



In December, Mickalene Thomas's career will be celebrated in a glorious retrospective from Phaidon Press.

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hen ESSENCE producers were in the early stages of planning the 2017 Black Women in Hollywood awards—its 10th anniversary—the team wanted to elevate the messaging of the event by highlighting how Black

women were celebrated in germane, unapologetic narratives beyond entertainment. Enter visual artist Mickalene Thomas. “Mickalene uses a multitude of mediums showcasing the strength and vulnerability of Black women through textiles, photo montages and glitter,” says ESSENCE’s senior creative director, Ally Brown, who selected works from Thomas’s archives to be featured as majestic panels on the stage of the black-tie affair.

Starting this fall, more of those archival pieces will be on display in Thomas’s latest exhibition, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, which will be on view at Lévy Gorvy galleries in New York, London, Paris, Hong Kong and at Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris. The global retrospective, the first of this size for the artist, coincides with another significant marker in Thomas’s nearly 25-year career. Phaidon Press is publishing the first comprehensive monograph of her

paintings, portraits, photography and photographic collage. The 288-page retrospective includes essays by acclaimed author Roxane Gay, renowned German-American painter Hans Hofmann and Professor of Modern Art at Columbia University Kellie Jones, who would deeply influence Thomas’s artistic journey when Jones taught her in a performance art class.

The New York-based artist has long centered Black women’s bodies in vivid acrylic paintings embellished with rhinestones and Blaxploitation-inspired photography (a reverent nod to her 1970s childhood). Her art is an explicit commentary on race, gender and sexuality, and her works adorn private and permanent collections, including the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, and the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C., where Thomas’s 2008 portrait of former first lady Michelle Obama is housed. Of her creations, fellow contemporary artist Kerry James Marshall has said, “A room full of Thomas’s paintings are viscerally exhilarating. High-impact color, clashing and overlapping patterns, rhinestones and glitter...produce an effect that is nothing short of sensational.” We couldn’t agree more.



Thomas’s body of work includes “Portrait of Lyfe, 2020” (far left) and “Racquel Reclining Wearing Purple Jumpsuit, 2016,” the latter of which will be featured in the Phaidon Press book.

THE BLACK BODY ELECTRIC

This fall, **Mickalene Thomas’s** work spans the globe with an exhibit and a book

BY CORI MURRAY