEASURE PRINCIPLE*, A GLOBAL FOUR-CITY EXHIBITION AT LÉVY GORVY WITH ACCLAIMED AMERICAN ARTIST MICKALENE THOMAS, TO LAUNCH IN LONDON ON SEPTEMBER 30



MICKALENE THOMAS. *Jet Blue* #32, 2021. Rhinestones, fiberglass mesh, acrylic paint, chalk pastel, mixed media paper and archival pigment prints on museum paper mounted on dibond with cherry wood frame 92½ x 64½ x 2 inches (235 x 163.8 x 5.1 cm) © Mickalene Thomas / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

London—On September 30, Lévy Gorvy will open Mickalene Thomas' *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in London, the second chapter of a multipart exhibition that will unfold across four international cities during fall 2021 to present interconnected bodies of new work, ranging from painting and collage to installation and video. Over the past 20 years, Thomas has cultivated a distinctive vocabulary of Black erotica, Black female sexuality, and Black queer aesthetic and thought within her multidisciplinary practice to producing and exhibiting her work. With the sequential premieres of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in the gallery's locations in New York, London, Paris, and Hong Kong, Thomas sets out to formally, spatially, and philosophically draw attention to the central study of her art: the power and desirability of Black women, and their presence, imprint, and legacy in global avant-garde visual culture.

Alluding to a 1987 hit song by Janet Jackson and a 1920 landmark essay by Sigmund Freud, the title *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* signals Thomas' personal, artistic, and political intentions while also acknowledging the intersection of influences and techniques that underlie her work.

In her *Jet Blue* paintings debuting in London at 22 Old Bond Street, the artist builds upon her newest series, which premiered in New York earlier in the month, with seven large-scale paintings composed of silkscreen, oil and acrylic painting, and rhinestone application. The paintings feature images of archival photos of Black women sourced from vintage *Jet Magazine* pin-up calendars. These new works reinforce Thomas' formal and material concerns in the centering of Black femininity, in this case beyond her personal relationships of intimates the artist is most accustomed to working with as subjects, to include existing images from the 1970s, a period of the artist's own adolescence and greatly influential to her overall oeuvre. Through her reworking of these images, Thomas tenderly imparts a familiarity and personalization with the women depicted in the paintings that, other than their monthly pseudonyms, were published as anonymous figures. Thomas will also premiere a film in London at 40 Albemarle Street made with her collaborator, Racquel Chevremont, titled *Je t'aime Trois* (2018; 15:27), that intensifies her dialogue with the past through personal narrative.

The women in her paintings, refracted through Thomas' signature application of collage, take on a new dimensionality and context. Her collage is not one of media alone, but eras and allegories, with notable references to Romare Bearden, Jacob Lawrence, and Faith Ringgold, as well as Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso, a demonstration of the diversity of cultural

traditions that conceived modern art and thought. For Thomas—whose own work has long depicted the beauty and power of Black women in order to subvert the material and cultural oppression and marginalization to which they have been subjected—engaging in a cultural touchstone like *Jet* underscores her determined commitment to visibility and historical and contemporary celebrations of Blackness, femininity, transgressiveness, and queerness.

In the works on view at Lévy Gorvy London, Thomas advances her engagement with the mediums of painting and collage to the mid-century's defining genre, Pop Art, evident through her references to the work of influential historical Pop artists such as Richard Hamilton. Thomas reconstructs the familiar forms and exuberant color palettes of modernist motifs around the models in the archival images from *Jet Magazine*, in a continuing process of centering Black women in a contemporary narrative of beauty and agency that stretches across artistic eras. The new *Jet Blue* series of paintings continues the overarching theme of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: the agency and impact of Black women and their representation in modern Western art history.

About *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*

Beyond the Pleasure Principle is an international exhibition unfolding across Lévy Gorvy's spaces in four global capitals—New York, London, Paris, and Hong Kong—over the course of fall 2021, unveiling interconnected bodies of new work by acclaimed American artist Mickalene Thomas. This multisite presentation will feature paintings, installations, and video works that expand Thomas' decades-long exploration of the Black female body as a realm of power, eroticism, agency, and inspiration, as well as a vehicle for reformulating visual idioms of modernism inherited from some of the 20th century's most influential masters. Presented in uniquely designed environments for each of the four locations, Thomas' exhibition will also include a video made in collaboration with her partner Racquel Chevremont, an art advisor, curator, and collector.

About the artist



Mickalene Thomas in the studio, New York 2021. Portrait by Tatijana Shoan © Mickalene Thomas / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Mickalene Thomas (b. 1971 Camden, NJ; lives and works in Brooklyn, NY) is a visual artist, filmmaker, and curator known for her paintings, collages, photographs, videos, performances, and large-scale installations that draw from and critique art history and popular culture in order to present nuanced representations of femininity, sexuality, desire, and power. Blurring the distinctions between abstraction and figuration, object and subject, real and imaginary, Thomas constructs portraits, landscapes, and interiors that subvert notions of beauty and examine how identity, gender, and subjectivity have been informed by the fetishization of the female body throughout history. The artist's enduring use of collage as a medium, method of abstraction, and conceptual form, has permeated every facet of her practice. By repurposing and recontextualizing found images from the artist's personal archive, in addition to mass produced imagery from visual culture, Thomas creates formally complex compositions, imbued with narrative depth, that engage alternative, active modes of looking, and propose a new visual language.

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