

Introduction

The goal of my research is to explore how Mickalene Thomas and Howardena Pindell engaged in a longer tradition of art through a close visual analysis of three specific paintings by the artists. The comparison of Pindell and Thomas's paintings allows for useful insights to be made in the different ways and motivations the two artists approach representing African American women in their art. Through their critical consumption and reinterpretation of history and art history, their ability to embrace the power of the erotic, and the representation of lost memories Mickalene Thomas and Howardena Pindell create a space where the formation of an identity for African American women continues to be constructed.

Thomas and Pindell both engage with African-American art history in their works, in the ways in which they construct their paintings. For Thomas, Bearden's collages are a direct influence on how she constructs her compositions. For Pindell, the engagement with photographs of familial ancestors and motifs referencing this past is her way of interacting with art history. The use of the reinterpretation of art history is key in their ability to recreate lost memories. Pindell recreates both her personal memories that were lost after a traumatic accident, as well as a larger lost cultural memory for African Americans. Thomas is working to construct a memory of the 1970's in her imagery directly borrowed from that time, specifically borrowed from blaxploitation films such as *Foxy Brown*. Inherent in Thomas's work is the eroticism of the female body. Thomas embraces the power of the erotic, as Audre Lorde defines it, to allow for the possibility of a complete identity to be formed. Thomas uses the erotic in her paintings to inform her representation of the women in her paintings. They have an agency about them that

allows for Thomas's audience to see their own bodies in, as bell hooks writes, an "erotic recognition."¹

The paintings discussed in this project, Thomas's *Three Graces: Les Trois Femmes Noires* and *A Little Taste of Outside Love*, and Pindell's *Autobiography: Water Ancestors/Middle Passage/Family Ghosts*, were chosen specifically for their unique treatment of surface and the sensual quality of the paintings. Both artists utilize various surface treatments to different effects. Thomas and Pindell's engagement with surface textures challenges notions of high art in the use of materials; the treatment of surface in these artists' works is a central theme to this project. Pindell's oeuvre as a whole engages in a strong manipulation of surface, especially in her earlier abstract works. *Autobiography: Water Ancestors/Middle Passage/Family Ghosts* was selected for this project specifically because of the manner in which Pindell engages with the question of African American identity as well as her personal identity. The deep blues and undulating surface of Pindell's painting calls to the viewer and invites them to search the painting for the underlying message of the artist.

Pindell engages with a cultural history of African and African American art, in a similar manner to how Thomas's works are based in Renaissance portraiture. Thomas's oeuvre is comprised mainly of large scale paintings similar to those included in this project, along with photographs and video installations that all focus on African American women and the diverse representations of them. *Three Graces: Les Trois Femmes Noires* and *A Little Taste of Outside Love* were chosen specifically because of their embodiment of Thomas's style and subject matter. They were also geographically accessible, allowing for me to do a formal analysis and spend time with the works in person.

¹ hooks, "Selling Hot Pussy," In *Black Looks Race and Representation*, 131.

Much has been written about Thomas and her large-scale paintings in the way she engages with historical representations of African American women in art. Derek Conrad Murray has written extensively about Thomas's works and her aesthetic style in terms of queerness and blackness in his essays. Murray also briefly goes into her treatment of surface and the effect it has on her work, but in this research there is more emphasis on the implications of how Thomas's surface manipulation affects the message of her paintings. Compared to Thomas, less has been written about Pindell's paintings, specifically *Autobiography: Water Ancestors/Middle Passage/Family Ghosts*. Pindell herself has written about her art in her book *The Heart of the Question : The Writings and Paintings of Howardena Pindell*, as well as for her 1986 solo exhibition *Howardena Pindell : Odyssey*. Much of the existent literature on Pindell focuses on her abstract work and her groundbreaking short film, *Free, White and 21* (1980), which addressed her exclusion from the AIR movement in the 1970s.

From a theoretical aspect, this paper relies heavily on the work of bell hooks and Audre Lorde for their writings on black female subjectivity and eroticism. The erotic is rarely discussed in relation to black bodies in art history, with Judith Wilson providing one of the few articles on the subject in her "Getting Down to Get Over: Romare Bearden's Use of Pornography and the Problem of the Black Female Body in Afro-U.S. Art." Evelyn Hammonds addresses black female sexuality in her essay, "Black (W)Holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality," yet this does not address the issue of eroticism. In addition to the lack of substantial literature on the erotic and black bodies, there is a lack of intersectional feminist art historical literature. The existing intersectional feminist literature does not address sufficiently the implications of depicting black female bodies. Hammonds briefly discusses this issue in "Black (W)Holes," and

bell hooks' book, *Art on My Mind : Visual Politics*, highlights the impact various African American artists have had on her life.

This thesis provides a case study for Thomas and Pindell in how their paintings are reflective of their cultural and intellectual influences. By analyzing the confluence of artistic traditions, and theoretical and spiritual practices in the art of Thomas and Pindell through a feminist lens, my research provides a new way of looking at these works. To begin deconstructing the works of Thomas and Pindell presented in this paper, I start with a formal analysis of the works individually. After analyzing the techniques of the artists, I provide a more theoretically based deconstruction of the paintings. The second chapter uses Audre Lorde's theory of the erotic to break down how Thomas approaches her sexualized paintings of African American women. In this chapter, there is a discussion of Thomas's motivations in creating these works and how they function in society. The final chapter is a comparison and analysis of the role memory plays in Pindell and Thomas's works. The chapter looks at how the memory invoked in the subject matter and surface treatment of the paintings has an effect on the formation of identity.

Looking Closely at the Art of Mickalene Thomas and Howardena Pindell

Mickalene Thomas and Howardena Pindell, although working thirty years apart, created visually rich depictions of Black women with autonomy over their bodies. The women in these paintings have individual and unique personalities, which the audience gathers from their surroundings and clothing. The artists managed to depict their subjects so that the audience cannot easily objectify and remove the women's agency. Both artists change the power dynamic between the viewer and their Black female subjects through the use of abstraction and the power of the female gaze. The work of Pindell and Thomas create a space in which the spectrum of female sexuality is explored and an identity is established.

Mickalene Thomas's *Three Graces: Les Trois Femmes Noires* (figure 1) is a fresh take on the classical depiction of the three graces, three nymphs from Greek and Roman mythology. The nymphs were closely associated with Aphrodite, each representing charm, beauty, and creativity.² As in previous depictions of the three graces, Thomas presents the figures at different angles allowing for each side of the figures to be seen. Consistent with both Thomas's representation and classical depictions is the proximity and intertwined positioning of the figures; the two women on the outside just barely touch the central figure uniting them.³ The women are also united in their gazes; the two figures on the outside are looking across at each other while the central figure is looking up and to the left. Thomas's painting of the women breaks from the traditional depiction of the three graces in that they are all clothed and are women of color. The subjects have more of a sense of autonomy over their bodies and how they are seen in Thomas's depiction because they are clothed and their

² Michèle Perny, "The Three Graces," The Louvre, accessed February 5, 2018, <https://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/three-graces>.

