

ARTFORUM

NOVEMBER 2021

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

PETRIT HALILAJ
TAUBA AUERBACH
SARAH OPPENHEIMER
MY BARBARIAN



\$16.99



REVIEWS



FOCUS

- 176 Dodie Bellamy *on* Judy Chicago

NEW YORK

- 178 Jan Avgikos *on* Mickalene Thomas
Murtaza Vali *on* Hugh Hayden
179 Margaret Ewing *on* Janaina Tschäpe
180 Zack Hatfield *on* Michael Dean
Donald Kuspit *on* Brea Souders
181 Jennifer Krasinski *on* Laura Parnes
Barry Schwabsky *on* "Colored Pencil Redux"
182 Chloe Wyma *on* Marcia Schvartz
183 Alex Jovanovich *on* Agatha Wojciechowsky
Charity Coleman *on* Jennifer Carvalho
184 Max Lakin *on* Sarah Slapppy

NEWBURGH, NEW YORK

- 185 Jeffrey Kastner *on* Martin Roth

DETROIT

- Lee Ambrozy *on* Cay Bahnmler

CHICAGO

- 186 Lane Relyea *on* Matthew Metzger
187 Lori Waxman *on* Jeffrey Gibson

LOS ANGELES

- 188 Andy Campbell *on* Soufiane Ababri
Suzanne Hudson *on* Susan Silton

KLEINBURG, CANADA

- 189 Dan Adler *on* Jon Sasaki

MEXICO CITY

- 190 Gaby Cepeda *on*
"The Light Comes from Within"

LIMA, PERU

- Giuliana Vidarte *on* "Hard to Swallow"

SÃO PAULO

- 191 Ela Bittencourt *on* Rafael Carneiro

LONDON

- 192 Gilda Williams *on* Leilah Babirye
Olamiju Fajemisin *on* "War Inna Babylon"

OXFORD, UK

- 193 Allison Young *on* Samson Kambalu

NICE, FRANCE

- 194 Anya Harrison *on* "She-Bam Pow Pop Wizz!
The Amazons of Pop"

MILAN

- Ana Vukadin *on* Nairy Baghramian

LECCE, ITALY

- 195 Samantha Ozer *on* Dora Budor

VADUZ, LIECHTENSTEIN

- 196 Camila McHugh *on* Paul Neagu

BERLIN

- Martin Herbert *on* Alexander Basil

HANNOVER, GERMANY

- 197 Andrew Witt *on* Camille Henrot

ARNHEM, NETHERLANDS

- Adam Kleinman *on* Sonsbeek 20→24

LUND, SWEDEN

- 198 Fredrik Svensk *on* Runo Lagomarsino

VILNIUS

- 199 Inga Lāce *on* the Baltic Triennial 14

ISTANBUL

- Kaya Genç *on* Volkan Aslan

BEIRUT

- 200 Kaelen Wilson-Goldie *on* Shuruq Harb

MUMBAI

- 201 Mario D'Souza *on* Mehlli Gobhai

BANGKOK

- Abhijan Toto *on* "A Life Beyond Boundaries
(The Geography of Belonging)"

HWASEONG, SOUTH KOREA

- 202 Andrew Russeth *on* Sung Chankyung

NEW YORK

Mickalene Thomas

LÉVY GORVY

There used to be a joke that went around the art world: When is a painting finished? The answer: When it goes to the conservator. The truth lurking in this gag addresses the experience of many painters who've realized they didn't always know when to quit. Mickalene Thomas's strength, in part, resides in the very fine line she walks between a fabulous intricacy and a dizzying overabundance. In her show of collaged canvases here—the first of four successive exhibitions, all to be titled “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” and to be staged throughout the fall at Lévy Gorvy's other branches, in London, Paris, and Hong Kong—her trademark surfaces are dense, decorative, and fiercely wrought. It's abundantly clear that she's completely comfortable with overload, but she has also calmed the dazzle down in several paintings for this outing, opting for an approach that's less fraught and more serene.

The unifying theme of the ten paintings and one sculpture in this presentation is derived from nude pinup calendars published by *Jet* magazine during the 1970s, which championed the beauty of young anonymous African American women. Thomas appropriates the vintage photographs and redirects their sensuality and playful seduction in the service of her ongoing articulations of Black lesbian desire.

In the canvas *September 1977* (all works 2021), the model—despite the glitter, rhinestones, and variously textured cutout elements that abstractly animate the rhythmic composition—looks relaxed in the open space she's been accorded. The full-length portrayal of her body retains the photographic quality of the original printed source, which distinguishes her silhouette amid visual pyrotechnics and gives the impression of a woman who owns the space she occupies with a quiet but undeniable confidence. Similarly, in *May 1977*, another comely nude beauty in a lovely, seated pose isn't fragmented, flattened, and

dispersed but is visually unified, whole—as if she exists in a world apart from her spectacular setting. Spatial depth creates a pictorial environment that makes room for the viewer's own absorption into the picture.

