



Impatient Obsessions

a three-person exhibition of new works of art created for **PULSE Miami 2018**.
Featuring the works of Barbara Earl Thomas, Bisa Butler, and Leonardo Benzant.

It makes no difference to the black bird if he eats from our table or scavenges from our discarded piles. The future of his kind may not be altered. But that is not our fate. We've inherited the burden of knowledge and the grief of failed intention. We are not born blind, but we can choose to live that way. Barbara Earl Thomas

The dictionary defines Impatient as restlessly eager. Webster's example: "They are impatient for change" could not be a clearer or more cogent statement explaining the concept behind Claire Oliver Gallery's exhibition at Pulse Miami Beach 2018. The three artists featured in Impatient Obsessions work slowly and methodically -- almost ritualistically. They create detailed and sumptuous works of art redolent with content and mystery; these works demand to be studied. Equally important to the painstaking "making" is their studio practices exploring the current condition in their own African American communities. Their artistic handling of materials in a social climate where added importance is given to factors such as making things oneself and recycling with aesthetic pretense, provide a bridge between ordinary experience and concepts that transcend the viewer's physicality. In Impatient Obsessions, Claire Oliver Gallery attempts to confront the accepted narratives, instigate conversations and question the status quo. This has long been the domain of artists.

Barbara Earl Thomas' works of art treat the viewer to a chaotic dream world, cross-pollinated with fragments of Bible stories, folklore, and superstition passed from the artist's 'deep southern' roots. Her personal history and current social narrative harmoniously coexist in these visual anthologies. A cultural ambassador and activist in her community, Thomas draws on current events in hopes that her work will help others to gain a new perspective on the important incidents shaping our world; as her grandmother often told her, we are all damned and redeemed every day. Thomas's current body of work addresses the growing hair-trigger violence in our society and, in particular, addresses that brutality surrounding young black men.

Walking the pathway forged by feminist artists like Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, Bisa Butler challenges the division between textiles and fine art. Embracing techniques that were conventionally relegated to the realm of 'women's crafts', Butler's visual storytelling combines painterly high decoration and an exploration of community and spirituality. Using skills passed down to her from her African grandmother, the artist questions unsettling topics such as the continuing practice of FGM, mortal violence and the breakdown of the family unit.

According to the artist, the textile medium allows her politically aware messages to be more digestible. The beauty here is truly beyond skin deep. Conceptually important to Butler's work is the rigid structure of her traditional craft; a quilt, by tradition, keeps one warm and comforted, however, in Butler's hand it becomes a thoughtful call to action.



Leonardo Benzant's studio practice is informed by both his African and Caribbean family roots. It is performative, ritualistic, labor-intensive and slow. The slowness itself contributes part of the work's meaning; our fast-paced world has somewhat forgotten that craft and mastery involve overcoming our impulse toward instant-gratification. Fabric is cut, rolled, sewn: papier-mâché is wrapped, very long and carefully curated strings of glass and metal beads are strung, embroidery, paint, and collage are added to create the artist's culturally aware works of art.

Benzant's visual vocabulary is informed by diasporic culture and personal insights fueled with periods of addiction, recovery, initiations and spiritual practices. His art does not exist solely within a Western framework but embodies the dynamics of being both sacred and secular. Contemporary discourse informs his practice, focusing on adaptation, re-invention, and innovation to bridge the past and create connections with a mindfulness and conviviality.

By preserving and encouraging long established traditional techniques: stitching, beading, tooling and papercutting, Butler, Thomas, and Benzant stifle the current urge for instant gratification in favor of allowing a slower and more full-blown concept to emerge in each piece. By using established fine art techniques and using them in a new way, these artists create an urgent chance to defend and recognize the strong connections between planet, people, politics and culture.