

# LOXX

RESPONSIBLE CULTURE

SUMMER 2020

## POWER COUPLE

How Mickalene Thomas and Racquel Chevremont conquered the NYC art scene

Giorgio Armani on being on top  
Wolfgang Tillmans in Brussels  
Sergei Polunin on life

SMILE,  
YOU'RE ON  
FACETIME!

Art icons including  
George Condo and  
Rashid Johnson  
snapped in lockdown

THE BLUE ECONOMY: Investing in our oceans





## FROM THE EDITOR



In the context of the havoc and devastation being wrought by coronavirus, the dilemma faced by sections of the lifestyle media, like ours, is irrelevant. But it is a dilemma, nonetheless. There is a demand for information from the media. (One positive effect will be a recognition that it is science, not memes or bluster, that we need to rely on.) And there is a demand for entertainment. We are in the middle of a crisis about the real world, and also an escape, a source of inspiration and direction.

We would never claim to change readers' lives, but nor is the Responsible Culture magazine a directory for vacant consumerism. Our readers have the opportunity to shape the world through the positions they hold, and we hope to reflect a little of that responsibility, as well as provide an escape into less lofty aesthetics.

Our Contributing Editor Maryam Eslar has provided an artistic snapshot into a world where physical interaction and movement is, in effect, halted. Her FaceTime photography of some of the world's most celebrated artists is an artistic concept that is as relevant to 2020 as Gerhard Richter's paintings of the German Red Army Faction terrorist gang were to the 1980s.

Maryam also photographed one of our cover stars this issue, the new New York artistic and cultural icon, Mickalene Thomas, and her partner Raquel Chaves. The story runs alongside Harriet Quick's interview with an icon of many decades, Giorgio Armani, who along with Miuccia Prada, has shaped the modern aesthetic more than most of us realize. I also make no apologies for continuing to champion travel. It is a human essential, currently a dream, but it will return and everyone working in hospitality needs our support.

The idea of an alien life form invading and causing chaos in an ecosystem is something that wouldn't be novel to marine life. While the human race has inflicted immeasurable damage on Earth (as well as some positives) we are, at least, terrestrial beings, and our actions on land feel like we are affecting a part of the biosphere that we live on. However these actions have a devastating effect on what exists in and under the water - and plastic pollution is just one part of this. Preserving and reviving the oceans is in part a selfish endeavour - they produce more than two thirds of the oxygen we breathe, and if we kill them, they will kill us. It is also an altruistic one, and something that few people realize is that entirely land-based activities and industries can play a part in destroying the ocean in just as much or more than a very visible oil slick or plastic garbage patch.

We explore ways in which the blue economy can benefit the oceans, and all of us, in a special section with Deutsche Bank Wealth Management. Ocean conservation is an endeavour that will continue after the destruction to our own ecosystem production and global distribution, it is a topic we will be flying our flag for.

Finally, readers may note my Editor's image has changed this issue - it was taken by the estimable Maryam, on a Zoom call. My imaginary interlocutors are Voltaire and Mendeleev, respectively the beacon of free speech and intuitive scientific visionaries, because we could do with them on Zoom, in the world, right about now.

Dariusz Szust  
Editor in Chief & Publisher



COVER: Mickalene Thomas and Raquel Chaves, photographed by Maryam Eslar, and Giorgio Armani

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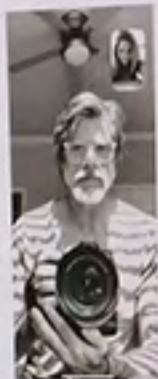
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# ARTISTS ON LOCKDOWN

As the art world paused for lockdown, photographer and author Maryam Eisler sprang into action, chatting to artists around the world on FaceTime and capturing them as screenshots in a unique project for LUX.



**DAVID LAUNDY**  
Where: home, Dublin, *Ireland*  
"Covid-19 has completely disrupted our lives and when I sit a part of it each day."



