



Art of Mickalene Thomas Lesson Guide

Use these slide by slide notes to follow along with the Mickalene Thomas powerpoint.

Slide 1: Mickalene Thomas is a contemporary African-American visual artist based in New York.

Slide 2: She is best known for her work using rhinestones, acrylic, and enamel. Is there anyone here that you recognize? Michelle Obama, Oprah Winfrey, Condoleezza Rice (66th U.S. Secretary of State)

Slide 3:

Prompt Questions:

Based on these photos, what are similarities that you notice between them? What do you think the women are thinking? How do they carry themselves? What are other things you notice in the images? Describe the colors, patterns, and shapes.

Thomas's collage work is inspired by Impressionism, Cubism, Dada and the Harlem Renaissance art movements.

Impressionism: style of art developed during the late 19th century - early 20th century characterized by short brush strokes of bright colors in juxtaposition to represent the effects of light on objects.

Cubism: An artistic movement in the early 20th century characterized by the depiction of natural forms as geometric structures of planes.

The Harlem Renaissance: a renewal and flourishing of Black literary and musical culture during the years after World War I in the Harlem section of New York City during the 1920's and 1930's.

Mickalene Thomas draws on art history and pop culture to create a contemporary vision of female sexuality, beauty, and power. Blurring the distinction between object and subject, concrete and abstract, real and imaginary. She constructs complex portraits, landscapes, and interiors in order to examine how identity,



gender, and sense-of-self are informed by the ways women (and “feminine” spaces) are represented in art and popular culture.

(If you didn’t know, the portrait all the way on the left of Solange is actually Beyonce’s sister.)

Slides 4- 8

Black Femininity and Bodies:

Portrayal of black women in the media has often been limited to inaccurate two-dimensional and detrimental depictions

- Sapphire/ “Angry Black Woman”
- Jezebel
- Mammy

Read more about these stereotypes here:

<https://www.lsu.edu/chse/news/BeyondMammy.pdf>

Defeminized even when (hyper)sexualized

- Rooted in transphobia

Generalization and misrepresentation of black women have taken its place out of media and fiction into reality

In the media and elsewhere, it is common to publicly defeminize black women

- Serena and Venus Williams
- Michelle Obama
- Megan thee Stallion
- Laverne Cox
- Leslie Jones

Exclusion of black women as feminine and powerful with a different traits

- Includes masculine and feminine

Much of Mickalene Thomas’ work shifts the narrative from what has been written by racists and sexists to “celebrating black femininity and sexuality in a different way by claiming the space that seemed to be voided. Just as there is ambiguity in the terms “sexuality” and “masculinity”, there is ambiguity to “*who a black woman is*” that deserves to be represented. “To see yourself and for others to see you is a form of validation” – Mickalene Thomas

Proper representation is necessary and vital



- Including in art

Craft Activity:

Make your own Diva Portrait based on the art of Mickalene Thomas. Print out a photo of yourself and decorate it using glitter, rhinestones, markers, and crayons. Make a collage background with magazine, photo, and other cuttings.

Recommended Supplies:

1. Picture print out of self in pose. This can be on picture paper or regular printer paper.
2. Tracing Paper
3. Glue (pick your poison: modge podge, Nori, Elmer's Glue, etc.)
4. Magazine/ Paper Scraps/ Notebook paper/
 1. Hand-colored paper/etc.
5. Glitter/Rhinestones/Beads/sequins/ needle and thread to sew (optional)

Use the image below as inspiration.

Additional Resources:

Artist Website: <https://www.mickalenethomas.com/>

"Beyond Mammy, Jezebel, & Sapphire: Reclaiming Images of Black Women"

<https://www.lsu.edu/chse/news/BeyondMammy.pdf>

"A New African American Identity: The Harlem Renaissance"

<https://nmaahc.si.edu/blog-post/new-african-american-identity-harlem-renaissance>



Paul W. Zuccaire
GALLERY

STALLER CENTER FOR THE ARTS | STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY



This Girl Could be Dangerous, 2007, Rhinestones, acrylic, and enamel on wood panel, 84" x 72." © 2009, Mickalene Thomas.