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## ***Mickalene Thomas: I Can't See You Without Me* opens at the Wexner Center for the Arts September 13**

*Exploration of the artist and her muses includes the debut of a multichannel video work supported by a Wexner Center Artist Residency Award*

May 21, 2018—Columbus, Ohio—**September 13–December 30, 2018**, the Wexner Center for the Arts will present ***Mickalene Thomas: I Can't See You Without Me***, a major solo exhibition that will fill every gallery in the Wexner Center's multidisciplinary art space with nearly 30 paintings, videos, and immersive installations.

This exhibition will look at the expansive body of work Mickalene Thomas has produced between 2005 and 2018. Focusing primarily on the artist's grandly scaled and opulent paintings, it will explore the intricacies of her visual dialogue with art history, identity, desire, power, authorship, and the historically fraught relationship between artist and subject.

Each of the Wexner Center's four galleries will be devoted to one of Thomas's significant and sustained muses: her late mother, Sandra; her former lover, Maya; her current partner, Racquel; and Thomas herself. By casting herself, her mother, and other formidable women in her life as her models and muses, the artist pushes the boundaries of beauty as defined in the canon of art history.

"Around the time I started taking photographs in the early 2000s, the reductive media stereotypes of young, black, female bodies were already pervasive," Thomas says. "Women like Mary J. Blige, Lil' Kim, and Foxy Brown were at the forefront of pop culture and still limited to depicting themselves as objects of desire. I found this presentation of black women to be deeply in conflict with my understanding of myself and most black women I knew. It was crucial for me to flip these ideas by making images of women who were not, for example, a 'Foxy Brown' but also weren't in line with the marginalizing narrative of female subjects in Western art history."

Culling from traditions of painting and popular culture, Thomas creates portraits that demand attention and exude power. The works in the exhibition will feature her signature materials—rhinestones, painted patterns, collaged compositions, and appropriated source imagery—which she has used to challenge presumptions about perception, authenticity, and beauty.

"There is a deep intelligence in Thomas's work and her prowess as an arbiter of art-historical traditions and practices," cocurator Michael Goodson notes. "She consistently and lucidly folds the history of painting, replete with all its complications, into her own ideas. She reclaims—and in so doing redefines—ideas of beauty canonized in Western art history while demanding her own space, on her own terms."

*I Can't See You Without Me* subtly reveals the individual character of the artist's muses, each of whose unique and collaborative relationships with Thomas have vitally informed their respective depictions. The sitters who recur in Thomas's compositions assert their spirit, strength, and self-confidence, whether in a reclining pose after Ingres's *La Grande Odalisque* (1814); as brazen, afro-adorned beauties; or as female wrestlers inspired by erotic magazines.

As Thomas explains, “One of the things I look for in a subject is a unique and sometimes unexpected interpretation of what it means to be a woman. All of them have an inimitable charisma, but know their bodies and see themselves through the camera very differently. Most of my muses are very intimate figures in my life so they have become a reflection of who I am, who I want to be, and the kind of figures I am grateful to observe in the world; ones who deserve to be seen and represented.”

In addition to paintings, the exhibition will present site-specific murals and four of Thomas’s video works, including the debut of a new multichannel video work by Thomas set to music by three-time Grammy Award–winning drummer, composer, and bandleader Terri Lyne Carrington. This piece was made possible with the support of a Wexner Center Artist Residency Award.

The show will also feature tableaux reminiscent of urban living rooms—a nostalgic nod to the artist’s youth and the women who raised her—which Thomas builds as performative spaces in her studio for her models. These works provide a deeper understanding of her multimedia influences and impulses, where photography, collage, video, painting, and installation each inform the other.

*Mickalene Thomas: I Can’t See You Without Me* is organized by the Wexner Center’s Michael Goodson, Senior Curator of Exhibitions, and Lucy I. Zimmerman, Curatorial Assistant. The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue with an introduction by Goodson and newly commissioned essays providing cross-disciplinary perspectives on Thomas’s work by Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Chair of Comparative Women’s Studies at Spelman College; Nicole Fleetwood, Associate Professor in the Department of American Studies at Rutgers University; and Antwaun Sargent, a New York–based writer and art critic.

## About Mickalene Thomas

Mickalene Thomas (b. 1971, Camden, NJ; lives and works in Brooklyn, NY) is a 2015 USA Francie Bishop Good and David Horvitz Fellow, visual artist and filmmaker who draws on art history and popular culture to create a contemporary vision of female sexuality, beauty, and power. Blurring the distinctions between object and subject, concrete and abstract, real and imaginary, Thomas constructs complex portraits, landscapes, and interiors to examine how identity, gender, and sense of self are informed by the ways women are represented in art and popular culture. Rhinestones—the artist’s signature material and a symbol of femininity—serve as an added layer of meaning and a metaphor of artifice. Thomas uses rhinestones to shade and accentuate specific elements of each painting, while subtly confronting our assumptions about what is feminine and what defines women.

Thomas received a BFA from the Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, NY, in 2000 and an MFA from Yale University School of Art, New Haven, CT, in 2002.

## Exhibition-Related Events

A free **Super Sunday** program with opportunities to explore the exhibition and engage in creative activities with local artists will take place on Sunday, October 7.

Two **Faculty Gallery Talks** are also scheduled: **Simone Drake**, Hazel C. Youngberg Trustees Distinguished Professor and Vice Chair, African American and African Studies at Ohio State, will speak on Thursday, September 27 at 1 PM; and **Tosha Stimage**, Visiting Faculty, Fine Arts, Columbus College of Art & Design, will speak on Thursday, November 15 at 6 PM. Both talks are free with gallery admission.

## Visitor Information

*Mickalene Thomas: I Can’t See You Without Me* will be on view September 13–December 30, 2018, at the Wexner Center for the Arts, 1871 N. High St. (at 15th Avenue) on the campus of The Ohio State University in Columbus.

Gallery hours are 11 AM–6 PM Tuesday, Wednesday, and Sunday; and 11 AM–8 PM Thursday–Saturday. Galleries are closed Mondays. Admission is \$8; \$6 for seniors and Ohio State faculty and staff; free for Wexner Center members, college students, and visitors 18 and under; and free Thursdays 4–8 PM and the first Sunday of the month. Gallery admission is also free with the purchase of a ticket to any same-day event at the Wex.

More info on bus routes, parking, and other visitor information is available [here](#), or at (614) 292-3535.

### **Exhibition Support**

**Crane Family Foundation** is a supporting sponsor of *Mickalene Thomas: I Can't See You Without Me*.

Free and low-cost programs at the Wexner Center are presented with support from **Huntington Bank** and **Cardinal Health Foundation**.

The Wexner Center receives general operating support from the **Greater Columbus Arts Council**, the **Ohio Arts Council**, **The Columbus Foundation**, and **Nationwide Foundation**.

Generous support is also provided by the **Corporate Annual Fund of the Wexner Center Foundation** and **Wexner Center members**.

### **About the Wexner Center**

The Wexner Center for the Arts is The Ohio State University's multidisciplinary, international laboratory for the exploration and advancement for contemporary art.

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