**NOURAHAYN**  
Where: home, Brooklyn, New York City  
"This moment is growing to be a really a promising, broken thing of 'promising pain' and so 'holding tension'."



**GEORGE CONDO**  
Where: home, East Hampton, Long Island, New York  
"I know you turn the camera into a creative device and so it's when you could be alone, well, go and work!"



**MARYAM EISLER**  
Where: home, with a video message of Apple  
"I try to bring the moment and the people, we're doing the work. This is the moment. This is the time."



**GLENN LEON**  
Where: home, Hudson Valley, New York  
"Covid-19 brought me the rest of the world of a pandemic, we have the capacity to learn things."



**LAURIE SIMMONS (WITH HER DOG PENNY)**  
Where: home, Northeast, Connecticut  
"I'm waiting to see the impact of all this, and it's occurring to an unprecedented level, we're all learning."



**RAMON JENNINGS**  
Where: home, East Hampton, Long Island, New York  
"I am feeling anxious but I am also feeling optimistic. I don't want to be motivated by fear but by love."



**ERIC FISCHER**  
Where: home, Brooklyn, Long Island, New York  
"No one wants to be where we are now, but this is where artists stand now, willing to bear witness to our time."



**NILES ALDRIDGE**  
Where: home, London  
"This world feels different to life before the virus. The clock is running faster and slower simultaneously."



**MICHAEL CRAIG MARTIN**  
Where: home, London  
"Nothing in my whole life has shown so clearly as the pandemic that we are all part of a single shared humanity."



**ALEX BRAIL**  
Where: home, Los Angeles  
"My heart goes out to all who are suffering, and to our brave heroes who are risking their lives on the front lines."



**MARY MCCARTNEY**  
Where: home, London  
"We have lost personal connection, these moments of loss and reflection, I can see how powerful such moments are."

Maryam Eisler is represented by Truett House Gallery in London (truett@truettgallery.com). See the full exhibition and the artist's own thoughts online at [luxmag.com](http://luxmag.com) (contact: [artists@luxmag.com](mailto:artists@luxmag.com)).



## Portrait of the radical artist

New York-based Mickalene Thomas is an important and innovative voice in the art world. Her dazzling portraits of African American women use collage, enamel and her signature rhinestones to explore femininity and ideas of beauty. Maryam Eisler visits her in her Manhattan studio to photograph her and talk beauty, sexual politics, identity and racial stereotyping







AS AN ARTIST, IF YOU'RE NOT DOING SELF-DISCOVERY, THEN YOU'RE NO LONGER MAKING THE ART. IT'S ALWAYS A JOURNEY"

**HN:** Your work is almost exclusively about women - real women, everyday women, in different sizes, with different stories, textures, silhoues. Tell us a bit about this.

**Mekela Thomas:** I love everything about women and more - confident women, smart women, the I don't give a shit women, with all shades of blackness. When I think of all the women in my life, I think of those who have mentored me, about those I've read about in books and their stories. I think about all the women who have trekked and sojourned that I aspire to be, about all the women who I love's not yet and who protect me. When I think of blackness, I think of my grandmothers. I remember seeing one of them at 95 years old in her apartment sitting in her favourite chair, with the striking, deep indigo colour of her skin, that blackness, the ageless glow in her eyes and thinking about all of the history that she understood and the things unspoken, all those stories. I think of her vulnerability, her beauty, her laughter, her strength.

**HN:** There are many stereotypes of black women set by white patriarchal societies. Is there an expectation for you to fit within a white canon of beauty? Not that you have ever conforming to that way of thinking, of course?

**MT:** Yeah, especially when you think of the things of a beauty that was put forth, setting up a magazine and an agency for everyone to follow. For me, it's important to figure out how that happened

and how it remained at the centre of our world. Because there were so many other powerful entities that had their own notions of beauty and aesthetics.

