

# Gallerist



## Mickalene Thomas Delves Deeper Into Cubism, Collage

By Andrew Russeth | 6/20

Over the past decade, Brooklyn-based artist Mickalene Thomas, 43, has earned acclaim for her wide-ranging practice, which slices and dices early Modernism, African sculpture, textiles and, perhaps most famously, rhinestones, to make exuberant, ingenious paintings, particularly portraits of black women in lush, electric, richly patterned interiors. Her latest show, “Tête de Femme,” opens at Chelsea’s Lehmann Maupin gallery on June 26.

**Your 2012 exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum earned a rave review from Roberta Smith, the Times’ co-chief art critic, who is not easy to please. How did you react?**

I didn’t actually hold the paper and read it. I had my partner sit and read it to me over breakfast and coffee, and I thought, “Okay, that makes me feel good,” but the first thing that came to mind was, “I’ve got a lot of work to do—I’ve got to get back into the studio and start thinking and making.”

**In these new works, your faces are more abstract, more explicitly Cubist or Constructivist. What was the process for making them?** When people would come to my studio, I would sit around with them, and start making portraits just really quickly with the Color-aid and all of the scraps and stuff that I had on my collage table. It’s about these forms and these shapes that have created these sort of flat planes to make an image. I also really wanted to find a new way of bringing new techniques into my studio practice. There’s a lot of silkscreen, there’s a lot of spray painting.

**There's always a deep connection to art history in your work—what sort of things were you looking at this time?** I was thinking of masks, African masks, and also Picasso's "Têtes de Femmes." I'm always interested in how many different genres of artists I can respond to. I started thinking about Warhol, with the Interview magazines from the '80s, with those Pop-y colors and angular shapes and how wild they were with the portraits—I truly love those covers.

**It seems like there's a new discussion taking place in the art world about the pressures facing women—the obstacles to success, the decision to have a child. You and your partner had a daughter two years ago. How did you make that decision, and how has that affected your work?** Making that decision to have a child was very difficult because the fear was, how am I going to be perceived by my peers and my gallery and all of this? How does my life change? The first thing people were asking was, "Does it affect your work?" And at the time, I was like, "No, no, no." There was so much going on at that time. My mother was dying and then shortly after she died, there was the Brooklyn Museum show and two shows at Lehmann Maupin. In retrospect, with all of these things happening, there was just this sense of freedom, of being able to do and make whatever I want to make, and I think that's where this work comes from, because it was this sense of, you know, life is short. That's what my daughter has done for me—just that sort of joy and happiness of being in the moment and allowing your work to be those same moments. I'm very excited, I really don't know how it's going to be perceived by the world, but I don't really care, and the thing is I really don't care because I'm having fun making it.