



For Immediate Release



NOW ON VIEW: MICKALENE THOMAS'S PORTRAIT OF MNONJA, A VISION OF BLACK FEMININITY, RECLINES ON THE HIGH LINE'S 18TH STREET BILLBOARD

New York, NY (February 11, 2026) — The High Line today announced the presentation of *Portrait of Mnonja* by artist Mickalene Thomas as a billboard, adjacent to the park at 18th Street near 10th Avenue, now on view until early March 2026. The billboard reproduction of *Portrait of Mnonja* — the original mixed media painting is in the collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum — showcases a Black woman with confident poise in repose, against a domestic backdrop of decorative patterns. Thomas's work is given new context as a billboard by the High Line, offering an exploration of Black beauty as an intervention into the cityscape, a relatively rare occurrence at this grand, public scale.

"Mickalene Thomas's dynamic billboard brings a welcome shift in visage and visual texture to streets of Chelsea," said Cecilia Alemani, the Donald R. Mullen, Jr. Director & Chief Curator of High Line Art. "*Portrait of Mnonja* — from Mnonja's self-regard to the sumptuous patterns that surround her — both brightens and challenges the landscape of commercial imagery and steely buildings we're used to seeing in Manhattan's public space."

Portrait of Mnonja presents a depiction of a Senegalese friend of the artist, reclining across a patterned sofa. The original painting, reproduced here in vinyl, glitters with rhinestones that embellish Mnonja's clothing, makeup, and high heels. Thomas first began using rhinestones because they were accessible and inexpensive, and they have become central to her practice, referring both to the artifice of makeup and female beauty products, and to decorative folk art



traditions. Mnonja's space resembles a 70s-era living room, complete with wood paneling and clashing psychedelic prints. Though she is relaxed, she commands attention, her body turned forward in an intentional contrapposto-like pose and her eyes meeting the viewer's directly. She is unapologetic and beautiful, exuding dignity and sophistication.

Mickalene Thomas is best known for her vibrant, rhinestone-studded artworks that combine photography, collage, and painting to redefine the representation of Black women in art. She looks to revise the canon of art history and traditional portraiture by centering Black women as subject, and by imbuing them with self-determination. Her models are often friends, portrayed at ease within their maximalist domestic interior spaces. Through her compositions, the artist critiques the images that have shaped accepted definitions of femininity, particularly taking aim at the artistic lineage of the reclining nude. Unlike their forebears, Thomas' subjects are not posed to be surveyed and objectified; they have agency, and their powerful gaze confronts viewers.

Mickalene Thomas's *Portrait of Mnonja* follows works by Roe Ethridge, Allison Katz, Alex Da Corte, Małgorzata Mirga-Tas, and Glenn Ligon in the ongoing series of artwork presented by the High Line at that location in Chelsea. The billboard at 18th Street, once a remnant of the neighborhood's industrial past, is now solely dedicated to the presentation of art, and artworks change every few months. Past artists featured include John Baldessari, Faith Ringgold, and Louise Lawler, among many others.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Mickalene Thomas (b. 1971, Camden, New Jersey) lives and works in New York, New York. Thomas has presented work in solo exhibitions at institutions around the world, including Grand Palais, Paris, France (2025-2026); Les Abattoirs, Toulouse, France (2025); Hayward Gallery, London, United Kingdom (2025), The Broad, Los Angeles, California (2024); The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (2024); Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris, France (2022); The Bass Museum of Art, Miami Beach, Florida (2019); The Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, Maryland (2019); Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans, Louisiana (2019); Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Canada (2018); The Dayton Art Institute, Dayton, Ohio (2018); Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio (2018); Georgia Museum of Art, Athens, Georgia (2017); Newcomb Art Museum, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana (2017); Spelman College Museum of Fine Arts, Atlanta, Georgia (2017); Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, California (2016); Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, Colorado (2016); Aperture Foundation, New York, New York (2016); Brooklyn Museum, New York, New York (2012-13); Santa Monica Museum of Art, Santa Monica, California (2012); Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, Massachusetts (2012); Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, Japan (2011); and La Conservera Contemporary Art Centre, Ceuti, Spain (2009). Notable and recent group exhibitions include *Edges of Ailey*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York (2024); *Singular Views: 25 Artists*, Rubell Museum, Washington, D.C. (2023); *Positive Fragmentation*, organized by the National Museum of Women in the Arts, on view at the American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center, Washington, D.C. (2022); *Women Painting Women*, The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas (2022); *New Time: Art and Feminisms in the 21st Century*, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley, California (2021); *Posing Modernity: The Black Model from Manet to Matisse*, Gibbes Museum of Art, Charleston, South Carolina (2019); *Multiply, Identify, Her*, International Center of Photography, New York, New York (2018); *Figuring History*, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, Washington (2018); La Biennale canadienne 2017, Musée des beaux-arts du Canada, Ottawa,



Canada (2017).

Thomas has been awarded multiple prizes and grants, including The Gordon Parks Foundation Award (2024), Pratt Institute Legends Award (2022); Rema Hort Mann Foundation 25th Anniversary Honoree (2022); Artistic Impact Award, Newark Museum (2022); Glass House 15th Anniversary Artist of the Year (2022); Yale School of Art Presidential Visiting Fellow in Fine Arts (2020); Legend in Residence Award, Bronx Museum (2020); Pauli Murray College Associate Fellow at Yale University (2020); Meyerhoff-Becker Biennial Commission at Baltimore Museum of Art (2019); Visionary Award, Pioneer Works (2019); USA Francie Bishop Good & David Horvitz Fellow (2015); Anonymous Was A Woman Award (2013); Brooklyn Museum Asher B. Durand Award (2012); and the Timerhi Award for Leadership in the Arts (2010). Thomas's work is in numerous international public and private collections including The Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, California; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Art Institute of Chicago; MoMA PS1, New York, New York; Brooklyn Museum of Art, Brooklyn, New York; Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Yale University Art Collection, New Haven, Connecticut; and Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo.

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ABOUT HIGH LINE ART

Founded in 2009, High Line Art commissions and produces a wide array of artworks on the High Line, including site-specific commissions, exhibitions, performances, video programs, and a series of billboard interventions. Led by Cecilia Alemani, the Donald R. Mullen, Jr. Director & Chief Curator of High Line Art, and presented by the High Line, the art program invites artists to think of creative ways to engage with the unique architecture, history, and design of the park, and to foster a productive dialogue with the surrounding neighborhood and urban landscape.

For more information on High Line Art, please visit thehighline.org/art.

ABOUT THE HIGH LINE

The High Line is a public park on the West Side of Manhattan operated, maintained, and funded by the nonprofit conservancy Friends of the High Line. Through our work with communities on and off the High Line, Friends of the High Line is devoted to reimagining public spaces to create



connected, healthy neighborhoods and cities.

Built on a historic, elevated rail line, the High Line was always intended to be more than a park. You can walk through the gardens, view art, experience a performance, enjoy food or beverage, or connect with friends and neighbors—all while enjoying a unique perspective of New York City.

Nearly 100% of our annual budget comes through donations. The High Line is owned by the City of New York, and we operate the park under a license agreement with NYC Parks.

For more information, visit thehighline.org and follow us on [Facebook](#), [X](#), [Instagram](#), and [TikTok](#).

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