³ Ibid.

poses convey a sense of power and status. The central figure has her right hand raised in an adlocutio pose, implying she has a voice that will be heard. If seen from another angle, the woman on the left with her hand on her hip would be creating a classical S curve. The pose also references the poses of models from high fashion campaigns during the 1970's (figure 2). The clothing of the women is bold and colorful, giving each figure their own sense of identity. Purple, the color of royalty for the center figure, and intricate floral patterns for the two other figures communicate their individuality. The intricate application of rhinestones to make the floral pattern on the two outside figures conveys a sense of luxuriousness and flashiness seen in portraits of elite nobles of the past, or as Derek Conrad Murray describes Thomas's use of rhinestones, as conveying "a type of tawdry regality."⁴

The figures are grounded in their abstracted surroundings by the suggestion of a blue marble platform upon which they are standing. The marble panels consist of thick layers of paint creating ripples in the surface texture and adding to the illusion that the women are standing on stone. The choice of using marble to create the platform for the women alludes to the typical medium of classical sculptures. The marble platform elevates, both literally and figuratively, the women into a place of higher importance.⁵ Behind the women is a flat background containing a tree silhouetted against a warm yellow-orange sky. The tree resembles a myrtle tree, referencing the classical depictions of the three graces, in which

⁴ Derek Conrad Murray, "Hip-Hop Vs. High Art: Notes on Race as Spectacle," *Art Journal* 63, no. 2 (Summer, 2004): 11.

⁵ The act of elevating an object on a podium automatically raises the status of the object. A concept explored by Piero Manzoni in his *Base Magica – Scultura Vivente (Magic Base – Living Sculpture)*, 1961, wood, metal, felt. Manzoni made a podium with two felt footprints on top encouraging the audience to step atop the podium and thus become an artwork themselves.

one is conventionally shown holding a sprig of myrtle.⁶ There is very little depth in the painting, which pushes the focus back onto the figures.

In addition to referencing the past depictions of the three graces by white male artists, Thomas is also referencing the early Cubist paintings that abstracted the figures into geometric forms (figure 3). Similar to Metzinger's *Deux Nus (Two Nudes, Two Women)*, there is a triangular fragment in the middle of Thomas's composition. The triangular form is repeated throughout the composition creating a greater sense of rhythm and harmony. The picture plane in Thomas's *Three Graces: Les Trois Femmes Noires* is broken up into fragments between which neon green, yellow, red, bright white and taupe are painted. The shattering of the picture plane into these segments makes the painting look like it was painted on a mirror then smashed. In some panels the images are repeated, as though the image was being refracted in a mirror (figure 4). This creates a confusing effect on the eye and incorporates movement into the work through the repetition of the same images. The hair of the woman on the far left is extended through the repetition of the image, as is a small section of the corner of her dress. Aside from functioning as a tool of abstraction, the breaking of the picture plane creates small vignettes within the composition. When looking at the work from up close, it becomes difficult to focus on the work as a whole. Instead your eye takes each panel as its own work. The waist of the woman with the light grey dress and floral pattern is perfectly framed where the chunky belt is cinched above her hips. The face of the central figure is within its own panel, putting more emphasis on her calm expression.

The hair of the women in *Three Graces: Les Trois Femmes Noires* is made entirely of rhinestones, making their iconic hairstyles stand out from the background. By varying the

⁶ Perny, "The Three Graces."

color of the rhinestones and the design in which they are placed on the panel, Thomas creates subtle patterns within the hair, giving it more texture and life. The hair has different tones and colors, with the one on the left highlighted in an aqua blue, the middle figure with highlights of a lighter brown and the woman on the far right has her lighter colored afro highlighted with a cream colored rhinestone. Their hair is a defining characteristic of the women, just as is their clothing. For women of color, hair is politicized.⁷ Angela Davis and other people involved in the Civil Rights movement popularized the afro as a symbol of power. Artist Sonya Clark stated that there is a spiritual nature to the hair of people of the African diaspora in the fact that it grows upwards into the universe and is not weighed down by the forces of gravity.⁸ Thomas frequently depicts her subjects with afros, and such is the case in her work *A Little Taste of Outside Love* (figure 5).⁹

As in *Three Graces: Les Trois Femmes Noires*, Thomas uses black rhinestones to depict the hair of her subject in *A Little Taste of Outside Love*. The dense grouping of the small rhinestones makes her hair stand out from the rest of the composition. Unlike in *Three Graces: Les Trois Femmes Noires*, there is only one figure in this painting and she is naked. The figure is reclining in the canonical odalisque pose looking over her shoulder directly at the audience, and is thus not allowing for the audience to objectify her body without accountability. Thomas puts her work in dialogue with the larger history of depicting objectifying women by painting them as odalisques, popularized during the eighteenth and

⁷ Vanessa King and Dieynaba Niabaly, "The Politics of Black Womens' Hair," *Journal of Undergraduate Research at Minnesota State University, Mankato* 13, no. 4 (2013).

⁸ "Hanes Visiting Artist Lecture Series: Sonya Clark," Lecture, UNC-Chapel Hill Art Department, Chapel Hill, NC, 10/5/2017.

⁹ Tyler Shine, "Beautiful Fictions: Composing the Artificial in the Work of Mickalene Thomas," (Master's Thesis, University of Maryland, 2015) pg. 4. *A Little taste of Outside Love* is titled after the Millie Jackson song of the same title from 1977.

nineteenth century by artists such as Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres. Just as in Ingres's *La Grande Odalisque*, Thomas flattens the woman and creates a contrasting tension between the figure of the woman and the fabrics that surround her (figure 6).¹⁰

There are almost no brush strokes visible in the acrylic paint depicting the skin of the woman, creating a perfectly smooth and shiny surface in contrast to the rough texture of the rhinestones. The majority of the fabric of the couch that the woman is lounging on is comprised of rhinestones, making them look like expensive beaded pillows. The different sizes and types of rhinestones add a sensual quality to the work, and you can almost imagine how it would feel to run your hands over the beveled edges of the rhinestones. Where the rhinestones touch the enamel paint in some spots there are small cracks in the finish of the enamel (figure 7). These cracks resemble stitches in fabric, retaining the connection to the original use of textiles.

The lack of a clear delineation of space in the work affects the way in which the figure interacts with her surroundings. The woman lays on the couch and her right hand rests gently on the side of the cushion, but aside from this there is little physical interaction. The floral and animal prints are luxurious and instill an air of decadence in the painting. The impression given by the work is one of regality. The figure is not passive and commands the room, in part due to its large scale. *A Little Taste of Outside Love* is nine by twelve feet, with the figure of the woman stretching across almost the entire composition. The scale of the painting adds a sense of agency to the nude woman. Unlike life size or smaller depictions of nude women, which convey a sense of vulnerability and fragility, Thomas's subject draws to mind the powerful Amazonian warrior women. The same is true for *Three Graces: Les Trois Femmes*

¹⁰ De Vergnette François, "Une Odalisque," The Louvre Museum, The Louvre, Accessed April 25, 2018, <https://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/une-odalisque>.

Noires. The three graces are smaller than the figure in *Outside Love* but the grand scale of the work still has an impact on the way in which the audience interacts with the figures.

