

# #2 Mickalene Thomas: Do I Look Like a Lady?

## Audio Description Script by Debbie Hippler

“Do I Look Like a Lady?” created in 2016 by Mickalene Thomas, explores black female identity, both past and present. Entering the exhibit area on either the left or right is like stepping into a living room from the 1970s, but with modern artwork on the walls, plus two videos projected on the rear wall. It’s a living room where you are welcome to sit, enjoy, and contemplate. Go ahead: you can sit in one of the chairs! Note, however, that museum signage cautions, *“Adult language and comments made during these videos may not be appropriate for younger viewers.”*

Centered in the 20-foot by 40-foot room is a 15-foot square cozy living room. The floor is a patchwork of different carpet squares and tiles all in earth tone colors. Small tables sit next to chairs which are about 3½ feet high, shaped like a “U,” with arms the same height as the backs. Four square footstools are present also. The fabric covering of all the furniture is a patchwork of colors and prints with large stitches showing. Faux plants, pillows, and stacks of books from the past and present relating to feminism and African American culture help outline the room.

There are four large, irregularly shaped silkscreen ink-on-acrylic mirror portraits associated with this exhibit. One is outside the wall where you enter, one is inside that same wall, and two are on the left wall and a small alcove in the rear. All but one are in gray tones and abstract shapes, containing facial images of their subjects. Each portrait is designed to look as if large pieces of cracked glass were pieced together, with wide seams showing. Here are the descriptions of the four portraits.

Outside the room hangs a 5’ by 8’ partial facial image of Naomi Sims (the first African-American super model). It alone uses a little color (blue and pink). On the other side of that same wall is a large waist-up portrait of actress and singer Diahann Carroll, who broke color barriers in the 1950s with films featuring black casts. A partial rendition of Carroll’s face also appears on the left wall, as does Sims’ face in the alcove.

Let’s turn now to the videos. The rear wall is devoted to two 12-minute videos playing a collage of clips of black women performers, past and present, in an ever-changing pattern. Like the artwork on the wall, the images are cut up, with a dozen or more sometimes appearing at once, though only one voice is heard at a time. Among the performers are Josephine Baker, Jackie ‘Moms’ Mabley, Wanda Sykes, Eartha Kitt, Diahann Carroll, Pam Grier, Diana Ross, and Whitney Houston.

The artist’s objective is “to challenge dominant depictions and narratives of female identity, and aim to empower women, especially women of color, to see themselves as strong and beautiful, like their famous counterparts. By placing these works within a domestic interior, she pushes viewers to take this self-defining journey within their own homes as well.”