

“I always felt my hand needed more,” she says. “It wasn’t physical enough for me. Visually, I felt the paintings needed more texture, and I couldn’t figure out how to do that with oils. So I went back to the materials I had fun with.”

-Mickalene Thomas

In this activity you will create your own collage (from materials found in your house) inspired by artist Mickalene Thomas.



R: Mickalene Thomas, *When Ends Meet #1*, 2007, Rhinestones, acrylic, enamel on wood panels

L: Mickalene Thomas, artist

What you might need:

- Plain paper or cardstock to build your collage on
- Photos, or images from magazines of people you like or admire
- Other colored, textured, or patterned papers and/or fabrics (these could be from other magazines, postcards, ask an adult what materials would be OK to cut up)
- Scissors or craft knives
- Tape and/or glue
- a hard surface you can work on
- markers, crayons, and colored pencils (optional)
- acrylic paints and paint brushes (optional)
- Rhinestones or glitter (optional, although very fun to include)

Steps:

- 1.) Start with laying out your materials: spread them out so you can look at your colorful papers, any fabric scraps you might have, images or pictures of people from your own archives, any glitter or rhinestones, your scissors and your tape or glue.
- 2.) Take a plain piece of paper and start playing with your papers and fabrics to set a stage or a scene.
- 3.) Select the figure that you want to highlight. Cut out that figure and place it within the scene you have created. Start thinking about a title.
- 4.) HAVE FUN and don't forget to PLAY. Collage is about letting colors, patterns, materials interact in unexpected ways.
- 5.) Start gluing or everything down once you find a layout you like.
- 6.) (optional) Add color with markers, crayons, or colored pencils.
- 7.) (optional) Add paint, glitter, or rhinestones, to add dimensionality to your collage.
- 8.) Let it dry and enjoy!

A little more about Mickalene Thomas:

Mickalene Thomas's collage-like paintings often combine traditional artistic media with colorful acrylics and rhinestone embellishments, referencing both pop culture and art history in her explorations of celebrity and power. By utilizing art-historical styles in her works, Thomas inserts her contemporary subjects into the canon of key historic figures and into art history: *When Ends Meet #1* depicts media mega-star Oprah Winfrey and former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in a manner similar to Warhol's portraits of Marilyn Monroe and Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, asserting the status of these 21st century women. Thomas sourced these images from TV, at once capturing a range of expressions, and yet alluding to how the media controls representation, often denying the complexity of identity for celebrities who must exchange privacy for fame. At the time this work was completed in 2007, both women held enormous power both politically and socially, though occupying opposite ends of the political spectrum. The artist notes, "I am really interested in how people are; who they really are when they go home and they're behind closed doors... That was my thinking... responding to these two powerful women who were coming from two completely different political positions and shaping America in very different ways."

Thomas finds her own inspiration throughout historical and popular culture, art history including Jean-Aguste-Dominique Ingres, Pablo Picasso, Édouard Manet, Henri Matisse, Pam Grier, and Romare Bearden; in fashion; in powerful female singers like Eartha Kitt, Billie Holiday, and Sharon Jones, and even in Blaxploitation films. Her works focus on reclaiming the agency of the figures she is presenting and giving them an exalted presence.



Mickalene Thomas, *When Ends Meet #1* [details], 2007, Rhinestones, acrylic, enamel on wood panels



Mickalene Thomas, *Le Déjeuner Sur L'Herbe Les Trois Femme Noires #5*, 2017, collage

This is a reimagining of Manet's famous painting *Déjeuner sur l'Herbe*. Here, the artist has replaced the two white men and the naked white woman with three glamorous African-American women. "It was meant as a statement about the impact and empowerment of all women," Thomas says.

For more reading on Mickalene Thomas and her practice, check out these articles:

Julie Belcove, *Artist Mickalene Thomas: 'It was always a political statement'*, from *Financial Times*, August 31, 2018

<https://www.ft.com/content/40f8bd16-ab1c-11e8-89a1-e5de165fa619>

Alina Cohen, *Mickalene Thomas Opens a Seductive, Spectacular Show in Miami*, from *Artsy*, December 6, 2019 <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-mickalene-thomas-opens-seductive-spectacular-miami>

From the editors of ARTnews, *From the Archives: Mickalene Thomas on Why Her Work Goes Beyond a Black Aesthetic*, in 2011, from ARTnews, September 14, 2018

<https://www.artnews.com/art-news/retrospective/archives-mickalene-thomas-work-goes-beyond-black-aesthetic-2011-10971/>

Carole Vogel, *The Rise and Rise of Mickalene Thomas*, from *Town and Country*, December 3, 2019

<https://www.townandcountrymag.com/leisure/arts-and-culture/a29762435/mickalene-thomas-artist-interview/>