The women in both compositions dominate the spaces they are in; both within the composition of each respective painting as well as the physical space the paintings occupy in the museum or gallery in which they are displayed. The scale of the works has an awe-inspiring effect on the viewer. Since the women in the paintings are so large, there is less of an imbalance of power in the relationship between viewer and subject. The women are not presented in a manner that allows for them to be completely objectified in a sexual manner. Shohini Chaudhuri summarized the thoughts of Laura Mulvey, noted feminist film theorist, on the role women play in cinema saying,

In narrative cinema, woman plays a ‘traditional exhibitionistic role’ – her body is held up as a passive erotic object for the gaze of male spectators, so that they can project their fantasies on to her. She connotes ‘*to-be-looked-at-ness*.’¹¹

Applying this to the manner in which Thomas presents her figures, it is evident that the women in Thomas’s work are seen, but they are not in the composition for solely voyeuristic purposes. The women are not made into a spectacle, instead the artists present their sitters in a way that commands their audience. Thomas articulately depicts the women so that they are seen only in the way they want to be seen. The fragmented aesthetic of the work also aids in preventing the complete objectification and loss of agency of the women. Their bodies are broken up irregularly and when standing close to the work, you have to adjust the way you look at it in order to see their bodies as a whole instead of as disjointed fragments. Thomas ensures the women’s bodies appear whole by only slightly refracting the picture plane where the women are shown.

Thomas’s approach to abstracting the figural elements through flatness in her work retains more

¹¹ Shohini Chaudhuri, “The Male Gaze,” in *Feminist Film Theorists : Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman, Teresa de Lauretis, Barbara Creed* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2006) 35.

detail of the forms of the women's bodies opposed to Howardena Pindell's technique of abstraction in *Autobiography: Water Ancestors/Middle Passage/Family Ghosts*.

Pindell's *Autobiography: Water Ancestors/Middle Passage/Family Ghosts* depicts her own body in a manner that subverts the traditional role of women's bodies being on display for the male gaze (figure 8). In the representation of her own body, Pindell provides the viewer with only a vague silhouette of her body with her face depicted in more realistic detail. The heavy blue lines of paint obfuscate and partially hide her body from the viewer's gaze, while the artist's body has a lighter brown color underneath the blue markings helping to differentiate it from the rest of the painting. Her form is commanding and substantial in size. The blue markings covering her body camouflage her form and give the impression that she is floating in the water with her head just barely above the surface of the water.

The disguising of the body makes it so that the viewer has to look for Pindell's body in order to see it. The viewer cannot passively look at the work; instead they must look closely at the busy composition in order to read it. Pindell has written about how after a traumatic car accident in which she lost part of her memory she recalled the eyes of everyone watching her as the paramedics aided her.¹² In making her viewer actively look for her body, which is obscured but still evident, Pindell is not allowing her audience to be passive bystanders in the relationship between subject and viewer. The viewer activates the painting with their gaze and alters the power dynamic. Pindell specifically chose how the audience would be able to see her body, altering the typically voyeuristic relationship between object and viewer. The eyes in *Autobiography: Water Ancestors/Middle Passage/Family Ghosts* look back at the audience, just

¹² Kellie Jones, "Interview with Howardena Pindell" in *Eyeminded : Living and Writing Contemporary Art*, (N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011) 229.

as Pindell does. The multitude of eyes in the work, when combined with the camouflaging of the artist's body balances the power dynamic more evenly between viewer and subject.

In addition to the unsettling number of eyes in *Autobiography: Water Ancestors/Middle Passage/Family Ghosts*, Pindell added several arms to her body, referencing both traditional depictions of Hindu gods and the Vitruvian Man.¹³ Within the majority of the palms of these hands are cut out pictures of eyes, forming a version of the Hamsa.¹⁴ Jacqueline Francis proposed that the “raised arms might be read as power salutes, the symbolic gestures of nationalists (majority and minority), labour unionists, feminists and other activists asserting their claims for self-definition and self-determination.”¹⁵ The arms can also be interpreted as a representation of swimming, referencing the enslaved people who were tossed overboard from the ships on the Middle Passage. Just above her face there appears to be a suggestion of another head, also common within the Hindu tradition of representing gods and goddesses with multiple heads. The second head and multiple arms can be interpreted as a visual representation of Pindell's connection to her ancestors because that she embodies all her past ancestors. Those that came before Pindell are a part of her, connected spiritually and physically in her contemporary self. In her travels to Buddhist and Hindu nations, which Pindell cites as being highly influential in her art, she encountered cultures that practiced ancestor worship and belief in reincarnation.¹⁶

The multiple arms and heads of the figure in *Autobiography: Water Ancestors/Middle*

¹³ Jacqueline Francis, “The Brooks Slave Ship Icon: A ‘Universal Symbol’?” *Slavery and Abolition* 30, no. 2 (2009): 330.

¹⁴ The Hamsa, sometimes referred to as the Hand of Fatima, is a symbol commonly found in Judaism and Islam to ward off evil. Ahmadreza Afshar, “The Hand in Art: Hamsa Hand,” *The Journal of Hand Surgery* (American Ed.) 38, no. 4 (2013).

¹⁵ “The Brooks Slave Ship Icon A ‘Universal Symbol’?” 330.

¹⁶ Jones, *Eyeminded : Living and Writing Contemporary Art*, 229

Passage/Family Ghosts is a visual manifestation of her encounters with Buddhism and Hinduism.¹⁷

The use of figural abstraction and the active gazes of the women in the paintings of Thomas and Pindell are key to the way in which both artists subvert typical representations of Black women in art. The female subjects of their art are objectified in that they are the subjects of paintings, but the manner in which Pindell and Thomas depict them allows the women to retain their agency. There is a commanding presence to all of the paintings discussed due to the clever and skillful way they are represented. They disrupt the conventional power dynamic in which the female subject is passive and has no control over how she is seen by the viewer. In all three of these paintings the subjects have autonomy over their bodies and the relationship between the audience and subject is at more of an equilibrium.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Chapter 2: Mickalene Thomas and The Erotic

The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling.

– Audre Lorde

Audre Lorde in her essay “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power,” defined the erotic as a source of power within women rooted in creativity, feeling, and the sharing of joy.¹⁸ Lorde separates the erotic from being entirely (hetero)sexual. Instead it is a way for women, specifically Black women, to reclaim “our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives.”¹⁹ Mickalene Thomas embraces this definition of the erotic in her work, sharing the joy of recognition and representation with her intended audience. This chapter discusses the ways in which Thomas explores the power of the erotic and its impact on the ability to reclaim the Black female body in her art.

Thomas takes a radical step in expressing the sexuality of her Black female subjects when viewed within the context of the history of past representations of Black women. As Kimberly Wallace-Sanders writes in her introduction to *Skin Deep, Spirit Strong: The Black Female Body in American Culture*,

...Black women have historically been represented as hypersexual, ignorant, and violent female ‘Negro beasts,’ in addition to many other denigrating types including the long-suffering desexualized Mammy, the primitive Topsy, the exotic Jezebel, and the evil, emasculating, Sapphire.²⁰

Thomas’s subjects embrace their eroticism, and are allowed to take corporeal joy in their sexuality. The women in Thomas’s paintings are sexual, but not hypersexual. Their bodies are portrayed realistically without the emphasis put onto the feminine markers of sexuality seen in

¹⁸ Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984, 53–59.

¹⁹ Ibid, 55.

²⁰ Kimberly Wallace-Sanders, *Skin Deep, Spirit Strong: The Black Female Body in American Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 3.

past representations made by white male artists. The woman in *Little Taste of Outside Love* is posed as a canonical odalisque, but instead of being fully exposed to the audience, we see only the profile of one breast. Her right hand is posed so that we cannot fully see the curvature of her body. Thomas did not idealize her body and omit the rolls on her torso that most female bodied people have. In including the rolls and bumps and imperfections, Thomas rendered her subject more accessible to people in her audience with feminine bodies. The sharing of the representation of a woman who is not ashamed of her body or her sexuality is erotic in that the woman is proudly taking up space as a sexual being. Thomas celebrates the sexuality of the women in her works without exploiting them. Her subjects do not fall into the trope of being seen as ignorant. All of the women's gazes in her works are present and knowing, and by presenting her models in canonical poses, they connote a notion of higher culture. Addressing the third stereotype presented by Wallace-Sanders, there is no implication of violence or threat from the women. The only threat of the women is in their rejection to be seen as the stereotypes society puts onto them and in their unabashed occupying of space.

