

# HANK WILLIS THOMAS

## ALL THINGS BEING EQUAL...



Hank Willis Thomas, *The Cotton Bowl*, from the series *Strange Fruit*, 2011. Chromogenic print, 50 15/16 × 74 7/16 × 1 1/2 inches. Detroit Institute of Arts, Museum Purchase, W. Hawkins Ferry Fund. Image courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. © Hank Willis Thomas

### **PRE- AND POST-VISIT MATERIALS**

#### **INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS, CHAPERONES, AND PARENTS**

*Hank Willis Thomas: All Things Being Equal...* features the artwork of Hank Willis Thomas, whose art explores the intersection of advertising, popular culture, and history to examine and critique how meaning is made through language and visual culture. The exhibition features over 90 artworks including photographs, sculpture, and mixed media.

Through close looking, group discussion, and activities specifically tailored to be appropriate for all grade levels, students will explore the subtle ways that companies use images and words to encourage consumerism while reinforcing generalizations about gender, race, culture, and class.

This tour utilizes a dialogical model, a process of student-centered exploration that is designed to deepen critical thinking and communication skills.

## KEY WORDS<sup>1</sup>

These words will likely be discussed during the tour.  
Please review with students prior to visiting the museum.

**ADVERTISING** ▪ the act of practice of calling public attention to one's product, service, need, etc., especially by paid announcements in newspapers and magazines, over radio or television, on billboards, etc.

**APPROPRIATION** ▪ the adoption or co-opting, usually without acknowledgment, of cultural identity markers associated with or originating in minority communities by people or communities with a relatively privileged status.



Hank Willis Thomas, *Amanda*, 2014. Silicone, fiberglass, metal finish, 51 3/16 × 29 15/16 × 20 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. © Hank Willis Thomas

**COPYRIGHT** ▪ the exclusive right to make copies, license, and otherwise exploit a literary, musical, or artistic work, whether printed, audio, video, etc.: works granted such right by law on or after January 1, 1978, are protected for the lifetime of the author or creator and for a period of 70 years after his or her death.

**FAIR USE** ▪ reasonable and limited use of copyrighted material so as not to infringe upon copyright.

**ICON** ▪ **1.** A picture, image, or other representation. **2.** A sign or representation that stands for its object by virtue of a resemblance or analogy to it. **3.** a person or thing that is revered or idolized

**LOGO** ▪ Also called logotype. A graphic representation or symbol of a company name, trademark, abbreviation, etc., often uniquely designed for ready recognition.

**PLAGIARISM** ▪ an act or instance of using or closely imitating the language and thoughts of another author without authorization and the representation of that author's work as one's own, as by not crediting the original author

**STEREOTYPE** ▪ a simplified and standardized conception or image invested with special meaning and held in common by members of a group

**SYMBOL** ▪ something used for or regarded as representing something else; a material object representing something, often something immaterial; emblem, token, or sign.

1. Unless otherwise noted, definitions are taken from *Dictionary.com*.

## PRE-VISIT ACTIVITIES

### MEDIA LITERACY<sup>2</sup>

#### MIDDLE AND UPPER GRADES

Discuss the difference between Copyright, Fair Use, and Appropriation. Show students examples of Hank Willis Thomas's artworks. For example, you may wish to compare and contrast Thomas's *Guernica* and Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*, or view *Absolute Power (Absolute No Return)*, *What Happened that Day*, or *Branded*. Have students create a work of art that uses some type of appropriation in order to make a statement about an issue that is important to them.

#### **What is appropriation**

Khan Academy

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/global-culture/identity-body/identity-body-united-states/a/what-is-appropriation>

#### **Questions for further discussion**

- What is the difference between appropriation and plagiarism?
- What are the ethics of appropriation?
- How have they been altered by Internet Culture and Social Media?

#### LOWER GRADES

Discuss the differences between a symbol, a logo, and an icon. Include visual examples of each. Have students work in groups to analyze advertising. What kinds of patterns do they notice in advertising? These patterns may be words, colors, lines, shapes, size, image, or any design element they notice. Have each group share their findings with the class.

#### **Questions for further discussion**

- How do images and/or words influence the way we think, act, and perceive the world?
- How does the media shape our view of the world and ourselves?
- How does what we know about the world shape the way we view ourselves and others?

### HISTORY

In preparation for viewing Hank Willis Thomas's *I Am. Amen.*, use the following resources to introduce and discuss the 3/5 Compromise, Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman" speech, and The Memphis Sanitation Strike.

[Exploring Constitutional Conflicts](#)

[Video: The Three-Fifths Compromise, Khan Academy](#)

[Video: Sojourner Truth: Ain't I a Woman?](#)

['I Am a Man': The ugly Memphis sanitation workers' strike that led to MLK's assassination, The Washington Post, February 12, 2018.](#)

[Ernest Withers, Civil Rights Photographer, Dies at 85, The New York Times, October 17, 2007.](#)

[Video: Hank Willis Thomas: I AM A MAN.](#)



2. These lessons are adapted from the Portland Museum. <https://portlandartmuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Lessons-and-Questions-for-Teaching-HWT.pdf>

Hank Willis Thomas, *Absolut No Return*, 2008, lambda c-print on metallic paper, 96 x 48 in. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

## POST-VISIT ACTIVITIES

### I AM WALL

- Introduce this activity by having students write 3-5 statements beginning with the words "I am not..."
- Ask students to journal about why they wrote what they did. Optionally, these statements can be shared anonymously to introduce the idea of stereotypes. Discuss stereotypes.
- Now that students have thought about how they DO NOT identify, ask them to think about how they DO identify.
- Designate a wall or bulletin board in your space. Label it with large words spelling out I AM.
- Give students colored paper in the shape of a rectangular brick and have them write I AM statements on their bricks and place them on the wall. Because of the personal nature of these statements, students may need the freedom to put their bricks on the wall anonymously.

### COMPARE, CONTRAST, AND CREATE

- Compare and contrast Hank Willis Thomas's and Henri Matisse's *The Fall of Icarus*.
- Create a work of art inspired by Matisse's cutouts and Thomas's artworks.
- Have students use materials that are special to them (candy wrappers, origami papers, cereal boxes, trading cards, etc). Focus on the basic elements of art (line, shape, color, form, texture, value, and space).





## RESOURCES TO CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION

Use these resources recommended by Northwest Arkansas teachers to further explore the themes presented in Hank Willis Thomas's artworks. Please note, some materials are better suited for older students.

*The March Chronicles* by John Lewis

*Go Tell it on the Mountain* by James Baldwin

*The Souls of Black Folk* by W.E.B Du Bois

"Ain't I a Woman" by Sojourner Truth



Hank Willis Thomas, *Strike*, 2018. Stainless steel with mirrored finish, 33 x 33 x 9 inches. Private Collection. Image courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. © Hank Willis Thomas