**HN:** How did you extricate yourself from this way of thinking about beauty?

**MT:** As a woman of colour, I was fortunate to be raised by a very strong group of women. I never grew up wanting to be anything other than what I am, or wanting to question my own blackness. I never thought, "Am I light enough for you?" I've always had natural hair or locks. I've never straightened my hair. That's never been an issue. So that white notion of beauty has never been imposed on me.

**HN:** Was this down to the influence of your mother and your grandmother?

**MT:** Yes, they let me know that I was beautiful enough for myself and never else, and that I fit of a new generation and can be a leader and that my blackness and difference is important. I questioned their ideas of beauty because they were such different from mine - but I also think that growing up with Black Power in the '70s made me think differently. Looking around the room and seeing women with hair in braids was very empowering. It's about freedom, really.

**HN:** Yes. And owning it, right?

**MT:** Yes, absolutely. However, you start questioning these ideas of beauty placed on you by the media because it's the only representation that you see. You know that within your own



Thomas spent six months documenting the life of a Nigerian young woman in Lagos, Nigeria, and the results are featured in the book 'Mekela Thomas: The Art of Blackness' (2018). The book is available at [www.mekela.com](http://www.mekela.com).

Thomas's 2018 series 'Mekela Thomas: The Art of Blackness' (2018) is a collection of photographs that she took in Lagos, Nigeria, and the results are featured in the book 'Mekela Thomas: The Art of Blackness' (2018). The book is available at [www.mekela.com](http://www.mekela.com).

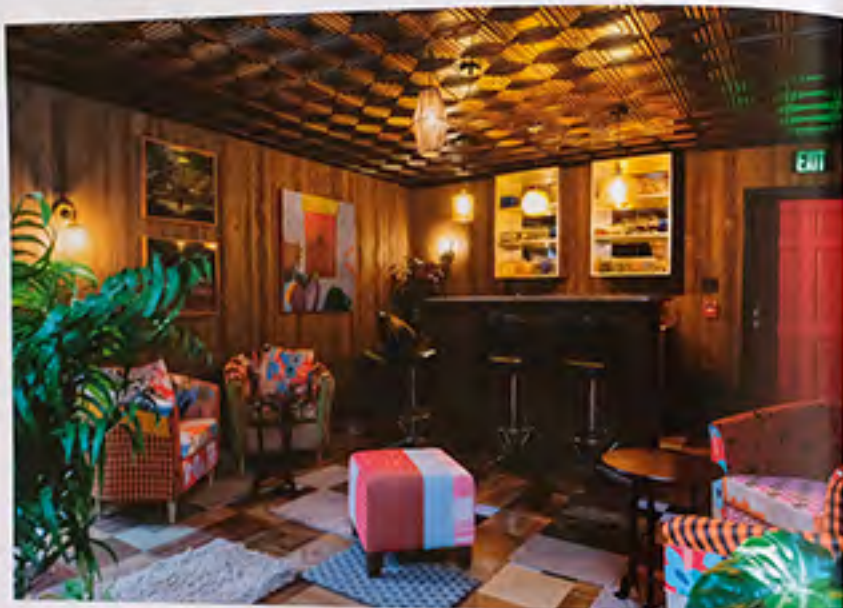




Illustration by  
JMA







community some things are considered beautiful, but then the media tells you otherwise.

**LUN:** Does that make you wonder if you're creating your own bubble?

**MT:** Yes. And you're constantly up against creating your own agency. Where do you fit in exactly? How do you navigate this world and this long-existence-in-it? It's a huge double consciousness.

**LUN:** With the histories and background stories involved, it's probably more like a twofold consciousness?

**MT:** Yes! I think that if we embrace the diaspora and look at ourselves as the melting pot that we are as a people, then we can start navigating our differences and embrace the various forms of beauty that each of us harbor.