There is a rejection of the "politics of silence" constructed around Black women's sexualities within Thomas's paintings.²¹ Evelyn Hammonds discusses the lack of acknowledgement by Black women and theorists surrounding their own sexualities as a response to the oppression and repression of their sexualities by society.²² Not acknowledging their sexuality was a way for Black women during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to retain control over their sexuality, but this led to the loss of autonomy over their ability to speak about

²¹ Evelyn Hammonds, "Black (W)Holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality," in *Skin Deep, Spirit Strong : The Black Female Body in American Culture*, edited by Kimberly Wallace-Sanders (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002), 307.

²² Ibid.

their sexuality.²³ The self-negation of Black women's sexualities denies their ability to fully articulate themselves. This is not to say that sexuality is the central focus of the works by Thomas. To avoid speaking in a binary, her paintings have multiple centers, including sexuality, memory, and aesthetics.²⁴ Lorde's definition of the erotic as "an assertion of the life force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives," encompasses all of the centers of the work by Thomas.²⁵ It is by addressing the sexuality of the Black women in her work that Thomas is able to keep her subject from being a peripheral figure like Laura, Olympia's maid, in Manet's 1846 painting (figure 9).

Thomas also visually references the aesthetics of 1970's blaxploitation films such as *Foxy Brown*, appropriating the recognizable sexual imagery and using it to construct a portrait of black female subjectivity. In *Foxy Brown* and *Coffy*, Pam Grier's two most famous blaxploitation films, centered around a sexualized black woman who used her sexuality as a tool to survive. Shoniqua Roach interpreted the performed eroticism in Grier's films as not for the enjoyment of the male gaze, but as a means to "which enable her to resist racialized gendered sexual subjection and tap into modes of erotic agency otherwise denied to her."²⁶ Thomas directly borrows the tackiness of the sets of blaxploitation films and the afro which Pam Grier wore in

²³ Ibid, 307-308.

²⁴ Loraine O'Grady addresses the multiplicity of centers in African-American culture saying, For African American folk wisdom, the "self" revolves about a series of variable "centers," such as sex and food; family and community; and a spiritual life composed sometimes of God or the gods, at others of aesthetics or style." I use centers to refer to the main themes present in these works that Thomas and Pindell address. In "Olympia's Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity," in *The Feminism and Cultural Reader*, ed. by Amelia Jones, 15, New York, NY: Routledge, 1992.

²⁵ Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic," 55.

²⁶ Shoniqua Roach, "Black Pussy Power: Performing Acts of Black Eroticism in Pam Grier's Blaxploitation Films," *Feminist Theory*, 19, no. 1 (December 3, 2017), 7.

Foxy Brown (figure 10).²⁷ By adapting this imagery and combining it with that of the odalisque, Thomas subverts the visual language of sexual objectification and imbues it with an autonomous agency.

The visibility of Black women as subjects, not marginalized objects, is necessary for the possibility of an articulation of their identity. O’Grady affirms the necessity of positive representations of Black women in the cultural discourse.²⁸ Thomas produced highly visible examples of a positive representation of Black women and their sexuality, especially in *A Little Taste of Outside Love*. Her paintings are inserted both into the canon of art, and into the spaces in which they are displayed. Thomas’s portraits demand that her audience sees her female subjects; they have no choice when confronted with the seven-foot long woman in front of them in *A Little Taste of Outside Love*. The reclining figure in this work is not “conveniently made to disappear into the background drapery.”²⁹ The black rhinestone outline and smooth surface texture of the woman’s skin sets her apart from the busy background composed of depictions of fabric. The paintings are loud and flashy, assertively taking up space in the gallery. It is impossible to walk past Thomas’s paintings without taking pause and noticing them.

Thomas’s paintings serve as a mirror for Black women who encounter them, reflecting an image that is not warped by harmful stereotypical depictions. They allow for a construction of identity to begin forming properly. Thomas’s motivations in making her large-scale portraits reference what Black theorists have said themselves about reclaiming the Black female identity.

In an interview Thomas said,

²⁷ Derek Conrad Murray, "Mickalene Thomas: Afro-Kitsch and the Queering of Blackness," *American Art* 28, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 11.

²⁸ Loraine O’Grady, “Olympia’s Maid,” in *The Feminism and Cultural Reader*, 4.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 2.

I like to think of the portraits as mirrors, in reference to Lacan's mirror image theory. We are not validated until we see ourselves, and the mirror is a tangible object that works as an evidence to external appearance. Not only are we present, we demand that we be seen, be heard, and be acknowledged.³⁰

Lacan defines the mirror stage "as an identification" when a child first seems themselves reflected in a mirror; this image reflected in the mirror is the "Ideal-I."³¹ Thomas provides this "ideal I" for her audience, as the women in her paintings are elegantly beautiful and convey a sense of autonomy. This is not to say that Thomas's paintings speak for everyone in her intended audience. Thomas's motivations in creating these works were to create the opportunity for someone to see themselves reflected in her paintings. The mirror analogy is furthered, in a visual sense, when considering the illusion of the shattered mirror in Thomas's painting *Three Graces: Les Trois Femmes Noires*.

The works of Thomas accomplish more than just adding to the visibility of Black women and their perception in society. Hammonds explains that it takes more than simply providing accurate representations of Black women to change public perception. She writes,

As theorists we have to ask how vision is structured, and, following that, we have to explore how difference is established, how it operates, how and in what ways it constitutes subjects who *see* and *speak* in the world. This we must apply to the ways in which Black women are seen and not seen by the dominant society and how they see themselves in a different landscape. But in overturning the "politics of silence" the goal cannot be merely to be seen: visibility in and of itself does not erase a history of silence, nor does it challenge the structure of power and domination, symbolic and material, that determines what can and cannot be seen.³²

Thomas's works challenge the existing structures of power within the art world in their subject

³⁰ Katie Booth, "In Mickalene Thomas's Awe-Inspiring Portraits, a Meaningful Reflection of Black Women in Art," *Women in the World*. January 29, 2016, <https://womenintheworld.com/2016/01/29/in-mickalene-thomass-awe-inspiring-portraits-a-meaningful-reflection-of-black-women-in-art/>.

³¹ Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative as the Function of / As Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," In *Écrits*, New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2001, 2.

