

The Creators Project

14 Photographers Explore Mythologies Surrounding Blackness

Antwaun Sargent — Dec 16 2016



Mickalene Thomas, Portrait of Sidra Sitting, 2012 C-Print, 48 x 60 inches. Edition of 5, with 2 APs. Courtesy of the artist and Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

By curating the works of her mentors and peers, alongside that of emerging artists, [Mickalene Thomas](#) has extended her studio practice to organize an art exhibition at [David Castillo Gallery](#). The show contextualizes [her work in relation to the multiplicity of beauty, sexuality, representation, and blackness](#).

“This particular iteration [of the show] is about addressing the [personal, social, and political mythologies that I see](#) in their work and that I see in my work,” Thomas tells The Creators Project.

The exhibition, *Tête-à-tête*, features photos from artists including, Lyle Aston Harris, Deanna Lawson, Zanele Muholi,

Malick Sidibe, John Edmonds, and Thomas herself. Their works form a constellation of ideas surrounding the perspectives on and techniques for picturing the black body and its relationships to self, others, and the world.

“A conversation that I had with [Clifford Owens, Derrick Adams, and Xaviera Simmons at MoMA](#) about artists and collaboration inspired the series,” she explains. “I stated how I would like the gallery to function more as collaborative space that shows how we see the discourse around our art as peers.” Thomas believes that the work artists are making in their studio practice is contingent on their experience, dialogue, and a discourse of their life interacted with their peers. “To look at my work is to look at other artists who are making work simultaneously,” she adds, “and for me that was really important to start doing that within my photography.”



Xaviera Simmons, Denver, 2008. Color photograph, 40 x 50 inches, Edition of 3. Courtesy David Castillo Gallery

Deana Lawson’s *Hotel Oloffson Storage Room, Port-au-Prince, Haiti* is a portrait of a nude subject sitting on a bed below a upper body sculpture of the leader of the Haitian Revolution, Jean-Jacques Dessalines. It alludes to intimacy and the histories that make up personal subjectivity; the relationship between the two is also seen in the nude photograph, *Untitled (New Haven)*, of John Edmonds and a male lover, involved; and Renee Cox’s *HOT-EN-TOT*, a black-and-white self-portrait of the artist wearing prosthetic breasts and buttocks. It recalls Saartjie Baartman, who was exhibited throughout European museums as the "Hottentot Venus" spectacle because of the size and shape of her body. The print is representative of the exhibition’s larger conversation that shows the voyage of the black body—from gross misrepresentation to something more accurate—through time.



John Edmonds, Untitled (New Haven), 2015, Archival Pigment Print, 21" x 32"

Thomas' own photographs, *Remember Me* and *Portrait of Sidra Sitting*, are central to the conversations happening within the works on display. The portraits stand in contrast to Zanele Muholi's documentary-style photographs of black lesbian women living in South Africa. The two bodies of work explore ideas of sexual representation and women picturing women. Thomas' muse series makes an appearance in Carrie Mae Weems photograph, *Scenes & Take (To Look Back In Anger)*, where Weems stands in a doorway on the set of *Empire* looking at a Thomas-mounted photograph. The works allude to questions of lineage, context, and the imaging of the black female body. Thomas' works engage in a fashion discussion with Malick Sidibé's stylized studios shots and Hank Willis Thomas' appropriated *Look Natural*, an ad of black women posing from *Jet* magazine.

"We don't necessarily have to have a work selling on a wall, we can have other conversations during an art fair," explains Thomas. "For me this was a great opportunity to do that and to think of different concepts in relationship to photography and how we use photography and the photographic image to encounter how the subject is seen and to be seen by yourself and the spectator."

"As I push forward and expand I'm interested in how I can bring other artists with me," she adds.

TO LOOK BACK IN ANGER
DIRECTIONS: SCROLL DOWN
SCENE 1 - TAKE 2
ROLLING...

THE PLOT: TOSHI AND KENAGHREI, A JEALOUS WOMAN ADOPTS A MENDACIOUS WAY
TO SEEK REVENGE.

TO LOOK BACK IN ANGER WOULDN'T GET HER PAID, BUT EVERY HAS A MIND ALL IT'S OWN.
SHE WAS NO HOLLY SOLENTINE, NO CROSSOVER SING, NO KENIC, NO LIPTA, NO TRANTOR.
WOODER WOMEN WHO HAD EMERGED OUT OF THE BRACKLES WERE TAKING HER NIGHTFUL
PLACE. AFTER ALL SHE'D BEEN THROUGH, SHE WAS A TAD UPSET TO SAY THE LEAST.

CUT - FRONT



*Carrie Mae Weems, Scenes & Take (To Look Back in Anger), 2016 inkjet print on canvas 36 3/8 x 71 3/8 inches (framed)
Edition of 5 + 2 APs ©Carrie Mae Weems. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York*

Tête-à-tête continues through January 31 at David Castillo Gallery. [Click here](#), for more information.