Other works, such as *February 1971* and *February 1975*, also include images of *Jet* models, but the figures are more heavily embedded in a plethora of surface effects chock-full of patterns, materials, and linear traces; also, their faces are largely obscured with overpainting. In these tableaux, all the emphasis is on pleasurable formal elements and spectacular craftsmanship. Yet what lies “beyond the pleasure principle” is a discourse that grounds Thomas's art in the politics of gender and race. If you knew nothing about her practice and her own sexual orientation and identity, it wouldn't take you long to perceive the underlying content and artistic intent. Thomas includes short stacks of books casually positioned in front of several of the canvases; volumes that theorize the

queer Black female body, reinforcing the exhibition's conceptual framework. And it must be stated that Thomas orchestrates a beautiful detournement of genre painting, plucking odalisques, bathers, and marvelous muses right out of pasty male art history and giving them new life as imaginary lesbian lovers. The same goes for the pinups, whose appeal and seductive powers are no longer in service to patriarchy but liberated as emblems of queer power, sensuality, and feminine freedom.

Thomas's work is in huge demand. At a time when LGBTQIA+ freedoms are seriously under assault—and being queer can get you killed in more places than we might like to think possible—taking the discourse of Black queer feminism on a journey around the world and being met with such acclaim is quite a feat. (The jury, however, is still out on whether all corners of the art world truly care about diversity and inclusion.) Meanwhile, Thomas continues to blaze a trail, undeterred in her defiance of institutional norms that once marginalized artists like her. Culling and synthesizing from virtually every dimension of culture, she creates an informed and expansive aesthetic that is broad in its appeal and insistently subversive in its message.

—Jan Avgikos

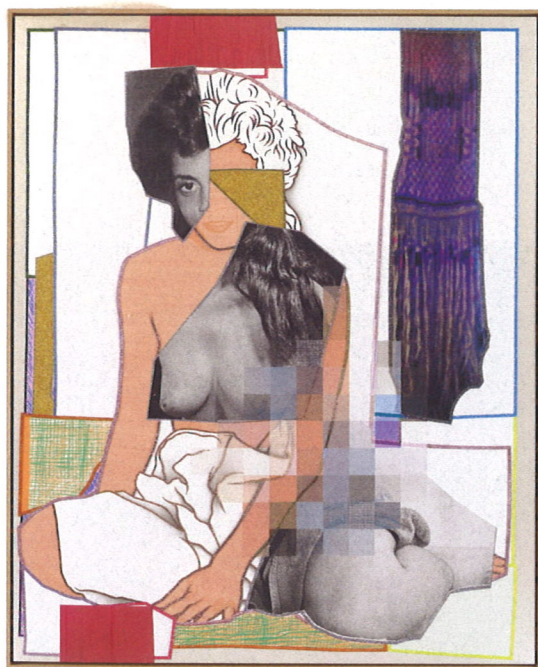
Hugh Hayden

LISSON GALLERY

Sculptor Hugh Hayden has enjoyed quick success, his work interrogating the idea of the American dream, often symbolized through the kitchen table, to explore class, aspiration, and the African origins of American cuisine, especially in the South. Hayden's strength lies in his skillful use of wood—specific types of which he often sources from particular places for their cultural and historical import—as both material and symbol. His exhibition here, titled after his pet name, “Huey,” drew on memories of his Texas upbringing to tackle the knotty subject of African American childhood through sculptures poised between indoctrination and imagination, discipline and play.

The show was divided into three spaces, each referring to a different section of a church. Six salvaged pews and a school desk filled the sanctuary, all carefully reupholstered with chemical cleaning brushes, the pews an eye-catching red. A pair of hairbrushes and a comb, each with a menacing steel blade in place of a handle, were affixed to the far wall. Making up a series titled “Good Hair” (all works 2021), the modified seating acknowledged the role that institutions such as church and school play in establishing and enforcing standards of appearance, while the objects, somewhat heavy-handedly, implied the violence of such disciplinary regimes. A chapel-like second room tackled the oversize role that athletic excellence plays in narratives of Black masculinity through a half dozen wall-mounted basketball hoops woven out of rattan and other materials. One of these, *Huey*, was inspired by the iconic 1960s poster of Black Panther cofounder Huey P. Newton enthroned on a wicker peacock chair, an image whose popularity made that item of furniture a familiar fixture in African American households. Hayden re-created its oversize back as a backboard, weaving the logos of Nike, Under Armour, and Umbro into the frame. Another work, *Fruity*, is unexpectedly pink, the rattan strips stained with Gatorade. In *Rapunzel*, the net, woven out of synthetic blond hair, is more than six feet long and just skimmed the floor. A number of these pieces referenced fairy-tale characters in their titles, perhaps suggesting that those seeking success and communal upliftment via sports might be engaging in wishful thinking.

In a minimally lit all-black crypt, Hayden presented a set of ebony sculptures, interrogating the material as a signifier of African American excellence. Some pieces directly referenced the history of slavery: A



Mickalene Thomas, *May 1977, 2021*, rhinestones, glitter, acrylic, and oil on canvas, 98 1/8 x 82 1/8".