³² Hammonds, "Black (W)Holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality," 316.

matter and choice of media. Rhinestones are considered a base material, yet the use cheap plastic imitation jewels create a tension between the grand scale of her paintings and references to the history of Western portraiture. The discussion that takes place around Thomas's work disrupts the hegemonic discourse regarding conventions of portraiture and the ways in which Black women have been represented. In this way, Thomas's works are accomplishing more than just creating visibility. Thomas talks about her works, not in reference to her own queer identity since it is not the main focus of her work, but in terms of the impact they have on the diversification of Black women in art.³³

Thomas's intended audience feels a validation of themselves in seeing positive, non-stereotypical, depictions of Black women who look like them taking up space in the world. Thomas abstracts her figures by flattening and fragmenting them to draw attention to the disparity in accurate representation of Black women of the past. This abstraction, however, does not negate the power of having well-articulated representations of Black women. It is an erotic experience to see oneself represented in a positive manner, especially when the dominant representations in the media are negative, if existent at all. Thomas captures the individual energy of her models and in this process allows for the beginning of an articulation of identity in both her subjects and audience. As Lorde said, "Recognizing the power of the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world, rather than merely settling for a shift of characters in the same weary drama."³⁴ Had Thomas only inserted representations of Black women into the canon of art, she would have been recasting the characters. Instead her technical innovations and ability to communicate the individualities of her

³³ "By portraying real women with their own unique history, beauty and background, I'm working to diversify the representations of black women in art." – Mickalene Thomas in an interview with *Women in the World*.

³⁴ Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic," 59.

models challenge the dominant narratives of Black women in art.

Thomas's work is erotic because there is an emotional connection to the sexuality of the women. *A Little Taste of Outside Love* is not pornographic or exploitative because there is a purpose to the eroticism of the painting. Thomas purposefully adapts the power of the erotic in this painting to remove it from the context of existing as pornography. Lorde aptly defined pornography as "a direct denial of the power of the erotic, for it represents the suppression of true feeling. Pornography emphasizes sensation without feeling."³⁵ Romare Bearden, cited by Thomas as an inspiration, frequently used pornographic images of Black women in his collages. While his depictions of Black women did not use the stereotypes often used to represent them, Bearden still presented the women as sexually available objects to the viewer. Tyler Shine summarized Judith Wilson's writings on Bearden and his pornographic images saying, "his female nudes recapitulate some of pornography's tropes such as a voyeuristic gaze, a romanticization of sex work, a reliance on dualistic stereotypes, and the connection of female body with nature."³⁶ The women in *Three Graces: Les Trois Femmes Noires* are surrounded by nature and have flowers in the design of their clothes, but the way Thomas separates the women from the background disassociates them from their surroundings.³⁷ They are simultaneously a part of their surroundings while not being overtaken by them. In *A Little Taste of Outside Love* nature is present in the fabrics that compose the background of the work. The zebra print fabric and floral design hint at the previous exoticism of Black women in art, while also referencing the collage of fabrics Bearden used in his *Patchwork Quilt* (figure 11). The mimicry of collage allows for her to put distance between the women and their environment. The process of

³⁵ Ibid, 54.

³⁶ Shine, "Beautiful Fictions: Composing the Artificial in the Work of Mickalene Thomas," 34.

³⁷ Ibid, 36.

recreating collage in paint makes the illusion that the women are not in the space to be sexualized by the audience. They have been taken from their original context and placed in a reimagined one to create a new story.

Collage as a medium allows for a whole to be constructed from various different sources. In the violent process of cutting and fragmentation, a new whole is made with all of the elements working together to make one unified aesthetic. The violence of collage is emphasized in the breaking of the picture plane in Thomas's *Three Graces*. The fragmentation of the depictions of the women's bodies can be connected to the long history of violence often tied to the discourse around Black women's sexualities. As Hammonds writes, in reference to Lorde, "In particular, since discussions of Black female sexuality often turn to the issue of the devastating effects of rape, incest, and sexual abuse, I want to argue that Black queer female sexualities should be seen as one of the sites where Black female desire is expressed."³⁸ Mickalene Thomas has the ability to portray the Black female desire because she is coming from the position of a queer woman of color. The history of sexual abuse that is prominent in other portrayals of Black women is not present in her representations. As opposed to the manner in which Bearden approached his models, which "reproduce standard gender tropes and objectifying strategies such as the voyeuristic gaze," Thomas liberates her models from these harmful tropes.³⁹

Bearden eroticized his models in the same way the white male artists painting nudes had been doing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He eroticized them in a pornographic way, eliminating their autonomy and subjectivity, making them objects of desire. In *Patchwork Quilt*, Bearden presents the woman laying prone on the couch, while still having her body slightly

³⁸ Black (W)Holes," In *Skin Deep, Spirit Strong*, ed. by Kimberly Wallace-Sanders, 311.

³⁹ Meredith Malone, "Spotlight Essay: Romare Bearden," 2, Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, February 2007.

turned, available to the viewer. Her rear and the curvature of her waist is accentuated, serving as a marker of the woman's exaggerated sexuality.⁴⁰ bell hooks described the butt as a contemporary marker of black female sexualization saying, "In the sexual iconography of the traditional black pornographic imagination, the protruding butt is seen as an indication of a heightened sexuality."⁴¹ Thomas still presents her subjects as erotic but not in the objectifying manner as Bearden; her works are erotic by Lorde's definition. She approaches her models with the aim of letting their individuality shine through, instead of erasing and painting them into the canon of art history, which has previously erased Black women's subjectivity.⁴² Thomas is not an outside observer because she is painting her peers. She does not occupy a voyeuristic artistic position; Thomas is diversifying the depictions of African-American women from a position of genuine intimacy. The expression of the woman in *A Little Taste of Outside Love* is one of a relaxed confidence. It is clear that Thomas's sitter was comfortable with being nude and modeling for the artist. The woman's hands and body do not appear tense or rigid. Her languid pose of relaxation indicates an intimate relationship in which the power dynamic is balanced between artist and subject.

Thomas's paintings allow for the articulation of identity to be formed by providing positive representations of Black women. Her paintings serve as a mirror, in Lacanian terms, in which Black women can see a positive image reflected. The inclusion of sexuality in Thomas's

⁴⁰ bell hooks, "Selling Hot Pussy: Representations of Black Female Sexuality in the Cultural Marketplace," In *Black Looks Race and Representation*, New York: Taylor & Francis, 2014, 123.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² "Around the time I started taking photographs in the early 2000s, there was a dominant stereotype of young, black, female bodies in the media. Women like Mary J. Blige, Lil' Kim and Foxy Brown who were at the forefront of pop culture, appearing in hip-hop magazines were often limited to depicting themselves as objects of desire. It appeared to me that as a black woman, I was subject to the same kind of limitations and framework in which they performed." – Mickalene Thomas in an interview with *Women in the World*.

paintings is what allows for a fully developed representation of her subjects to be captured. Her work is erotic in that she creates a platform wherein the assertion of self-identity is communicated and made available to her audience. Thomas is allowing for the possibility of black women to relate to their bodies, as bell hooks said “[when] erotic recognition, desire, pleasure and fulfillment [are placed] at the center of our efforts to create radical black female subjectivity, we can make new and different representations of ourselves as sexual subjects.”⁴³ While Thomas’s depictions of black women are not idealized, and there is still the presence of sexual objectification, her paintings establish a site where an identity can be recognized.

⁴³ hooks, “Selling Hot Pussy,” In *Black Looks Race and Representation*, 131.

Recalling a Lost Memory

In the introduction to *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*, James Baldwin addresses the role memory plays in dictating how people go about their lives. He wrote,

...what the memory repudiates controls the human being. What one does not remember dictates who one loves or fails to love. What one does not remember dictates, actually, whether one plays poker, pool, or chess. What one does not remember contains the key to one's tantrums or one's poise. What one does not remember is the serpent in the garden of one's dreams. What one does not remember is the key to one's performance in the toilet or in bed. What one does not remember contains the only hope, danger, trap, inexorability, of love – only love can help you recognize what you do not remember.⁴⁴

Memory is the locus on which an identity is formed, according to Baldwin; the absence of memory is just as important as the presence of one. Howardena Pindell and Mickalene Thomas manipulate cultural and personal memory in their works in their search for identity. Thomas invents a new sense of memory in her work by recalling a recent past created by the appropriation of an aesthetic style. While Pindell, uses her art as a form of therapy to recover her own lost memories.

