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## Portrait Panorama

By Robert Milburn

Need a sweeping education on portraiture in short-order? We suggest you visit the [Leila Heller Gallery](#) on 57<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan, where 16,000 square feet of space is devoted to portraits in an exhibition titled, "Look At Me." (The exhibition will run until August 29<sup>th</sup> on 57<sup>th</sup> Street; Heller's Chelsea gallery will show similarly themed works until August 14<sup>th</sup>.)

Here, over six floors, everything from late 19<sup>th</sup> century works by Mary Cassatt, Édouard Manet and Henri Matisse are hung opposite Andy Warhol's blue-and-black pixelated *Jackie* and Keith Haring's amusing open-mouthed characters in *Meatloaf Drawing Meals on Wheels*. Even further out in the ether of the modern art world was Bill Viola's chilling video *Acceptance*, in which water cascades over a naked women's anguished body. Though this particular piece might not excite you, the sheer scope and mediums of the 230-odd display will stimulate your imagination, and perhaps make you wonder how you would like yourself or your own family captured in a portrait. Below, a few of our favorites.



Courtesy Mary Boone Gallery, NY

*The Krakoffs*, 2006. By [Eric Fischl](#)

Eric Fischl is a well-established American portrait artist who has painted a colorful cast of cosmopolitan socialites, including author Joan Didion and artist Chuck Close, along with married musical duo Edie Brickell and Paul Simon. He's particularly known for brightly colored canvasses of half-naked men and women cavorting in the water and on the beach. Raised in Long Island, his paintings often have the bright light and colors of Arizona, where he was educated. Shown to the left is *The Krakoffs*, a more sober work painted just eight years ago of the husband and wife Reed and Delphine Krakoff.

Reed, a former creative director at the Coach leather-goods company, is pictured standing with furrowed brow above his wife, who is comfortably seated below his squinting glare. Reed's tense face is blotchy, smeared with cramped, rough strokes, as he shrugs on his coat and rushes off somewhere. Delphine's rather masculine features are, in contrast, smooth and serene, painted with

even lines, eyes staring directly forward. Reed's outstretched arm and the black of his jacket seems to melt into his wife's shirt, a oneness at odds with their clashing expressions.

*Untitled*, 1990. By [John Currin](#)



Courtesy Private collection, NY

Artist John Currin is best known for his paintings of voluptuous and slightly cartoon-ish women and nudes. Rendered with great artistry, evoking images and techniques of the great Renaissance artists and Old Masters, Currin's works are nonetheless often bursting with shocking, pornographic images. His work is so effective, precisely because the edgy and naked women engaged in sexual acts are imbued with a soft reverence for Old Master techniques, best seen in the complex layering of colors that create his fleshy, pastel-colored hues.

Long before establishing himself as a mid-'90s provocateur, however, Currin depicted youthful women, unassumingly and sweetly posing for their annual yearbook photo. As pictured above in this untitled work, a young blonde with pale white skin seems to glow, her shoulders drooping and at ease. Our eyes are drawn to the center of her face, by blood red yet somehow demure lips, and a charmingly crinkled nose. A statement of innocence that seems both sad and hopeful.

*Sandra-She's A Beauty*, 2012. By [Mickalene Thomas](#)



Courtesy of Artist and Lehmann Maupin, NY and Honk Kong

Mickalene Thomas was born in Camden, New Jersey, in 1971, and her work has a distinctly urban '70s feel, with wood-paneled frequently in the background, bright-colored plaids and flower-patterned furniture. Her female subjects frequently wear large hooped earrings and sport puffy Afros. Her similarly themed installation *Art Bar* at Art Basel last year was well received by critics.

Thomas works in many mediums but she is best known for her rhinestone and acrylic pieces on wood. Her photograph *Sandra-She's A Beauty* at the Leila Heller Gallery, seen above, was particularly grabbing in a room full of strong work. Intensely patterned pillows of scrolling flowers and zebra-prints surround Thomas' mother and frequent muse. Her subject could easily be lost in the kaleidoscope of color, and yet Thomas – influenced by the Hudson River School — captures her mother's stately poise. We are pulled to her subject's at-ease demeanor, the depth hidden in her eyes, the pursed and bemused red lips. Stand back from this large work and you are struck powerfully by the bold black, the red, the sheer force of character.

For more on portraits, see our articles on [picking a portrait painter](#), [family portraits that inspire](#), and [a young photographer's images of wealthy families in their homes](#).

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