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Hank Willis Thomas: **LOVERULES** February 24 – August 4, 2024



Hank Willis Thomas (U.S., b. 1976). *LOVE RULES*, edition 2/3, 2018. Neon multiple. Collection of Jordan D. Schnitzer. Photo: Aaron Wessling Photography.

Seattle, WA—The Henry Art Gallery at the University of Washington is pleased to present one of the largest presentations of works by well-known conceptual artist and activist **Hank Willis Thomas** (b. 1976). *Hank Willis Thomas: LOVERULES* will be on view from February 24 through August 4, 2024.

Thomas's work focuses on themes relating to commodity, identity, media, and popular culture. Experimenting with mixed media and mass-produced imagery, his practice includes photography, sculpture, installation, and large-scale public projects. Originally trained in photography, Thomas employs both archival and contemporary imagery from popular culture to take on urgent questions: *What is the role of art in civic life? How do advertising and visual culture create narratives that shape our notion of value in society?*

This exhibition of 90 works spans 20 years (2002-22) of Thomas's practice and is drawn from the collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and his Family Foundation. The exhibition features some of the artist's most iconic and well-known works, including selections from the series *B@anded* and *Unbranded: Reflections in Black by Corporate America*, as well as an immersively installed grouping from *Unbranded: A Century of White Women*. In *B@anded*, Thomas explores and

re-contextualizes the history of brand advertising and sponsorship through the iconography of sport. In *Unbranded*, the artist digitally removes advertising punchlines and logos. Together, these series highlight the consistently dehumanizing strategies of corporate media, the commodification of identity, and the ways in which dominant cultural tropes shape notions of race and race relations, along with gender and socio-economic presentation.

Other lines of connection appear through the use of historical photography in transmuted forms, repurposed fabrics that give contextual weight to seemingly abstract compositions, and sculptural works that both celebrate and investigate the presence of the Black body in contemporary culture. The exhibition also highlights Thomas's mining of personal and public archives, as well as his ability to reframe texts, images, and materials to connect historical moments of resistance to our lives today.

Recent years have thrown structural inequality into sharp focus. Critical awareness, civic engagement, inclusive collaboration, and empathy—among the core invitations of Thomas's work—are powerful tools for our times. Thomas's work guides us to the intersection of art, politics, and social justice. With incisive clarity, Thomas asks us to see and challenge systems of inequality that are woven into the fabric of contemporary life.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a publication to include essays by curator **Shamim M. Momin** and collector **Jordan D. Schnitzer**, installation images, and more. The exhibition is intended to travel to other museums after its debut at the Henry. A press preview will be held on Thursday, February 22 from 3 to 4 PM.

Hank Willis Thomas: LOVERULES - From the Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation is organized by Shamim M. Momin, Director of Curatorial Affairs. Media sponsorship is provided by The Seattle Times.



Hank Willis Thomas (U.S., b. 1976). *An All Colored Cast* [flash-activated], 2019. UV print on retroreflective vinyl. Collection of Jordan D. Schnitzer. Photo courtesy of Kayne Griffin, now Pace Los Angeles.

ARTIST BIO

Born in 1976 in Plainfield, New Jersey, and raised in New York, Hank Willis Thomas earned a BFA from New York University, New York, NY (1998) and an MA/MFA from the California College of the Arts, San Francisco, CA (2004). Additionally, he received honorary doctorates from the Maryland Institute of Art, Baltimore, MD and the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts, Portland, ME.

Thomas's work has been exhibited internationally and is collected by the Museum of Modern Art, Brooklyn Museum, and Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, and the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C., among others. Thomas is a recipient of the Gordon Parks Foundation Fellowship (2019), The Guggenheim Fellowship (2018), AIMIA | AGO Photography Prize (2017), Soros Equality Fellowship (2017), Aperture West Book Prize (2008), Renew Media Arts Fellowship from the Rockefeller Foundation (2007), and the New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship Award (2006). He is a former member of the Public Design Commission for the City of New York.

Thomas's public art practice includes permanent artworks around the United States, including *The Embrace* (2023) on the Boston Common in Boston, MA, a statue that pays homage to the King family, Dr. Martin Luther King and Coretta Scott King; *REACH* (2023), made in collaboration with Coby Kennedy, at O'Hare International Airport in Chicago, IL; and *Duality* (2023) at The Underline in Miami, FL. Additional public works include *Unity*, a monumental public artwork, in Downtown Brooklyn, N.Y.; *Love Over Rules*, a neon installation in San Francisco, CA; and the sculpture *All Power to All People* in Opa Locka, FL.

His collaborative projects include *Question Bridge: Black Males; In Search Of The Truth (The Truth Booth); The Writing on the Wall; and The Gun Violence Memorial Project*.

Influenced by social history and the hard-fought, perennial battle for equality in all areas of his work, Thomas co-founded For Freedoms with artist Eric Gottesman, Wyatt Gallery, and Michelle Woo. For Freedoms, an artist-led organization that models and increases creative civic engagement, discourse, and direct action. Inspired by American artist Norman Rockwell's paintings of Franklin D. Roosevelt's Four Freedoms (1941)—freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear—For Freedoms uses art to encourage and deepen public explorations of freedom in the 21st century. Thomas lives and works in New York.

ABOUT THE HENRY

The Henry advances contemporary art and ideas. The museum is internationally recognized for groundbreaking exhibitions, for being on the cutting edge of contemporary art and culture, and for championing artists at every level of creation. Containing more than 28,000 works of art, the Henry's permanent collection is a significant cultural resource available to scholars, researchers, and the general public. The Henry is located on the University of Washington campus in Seattle, Washington. Visit henryart.org to learn more.

ABOUT JORDAN D. SCHNITZER AND HIS FAMILY FOUNDATION

Jordan D. Schnitzer is a renowned art collector who started collecting contemporary art at age 14. With a collection that exceeds 20,000 works and includes many of today's leading contemporary artists, it has grown to be one of the country's largest and finest private collections—particularly famous for its expansive collection of prints and multiples. His foundation, the Jordan Schnitzer Family Foundation, generously lends works to qualified institutions and has organized more than 160 exhibitions of art from his collections, which have been exhibited in over 120 museums. To learn more about the Jordan Schnitzer Family Foundation, please visit jordanschnitzer.org.

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