In October of 1979, Howardena Pindell was involved in a car accident leaving her with memory and motor function loss. In an interview with Kellie Jones, Pindell spoke about not being able to recognize people from her past and using her art practice as a means to regain her memory saying,

I had a show in April coming up after the accident and I could cancel it or do it. I forced myself to finish the work because I didn't want to lose the chance to show on account of some motor problems. I didn't want to lose all of my skills. I used the postcards to get my memory back and also to force myself to do work so I wouldn't lose my dexterity... I'd remember a little bit and I'd try to piece it together. It was therapeutic.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ New York: H. Holt, 1995.

⁴⁵ In *Eyeminded : Living and Writing Contemporary Art*, 227. N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011.

Pindell's *Autobiography* series was created in this attempt to regain her memory; in a poetic title her audience learned of Pindell's past in the same way she did herself. In what she refers to as her "strongest painting" of the *Autobiography* series, *Ancestors/Water/Middle Passage/Family Ghosts*, Pindell addresses both the loss of her own memory and a cultural one.⁴⁶ The large painting contains photo scans of her actual familial relatives and anonymous images of people of the African diaspora.⁴⁷ The inclusion of these specific images are references to her own familial history, but as a viewer it is impossible to determine which of the people in the photographs are actually blood relatives of Pindell and which are unknown. The uncertainty of the identities of the people in the photographs reflects the same loss of recognition Pindell had after her accident. The image of the African woman's head in the upper middle portion of the composition is meant to represent, according to the artist, "the one African woman back to whom all human life is traced to."⁴⁸ The inclusion of this head provides a link, whether her audience is cognizant of it or not, between the artist and viewer no matter their race. Without having familiarity with the image of the woman's head, however, it is not evident that the head of the woman is this intended link to the distant past. The head of the woman simply appears to be an old depiction of a woman. The reconnection of African American cultural memory and Pindell's personal memory is made overtly political in *Ancestors/Water/Middle Passage/Family Ghosts*.

Pindell contends with the violent erasure of the history of African Americans as well as the incredible mistreatment of the indigenous peoples of America, which she includes in the

⁴⁶ Ibid, 229.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Pindell, *Howardena Pindell : Paintings and Drawings*, 66, Kansas City, MO. Exhibits USA, 1992.

artwork as part of her ancestry.⁴⁹ In the composition of *Ancestors/Water/Middle Passage/Family Ghosts* the word “Seminole,” the specific group of indigenous people to which Pindell traces her lineage, is present along with “a hand holding a radioactive tablet,” in reference to the indigenous people who died due to radioactive exposure from the uranium mines in New Mexico.⁵⁰

Aside from the reference to the slave ship in the composition previously discussed, Pindell included the text of a law from North Carolina during the early nineteenth century that protected slave owners who raped their female slaves. The portion of the law states, “...if the master attempts the violation of the slave’s wife and the husband resist his attempts without the least effort to injure him, but to merely to shield his wife from his assaults, this law does not merely permit, but authorizes the master to murder the slave on the spot.”⁵¹ The inclusion of this law is Pindell attempting to educate her audience about the violent history of slavery that is not included in the majority of American history textbooks.⁵² Pindell includes the ugly history of slavery in her work by using words and images, such as the Brooks’ Slave ship and the text of the law, without having to reproduce the explicit images from the era of slavery. The artist combines the “public and private history and all its pain into the painting,” not sparing her audience from the truth of the forced erasure of memory.⁵³

The erasure of memory is made corporeal in Pindell’s obfuscation of her own body in her self-portrait. The process Pindell used to depict her own body has a symbolic, almost ritualistic

⁴⁹ Pindell, In *Eyeminded : Living and Writing Contemporary Art*, 229, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011.

⁵⁰ Ibid. Keith Schneider, “A Valley of Death for the Navajo Uranium Miners,” *The New York Times*, May 3, 1993, <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/05/03/us/a-valley-of-death-for-the-navajo-uranium-miners.html>.

⁵¹ Pindell, *Howardena Pindell*, 66, Kansas City, MO. Exhibits USA, 1992.

⁵² Pindell, In *Eyeminded* , 229, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011.

⁵³ Ibid.

nature to it. The artist lay down on the canvas, traced her outline, then cut it out and sewed it back into the canvas.⁵⁴ The cutting out and restitching of the canvas results in a visibly raised delineation of the form of Pindell's body created by the sutures. In the process of sewing, Pindell furthered her construction of self as a patchwork of selected and modified memories. The physical act of sewing the canvas as a fabric to create a unified image is connected to the long history of African American quilting as an art practice.⁵⁵ One of the most noticeable aspects of *Ancestors/Water/Middle Passage/Family Ghosts*, is the surface texture of the work. Pindell was inspired by the resist fabric dying technique *adire eleko* of the Yoruba people in which a paste is applied through a stencil to a fabric, dried in the sun then the fabric is then dyed. She altered this technique and "pressed paints through stencils onto the surfaces of her canvases, leaving bold fractured lines, often raised in thick impasto... Using these stenciled fractured lines, she unifies disparate forms on her canvases, and pushes the jagged discords of disconnected figures to the utmost limits, without any fear of formal disintegration."⁵⁶ In *Ancestors/Water/Middle Passage/Family Ghosts* Pindell uses this technique with varying shades of blue to represent water. The blue paint covers the form of her body, leaving only her head visible along with the outline of her body. The image of Pindell's body is subsumed and taken over by the same water on which her ancestors were taken to America.

The water and mimicry of the *adire eleko* process is what unites the composition visually. Pindell connects her present self to her past via the water. bell hooks, when writing about the role of water in Lorna Simpson's *The Waterbearer* (1986, silver print) said,

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Moyosore Okediji, "Semioptics of Anamnesia: Yoruba Images in the Works of Jeff Donaldson, Howardena Pindell and Muneer Bahauddeen," (PhD Dissertation, The University of Wisconsin – Madison, 1995) 196.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 198-99.

the water that flows from each is constant, undifferentiated, a sign of transcendent possibility, a reminder that it is always possible to transform the self, to remake history. The water flows like a blessing. Despite changes, distortions, misinformation symbolized by its containers, the water will continue to sustain and nurture life. It will redeem. It is the water that allows the black woman figure to reclaim a place in history, to connect with ancestors past and present.⁵⁷

Pindell's memory was altered after her accident, but through the manipulation of photographs she began to recall her lost memories. The fluid connection to water and her past ancestral memory gave Pindell the ability to reclaim her sense of self.

In a similar manner to the way that Pindell grasped images of her past, Mickalene Thomas uses the imagery of the 1970's Black power and Blaxploitation films to construct an imagined memory. Her choice of media and imagery recalls the 1970's glam culture of which Thomas does not have a completely accurate memory of her own.⁵⁸ The rich surface texture and manipulation of cultural imagery is what formally connects Thomas's works to Pindell's. In talking about general stylistic similarities of African-American artists, Pindell said,

I also noticed that Afro-American artists are very often involved in the extended surface... We get involved in crossover surfaces into sculpture-painting, painting-sculpture... There may be beads, there may be blood, there may be hair, there may be cloth, there may be bells. A very rich surface empowers the piece. I find that often Afro-American art has this aspect even if it's one material that has a sense of density of texture. Surface tension.⁵⁹

Thomas's works have this surface tension, as Pindell states, between the glitzy rhinestones and the flat painted surface. Around the rhinestones in Thomas's *A Little Taste of Outside Love* are cracks resembling the stitching around the form of Pindell's body in *Ancestors/Water/Middle Passage/Family Ghosts* (figure 8). This illusion of stitches forms a connection to the art of

⁵⁷ *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics*, 95, New York: Distributed by W.W. Norton, 1995.

