

# Caroline Perzan

46, set decorator for Fox's  
*Empire*



PHOTO: CLAYTON HAUCK

**APRIL 2015** "I do all the decorating on set that doesn't involve architecture. That means rugs, lighting, drapery, furniture. From day one, we wanted to establish a look for *Empire*. [Cocreator] Lee Daniels is crazy about art—he's a collector—and asked me to blend famous hip-hop painters like Kehinde Wiley with greats like Van Gogh. We have a saying on set when we need to 'Empire up' a room: We call it 'zhuzhing' it. That means adding gold, silver, fur, jewels, alligator, a funky sculpture—even a bong if it's [the character] Hakeem. The whole show is about blending Old World antique beauty with new hip-hop glitz. I commissioned the artist Matthew Thomas to do the portrait of Lucious [played by Terrence Howard] I'm holding here. It hangs behind him in his study. The room felt like it needed some art, and he's the kind of character who would have a portrait done. He's King Lear." —Interview by Matt Pollock