



## Hank Willis Thomas: All Things Being Equal...

Oct 12, 2019 – Jan 12, 2020

### Prompts for Students on Self-Guided Visits

Welcome to the Portland Art Museum! Please use these prompts for deeper engagement with the artwork. Have a conversation. Write down your thoughts. Draw a sketch. Take a photo. This place is here for you.

-Department of Learning and Community Partnerships

**1. Slow down and look closely.**

The average museum visitor spends only 15 – 30 seconds in front of each work of art. To have a meaningful experience in a museum, it helps to slow down. As you walk through the Hank Willis Thomas exhibition, choose at least one work on each floor and spend a full minute looking closely. (Setting a timer can help.) Write the title of each work and responses to these questions:

What draws you to this artwork? What do you notice about it? Are there things that you like or dislike about it? What do you wonder about it?

a. Title: \_\_\_\_\_

b. Title: \_\_\_\_\_

(over)

2. **14,719 and Remember Me. 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> floors.**

Please look, listen, and reflect on Thomas' monumental flag installation and other works memorializing his cousin Songha Willis and all victims of gun violence in America as well as the friends and family who have lost their loved ones.

3. **Branded and Unbranded series. 2<sup>nd</sup> floor.**

Thomas adapts the strategies of marketing campaigns to draw parallels between present-day capitalism, commerce, and the transatlantic slave trade.

- Without looking, can you name the brands of shoes and clothes that you're wearing right now? Why do you think that is? Hank Willis Thomas asks us to think about the practice of branding, what it means to us today and in the past.
- What is a brand? How do brands work as a form of communication? How do they relate to our personal identities? How do brands relate to art?
- What are the connections, Thomas asks, between "how slaves were branded as a kind of ownership, and [how] today we brand ourselves"?


4. **Pitch Blackness / Off-Whiteness. 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> floors.**

In text-based works, Thomas focuses on how the meaning and expressivity of words can easily change. Be sure to stop into the gallery of lenticular prints. Not sure what *lenticular* means? Walk past these prints to find out.

- Consider the phrases that Thomas calls out: "All Things Being Equal..." "History is Past." "Past is Present." "Ads Imitate Art Imitates Life Imitates Ads." In what contexts have you heard these phrases? Do you think each phrase is true or not? Why?

5. **Solidarity, Resistance, and Social Media. 1<sup>st</sup> floor.**

In series such as *Trouble the Water* and *Common Cause*, Thomas draws on historical archives from slavery and the Civil Rights Movement as well as international social justice movements resisting Apartheid and the Nazi regime. Thomas insists that we interact with these images and think about our relationships to these histories:

- Use a camera/phone flash to illuminate the works with  on their labels.
- Look for works that reflect your own image back to you.
- Read aloud Thomas' prose poem / *Am. Amen*.

Do you recognize any of these statements or images? What do they mean to you? Choose one that stands out to you and do some research on the spot or after you leave the museum. What is the history of the phrase or image? How does it relate to our world today? How do you think social media interacts with justice?

6. **Question Bridge: Black Male. Modern & Contemporary Art Wing, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor.**

Thomas works with a team of artists and ethnographers to develop a question and answer exchange mediated through video. "The idea was to show that black male identity is limitless."