⁵⁸ Murray, "Mickalene Thomas: Afro-Kitsch and the Queering of Blackness," *American Art* 28, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 11. Thomas was born in 1971.

⁵⁹ In *Eyeminded: Living and Writing Contemporary Art*, 231, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011.

quilting, as well as to the art of Romare Bearden.⁶⁰ The elaborate surface texture of Thomas's and Pindell's works are central to how they communicate their ideas and forge connections to a past memory. Both artists prioritize the formal aspects of their work as critical consumers of art history. They utilize various methods of creating a visually luscious surface textures to engage their audience. For Thomas the fabric prints and rhinestones reference the fashion of the 1970's and the social movements surrounding them; for Pindell her techniques reference a longer history of art from Africa and the African diaspora.

The memory of a cultural past serves as a locus on which Thomas and Pindell begin to visually reconstruct and stitch together a fragmented past. For Pindell her *Autobiography* series was integral to the reestablishment of her identity after the loss of her memory. As Baldwin phrased it, memory is what forms everyone's identities and informs how they operate in society.⁶¹ The absence of memory provides just as much of a basis for the formation of an identity as the presence of one. In the absence of memory, one must go on a search to actively construct something to take the place of the loss of memory. Pindell and Thomas they rely on established cultural signifiers upon which they expand to form a new version of their memories.

⁶⁰ Thomas has cited Bearden as a major source of inspiration for her work. ⁶⁰ Tyler Shine, "Beautiful Fictions: Composing the Artificial in the Work of Mickalene Thomas," (Master's Thesis, University of Maryland, 2015) pg. 34.

⁶¹ *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*. New York: H. Holt, 1995.

Conclusion

Art is a vehicle for sharing experiences of love, loss, and existence. Pindell and Thomas adapt the language of visual representation typically reserved for white upper class subjects and use it as a means to begin reconstructing a lost identity for African-American women. They draw upon a tradition of art from Africa and the African diaspora to create a new language of art in which a fully formed identity can be articulated. Both Thomas and Pindell utilize the power of the erotic and abstraction to allow Black women to occupy a space in society as sexual beings with agency, a space that has historically been inaccessible to Black women.

Pindell used her works to find herself again after the traumatic loss of her personal memory. The loss of Pindell's personal memory mirrored the violent forced erasure of a cultural memory for African-Americans as a result of slavery. *Autobiography: Water Ancestors/Middle Passage/Family Ghosts* merges Pindell's amnesia with the loss of a larger cultural memory. The artist used methods that recall resist dying techniques found in Yorubaland and images referencing her family to form a bridge between her present self and the distant past. Mickalene Thomas uses the aesthetics of the 1970's, the decade in which she was born, to blend the contemporary with the traditions of Western high art. Thomas and Pindell's portraits create a locus on which an African-American female identity can be formed. They provide a mirror in which Black women can see themselves positively represented on a grand scale. It is through the adept articulation of the erotic, as Audre Lorde defines it, and the adaptation of aesthetic processes from African-American culture that Pindell and Thomas's works create a platform for the formation of a complete African-American female identity.

Figure 1



Mickalene Thomas, *Three Graces: Les Trois Femmes Noires*, 2011, rhinestones, acrylic paint and oil enamel on wood panel, 109 x 144 in, NCMA, Raleigh, NC, Photo from the NCMA website

Figure 2



Francesco Scavullo / Condè Nast Publications, *Iman*, 1977, photograph, courtesy of *Vogue Magazine*

Figure 3



Jean Metzinger, *Deux Nus (Two Nudes, Two Women)*, 1910–11, oil on canvas, 92 x 66 cm, Gothenburg Museum of Art, Sweden

Figure 4



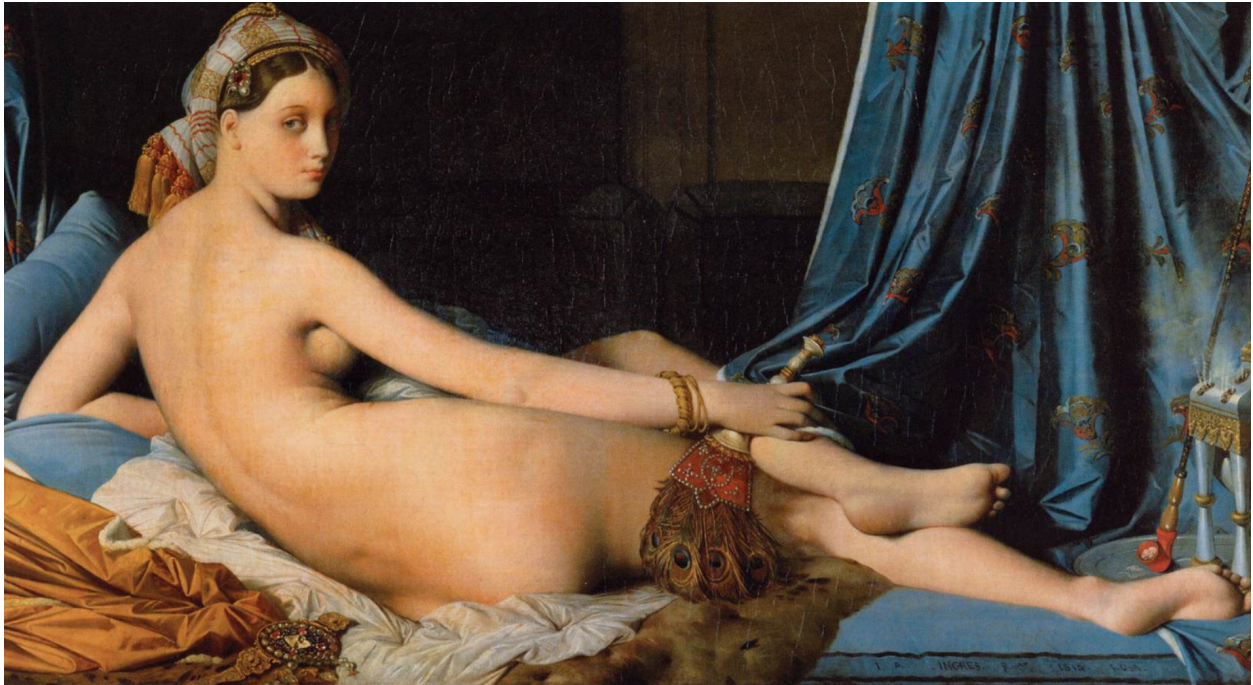
Detail of image being repeated in *Three Graces: Les Trois Femmes Noires*

Figure 5



Mickalene Thomas, *A Little Taste of Outside Love*, 2007, acrylic, enamel and rhinestones on wood panel, 108 x 144 in, Brooklyn Museum, NY, photo from the Brooklyn Museum website