**LUN:** Do you think we tend to forget about our humanity as the common ground?

**MT:** Yes, that would be a much healthier way of looking at the world - to try and understand the way we are because we had to migrate and move around for a variety of reasons, such as adverse conditions, weather, food, disease and much more!

**LUN:** What does it mean to question such stories of migration within your own community on a daily basis, in this day and age and in the USA of all places, the country of migration per excellence?

**MT:** The entire country is based on migration and for me, it's even been thinking about it gives

me shivers. To think that America is leading this story of deportation, when it is built on people migrating here for many different freedoms.

**LUN:** When is this re-examination of colour, race, faith, culture coming from?

**MT:** I think there are many people in the world who operate specifically out of hatred and fear. I was raised a Buddhist and I think that was one of the fortunate gifts my mother gave my brother and me: this sense of spirituality and the sense of philosophy of life. It's not necessarily a religious practice, but more a philosophy of understanding, through knowing your causes and effects. The people who commit atrocities, such as mass shootings and bombings, are feeling displaced and threatened in society, and the causes are deeply rooted in their ancestors' past. We want to live right now and right here, but there's a lot we don't look at in our pasts. I really believe that, as an artist, you have to look at history to move forward. We're just moving forward without seeing our past histories.

Times are tough. Our economy is about to take a huge shift, and I think it won't just affect the poor in the middle classes - it's going to affect many people in ways that they haven't really seen before.

**LUN:** And there's a lot of anger out there.

**MT:** Yes. And people want something that they feel is owed to them, so that they are entitled to. And they think that immigrants and people of colour have been given some special privileges,

**"I REALLY BELIEVE THAT, AS AN ARTIST, YOU HAVE TO LOOK AT HISTORY TO MOVE FORWARD"**



or realizing that most of us, if not all, have worked very hard to get to 'where we are'.

**LUN:** Can we talk about ownership of one's identity?

**MT:** You've got to own it! You only have one life. Period. And it took me a long time to recognize my own power and strength.

**LUN:** And while it's okay to flaunt it, it seems that women and men are judged differently when they do...

**MT:** Men have much more access to self-expression as well as the freedom to navigate the world and go about doing whatever they want to do. I remember arguing with my brother and having to figure out how to deal with those complications and being very argumentative with my family about it: "So why is he able to do certain things and I can't but that I do better?"

**LUN:** Your work can be flamboyant, exuberant and carefree, with much layering and experimentation. Is this a case of eye candy on the outside, but with deeper issues beneath?

**MT:** Those ways of telling stories, of thinking about how the women I depict collected their own histories, making sacrifices and compromises with little means and making the best of it. They went from one place to the other, transcending time and space.

**LUN:** So, it's about stitching together a patchwork of life events?

**MT:** A lot of the layering of material and stitching is about their own journeys, their own

perseverance, their own struggles. The stitches, the unweaving of time and space, is about their scars, and mostly it's about the artifice of what you may think you see and the reality of it being another truth.

**LUN:** The visual effect is powerful, and the nostalgia palpable.

**MT:** There's the power of the visual, yes, and how we begin to believe our own truths or memories, whether or not there's myth, and how they then become our reality. And so, as artists we create time capsules for histories. I find this very interesting, how people believe their own lies, their own truths, or their own memories or fantasies or dreams. These become reality to the point one might think: "Wait, did that really happen?" When my mother passed in 2002, I came across photos that were almost a validation of my memory of childhood experiences. The photos encapsulated some moments for me - "Okay, now I have some evidence of what happened in my life. Now I have images from which to work. So now I have material to use for creative ideas and put the pieces of the puzzle together."

**LUN:** So, above all, is your art a journey of research and self-discovery?

**MT:** I think, as an artist, if you're not doing self-discovery, then you're really no longer making the art. It's always a journey. ■

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Opposite: From top: Installation view of "My Sister Phoenix" at Museum of the African Diaspora, Oakland, CA, 2015; the second of her "Dear Landings" displayed by Phoenix, AZ.

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