

# FRYE

## ART MUSEUM

### Guided Artwork Discussion: Mickalene Thomas

<https://youtu.be/KaKihofHwdw>

Thank you for joining us for a virtual Artwork Discussion with the Frye Art Museum. My name is Caroline, and I am the Manager of Tours & Public Programs here at the Frye. I will be facilitating today's digital discussion. While we cannot be together in the galleries, we hope you will still enjoy the opportunity to slow down, look closely, and spend some time with a work of art.

It's always fun to look at art by yourself or invite a friend or family member to join you in this discussion. You might also choose to write down your observations or make a drawing in response. If this is the case, please gather your materials now.

We will begin each artwork discussion by taking a quiet moment to simply look at the work of art and observe. Remember there are no right or wrong answers—it's about what you notice or experience when looking. After you have taken a moment to observe on your own, I will ask some questions to guide your looking and provide information about the artwork before we end.

You can expand or minimize the video on your screen for this discussion. You can also access closed captioning through the settings tool. Take a moment to see what works best for your viewing.

Today's theme is **Animals in Art**. The artwork we will be looking at is featured in the exhibition *Black Refractions: Highlights from The Studio Museum in Harlem*, which is currently on view at the Frye. *Black Refractions* presents nearly a century of creative achievements by artists of African descent and celebrates The Studio Museum's role as a site for the dynamic exchange of ideas about art and society. This landmark exhibition showcases a variety of narratives of black artistic production, and I am excited to share one of these works with you today.

This is the artwork we will be looking at today. We will take pauses in between each set of questions to give you time to look closely at the artwork and think about your

responses. Remember: you may pause this video at any time to spend more time on one of the slides.

To start our discussion, please take 30 seconds to look quietly at this piece. You might start at the top corner of the canvas, moving across and down. You may move close to the screen to see details or step back for a new perspective. Your cursor is a great tool to trace and track details within the artwork.

Thank you for your quiet observation.

We will now move into our guided questions. If you are looking with a friend or family member, we hope you will share your observations, or consider writing down or sketching your answers.

1. What are we looking at? What are some words you would use to describe this scene?
2. Let's look at the central animal. What might this animal be doing? What do you notice about the animal's pose or expression? What might be happening beyond the frame?
3. Take a close look at the materials used in this artwork to see if you can recognize them. The artist uses rhinestones to create this image of a black panther. Why might the artist have used rhinestones to create this image?
4. How does this artwork make you feel? What ideas or emotions might the artist be trying to express with this artwork? What details in the image do you see that make you say that?
5. The title of this work is *Panthera*. The artist is interested in the symbolism of the animal. In your opinion, what might a panther represent?

Thank you for taking the time to share and reflect on your observations. I would now like to share some information on this piece.

**Mickalene Thomas. *Panthera*, 2002. Rhinestones on acrylic on birch panel. 48 x 72 in. The Studio Museum in Harlem; Museum purchase with funds provided by the**

Acquisition Committee 2003.10.9. Photo Credit: Zalika Azim. © 2021 Mickalene Thomas / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Mickalene Thomas, born in the 1970s, is a contemporary artist who lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. She attended Yale School of Art and is recognized for her exploration of gender, sexuality, and representation in media.

Thomas is best known for her works of black women in 1970s-inspired interiors. Her figures are often depicted in bright colors, patterns, and placed within similarly vibrant surroundings. She uses a variety of mediums, including painting, photography, collage, and video, to explore the complexity of her subjects. Thomas is specifically interested in representations of beauty - often using colorful materials such as glitter and rhinestones to "[confront] ideas of artifice and masking."

*Panthera* explores the symbol of black womanhood and beauty through the image of a panther. Here we see a black panther stretched across a branch, the animal's head turned and teeth bared in a growl. There is strength in the animal's pose and power in its prowess.

Covered completely in rhinestones, Thomas highlights the cat's beauty with a façade of shimmering stones. If we were able to move around this work together in the galleries, we might notice the shimmering effect as it plays against the light - creating a sense of movement. Her merging of strength and beauty gives power and ownership to the black female subject she seeks to symbolize.

Thomas created *Panthera* during her 2002 residency at the Studio Museum in Harlem. *Panthera* is currently on view at the Frye Art Museum as part of exhibition *Black Refractions: Highlights from the Studio Museum*. We are grateful for the opportunity to share Thomas' work with you.

Thank you for joining us for a virtual artwork discussion celebrating our newest exhibition *Black Refractions*. We hope to see you at the Museum again soon! And if you are able to visit, be sure to stop by and spend some time with *Panthera*.