



# TAKE A LOOK

NORTON  
MUSEUM  
OF ART

Mickalene Thomas (American, born 1971)  
*Naomi Looking Forward #2*, 2016  
Rhinestones, acrylic, enamel and oil on wood panel  
84 × 132 in. (213.4 × 335.3 cm)  
Purchase, acquired through the generosity of the Contemporary and  
Modern Art Council of the Norton Museum of Art, 2016.245a-b  
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NORTON  
MUSEUM  
OF ART

A CLOSER LOOK  
CONTEMPORARY COLLECTION

Mickalene Thomas  
*Naomi Looking Forward #2, 2016*



# ABOUT



## The Artwork

*Naomi Looking Forward #2* portrays the supermodel Naomi Campbell reclining on a couch, supporting her raised torso on her left elbow. The pose recalls many paintings of women from the Renaissance to the present. However, as Naomi twists to look to the right, her right hand pulls her left leg up over her right leg. Curiously, the calves and feet are distinctly paler than Naomi. In fact, they are a photographic detail of a famous painting in the Louvre Museum in Paris, the *Grand Odalisque* by 19th-century French artist Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres (pronounced "Ang"). By painting a fully clothed, extremely successful African-American woman in the pose of an earlier nude, Thomas appropriates a long-standing tradition in the visual arts, dominated by male artists and patrons, and asserts the presence of a proud woman in place of the earlier subservient model.

Not only is Thomas' subject related to the historical representation of women in art, but her technique of composing her painting also is related to earlier art. At the beginning of the 20th century, Cubist artists such as Braque and Picasso, used collage to divide the picture surface in new ways and to represent different aspects of their subject simultaneously. Thomas's paintings, composed of rhinestones, enamel, and acrylic paint, as well as photographically reproduced sections, relate to collage. Thomas has commented on the importance of collage to her art-making: "I've always done collages - more than drawing or sketching - because that's how I learned to create my compositions. ...The process of collage allowed me to navigate structure in an image: segmenting, deconstructing, pasting, and re-contextualizing my ideas. I wanted to shift ways of seeing the image."

## The Artist

Mickalene Thomas was born in 1971 in Camden, New Jersey. She studied art at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York, before earning her Masters of Fine Art degree from Yale University in 2002. During the past decade, Thomas has received numerous honors and awards, and her artwork has been exhibited and collected by museums around the world. She lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

Her compelling, lavishly executed paintings and photographs explore gender and race. Through her understanding of art history, Thomas often juxtaposes classic, European representations of beauty, such as the reclining figure, with more modern concepts of what it means to be a woman. Her work calls into question age-old concepts related to women and how they are represented in art and other media. *Naomi Looking Forward #2* is an excellent example of this approach in Thomas' work.

Mickalene Thomas (American, born 1971)  
*Naomi Looking Forward #2*, 2016 (detail)  
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# SEE



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Njideka Akunyili Crosby (Nigerian, born 1983)  
*Super Blue Omo*, 2016  
Acrylic, transfers, colored pencil, and collage on paper  
83 ¾ × 107 ¾ in. (212.7 × 273.7 cm)  
Purchase, through the generosity of Jim and Irene Karp, 2016.178  
© Njideka Akunyili Crosby, Courtesy Victoria Miro Gallery

# THINK

## Observe & Describe

Spend a few minutes looking closely at *Naomi Looking Forward #2* by Mickalene Thomas.

Ask students to describe what they see; encourage them to be specific with their descriptions. Ask the group the following questions:

- *What is the first thing you notice about this painting?*
- *Can you describe the lines you see?*
- *What can you say about the shapes in the artwork?*
- *What interests you about this work? Detail things that interest you.*
- *What do you notice about the materials used?*
- *Are there any objects that you recognize? List them.*

## Looking Closer

Have students examine *Naomi Looking Forward #2* and provide time for them to answer the following questions:

Mickalene Thomas, originally used rhinestones to help her locate color and “transform and push the material in a new direction.”

- *What is the most important visual element on this painting? Why do you think so?*
- *Can you describe what is happening in this scene?*
- *What elements of this painting seem real to you and what elements seem fantasy? Please explain.*
- *Is there something you find exciting about this artwork? What is it?*
- *What do you think will be the differences from seeing this painting on this poster or seeing it in real life?*

## Let's Compare

### Njideka Akunyili Crosby

This mixed media painting, depicting a lone female figure, exemplifies Crosby's style, including her signature patterning made by transferring images of her family and popular culture from her native Nigeria. In *Super Blue Omo*, the artist is referring to a Nigerian laundry detergent marketed by the advertisement represented on television. Crosby creates subtle compositions that offer a unique perspective on her life in Nigeria and the United States, and also contribute to the figurative tradition of art.

Have students look carefully at Thomas' work. Ask students to review Observe and Describe questions that are also significant to Njideka Akunyili Crosby's work. Have students discuss the following:

- *How are these paintings different?*
- *What similarities do you find in these paintings?*
- *How are both paintings composed?*
- *Are there any similarities in how objects/people are organized?*
- *Can you identify a focal point in both paintings?*
- *Which area of the artwork is most important to you? Why?*





## For Younger Students

Engage students in discussion and writing activities.

### Classroom Discussion

Working in groups, students will brainstorm together, discussing the following questions:

- Does Thomas' style remind you of other works of art?
- What do you think the artist was trying to communicate by creating this work of art?
- What does this work of art remind you of? Why?
- If you sat like the model in the painting, how do you think it would feel? Explain.

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## For Older Students

Engage in discussion and writing activities.

### Topics to Discuss

Mickalene Thomas is well known for her collage-like paintings made with rhinestones, and acrylic and enamel paint. Through her study of society - past and present, Western art history, pop art, and media, Thomas' work examines ideas around femininity, beauty, race, and gender.

Teacher will ask students to discuss and reflect on the many social issues affecting society today, and how artists draw on personal experiences and cultural influences to create art.

If you were to create a collage/painting/photograph like Thomas' *Naomi Looking Forward #2*:

- Who would you choose to portray?
- Which objects would you display?
- What elements would you choose to create a focal point?
- What topics would you like to draw from?
- What would you want people to remember about your artwork?

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