Michelle Obama's portraitist exhibits at Tulane

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Mickalene Thomas, one of the country’s most celebrated contemporary artists will soon have her first solo exhibition in New Orleans at the Newcomb Art Museum on the uptown campus of Tulane University.

Opening Wednesday, Jan. 18, Mickalene Thomas: Waiting on a Prime-Time Star brings together more than 40 of the artist’s works.

Thomas is known for lush rhinestone-encrusted paintings that combine references to iconic artworks from the Western canon and 1970s’ pop culture. Her vibrant compositions present powerful images of women and women of color, especially.

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_MONICA RAMIREZ-MONTAGUT, MUSEUM DIRECTOR_

In 2008, she was selected by the White House to create the first individual portrait of First Lady Michelle Obama and in 2012, she designed the cover art for Solange’s EP “True.” Her _Le Déjeuner Sur L’Herbe: Trois Noir Femmes_—a reinterpretation of Édouard Manet’s 1863 _Luncheon on the Grass_—has even appeared on FOX’s award-winning television drama “Empire.”

She received an MFA from Yale University and was trained as a painter, but works confidently across other media. Newcomb’s exhibition will highlight this multi-disciplinary practice with examples of Thomas’ photography, collage, sculpture, painting and film.

“The artist’s use of diverse media will resonate with all audiences but with Tulanians, in particular,” said museum director Monica Ramirez-Montagut. “The university has steadfastly advocated for intellectual exploration across discipline boundaries—the very approach Mickalene employs in her work.”

One piece in the show has added significance for the campus community. _Tamika sur une chaise longue avec Monet_ is on loan from Walda and Sydney Besthoff of New Orleans — a family that has enjoyed a nearly century-long relationship with Tulane.

Thomas’ work is in the permanent collections of New York’s The Museum of Modern Art, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and Whitney Museum of American Art among many others.

The exhibit, on view through April 9, 2017, opens Jan. 18 with two free events that are open to the public in the Woldenberg Art Center.

At 6:30 p.m., Thomas will speak about her work with Tulane art historian Dr. Mia Bagneris. A public reception begins at 7:30 p.m.

**Related content:** Photos: Mickalene Thomas: Waiting on a Prime-Time Star