Figure 6



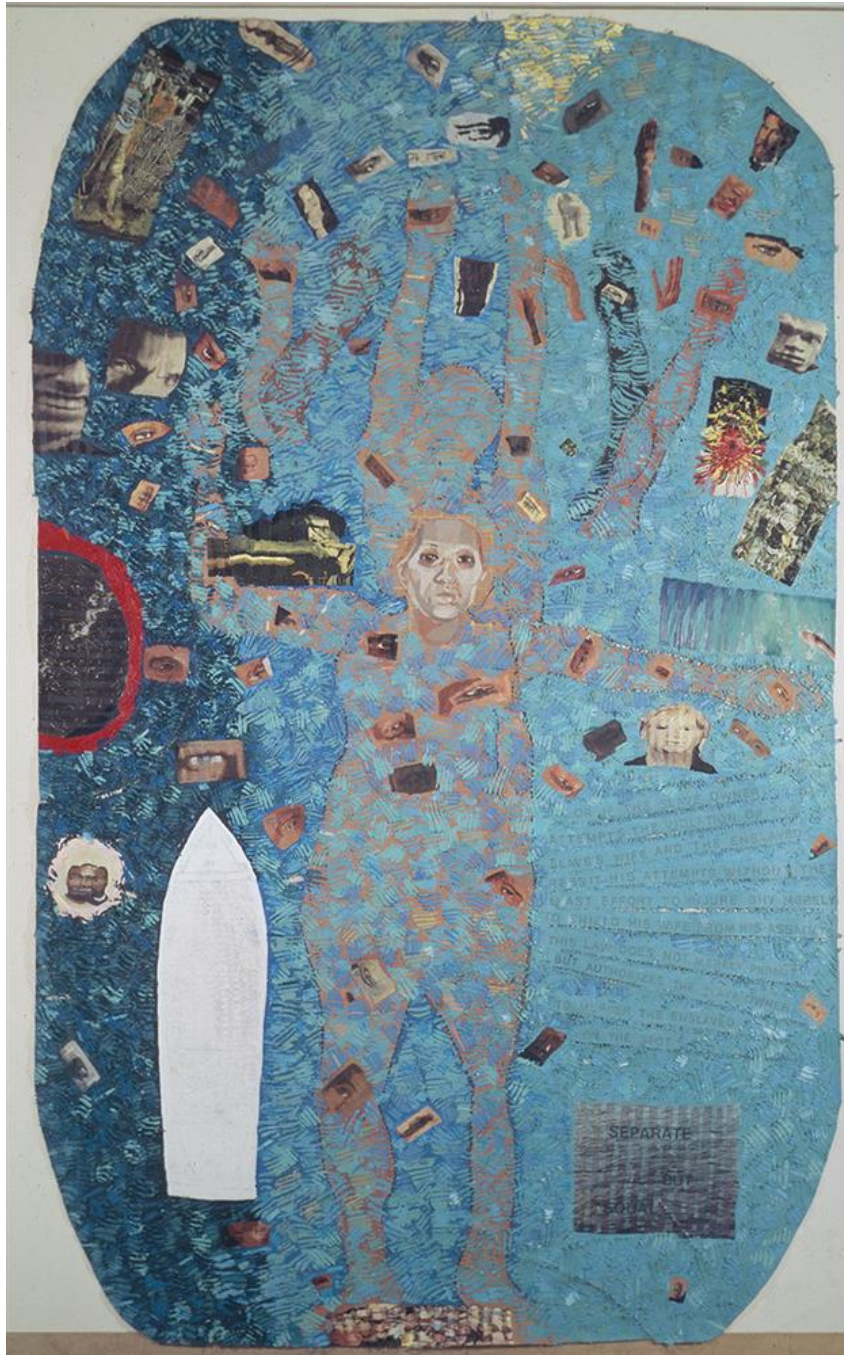
Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *La Grande Odalisque*, 1814, oil on canvas, The Louvre, Paris, image from The Louvre website

Figure 7



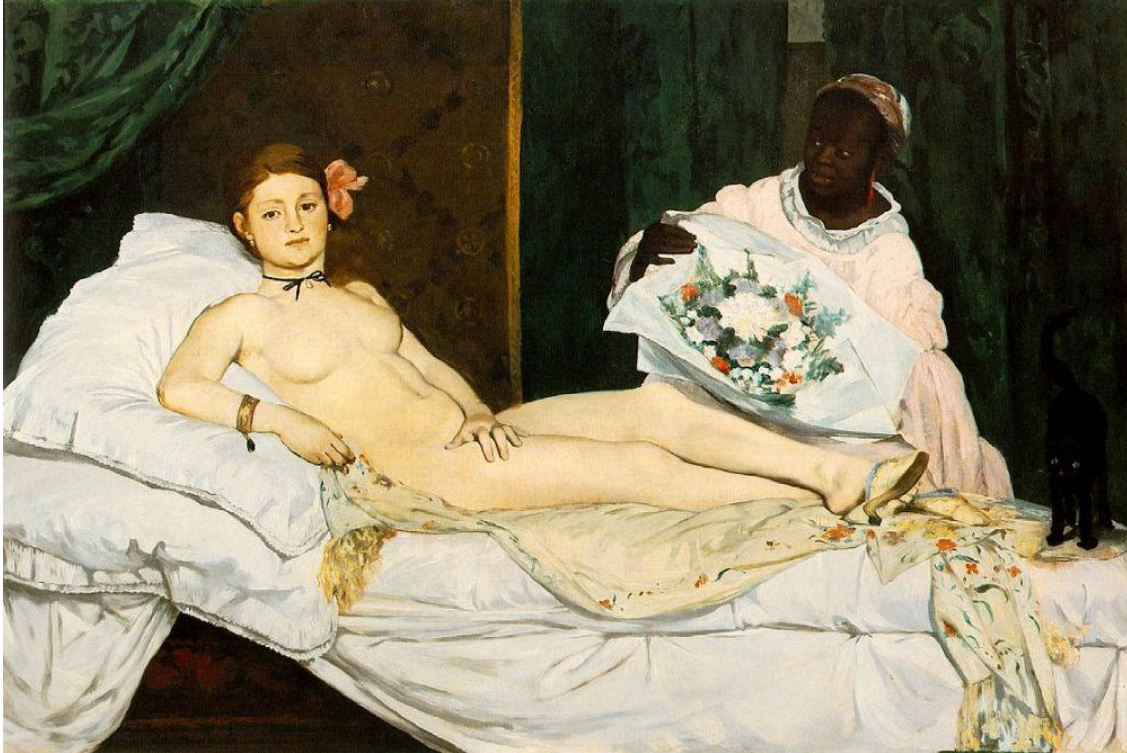
Detail of the cracks in the enamel of *A Little Taste of Outside Love*

Figure 8



Howardena Pindell, *Autobiography: Water Ancestors/Middle Passage/Family Ghosts*, 1988, acrylic, tempera, cattle markers, oil stick, paper, polymer photo transfer, vinyl on sewn canvas, 118" x 71" Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut, photo from the Wadsworth Atheneum website

Figure 9



Édouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1856. Oil on canvas, 51.4 in × 74.8 in. Paris, Musée d'Orsay

Figure 10



Screen shot of *Foxy Brown*, directed by Jack Hill, 1974, Los Angeles: American International Pictures.

Figure 11



Romare Bearden, *Patchwork Quilt*, 1970, cut-and-pasted cloth and paper with synthetic polymer paint on composition board, 35 3/4 x 47 7/8 inches, Museum of Modern Art, New York

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