

# San Francisco Chronicle

"Berkeley artist Lava Thomas honors family history in new Jessica Silverman show"

By Tony Bravo

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"Lineage" featuring monumental portraits by Lava Thomas is on view at Jessica Silverman through Oct. 24.

Phillip Maisel

Lava Thomas' "Portrait of a Phenomenal Woman: A Monument to Honor Dr. Angelou" has rightly become known as one of the best new pieces of public art in the Bay Area since its installation in 2024 outside the Main Branch of the San Francisco Public Library.

Now, in her first show with Jessica Silverman, "Lineage," the Berkeley artist focuses on people from her own ancestry in post-Emancipation Texas, giving family the monumental treatment in this moving new work.

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In nine large-scale graphite and Conté pencil drawings on paper, Thomas shows members of her family from the early 20th century rendered in the formal style of portraiture associated with European art and photography. These works were inspired by the 2013 discovery of her grandmother's photo albums, which showed a deeply personal slice of Black history in the region that became the foundation of much of Thomas' work for the past decade. Her research into the album is represented in a series of hand-drawn reproductions of archival documents pertaining to her family.

Thomas' great technical skill and love of detail are shown to full advantage in these works, but it's the figures' sensitive expressions that truly invite lingering.

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