

TRAVEL DIARY

Mickalene Thomas's Adventures in Italy

CULTURE, TRAVEL | BY ALEXANDRIA SYMONDS | JUNE 17, 2015 4:25 PM



"This Patricia Cronin work, 'Shrine for Girls,' was installed in the Chiesa di San Gallo. It addresses absence and the dangers facing women around the world in such a direct and powerful way. It stopped me in my tracks." *Mickalene Thomas*

Earlier this month, the artist Mickalene Thomas returned home to Brooklyn after a trip to Italy spanning 10 days and four cities, organized around her participation in a conference, "Black Portraiture{s} II," put on by NYU in Florence. "Since it was going to be my first time in Italy, and since the conference coincided with the Venice Biennale, it seemed like a great time for me to travel all over Italy and see what was happening in the art world in what, to a New Yorker, can feel like a different part of the universe," she says. "There was all sorts of buzz around the Biennale, and I wanted to experience firsthand all of the things I'd been hearing about Italy for years: the architecture, the food, the people, the energy, the language. I got a taste of all of that."

Thomas found no shortage of visual inspiration in Italy, from the work of other artists (like Lyle Ashton Harris, Patricia Cronin and Hassan Hajjaj) she saw at the Biennale and in shows in Rome and Florence to the quotidian sights — graffiti, advertisements, storefronts — transformed, thanks to Thomas's thoughtful photographic eye, into conversation-starters. Above, the artist shares with T some pictorial highlights of her trip.