

HANK WILLIS THOMAS – BIOGRAPHY

Hank Willis Thomas is a conceptual artist working primarily with themes related to identity, history and popular culture. His work has been exhibited throughout the U.S. and abroad including, the International Center of Photography, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, Musée du quai Branly, and the Cleveland Museum of Art. Thomas' work is in numerous public collections including the Museum of Modern Art New York, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Brooklyn Museum, the High Museum of Art and the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC, among others. His collaborative projects include Question Bridge: Black Males, In Search Of The Truth (The Truth Booth), and For Freedoms. For Freedoms was awarded the 2017 ICP Infinity Award for New Media and Online Platform. Thomas is also the recipient of the 2017 Soros Equality Fellowship and the 2017 AIMIA | AGO Photography Prize. In 2017, Thomas unveiled his permanent public artwork "Love Over Rules" in San Francisco and "All Power to All People" in Opa Locka, Florida. Thomas is a member of the Public Design Commission for the City of New York. He received a BFA in Photography and Africana studies from New York University and a MFA/MA in Photography and Visual Criticism from the California College of Arts. He has also received honorary doctorates from the Maryland Institute of Art and the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts. Thomas lives and works in New York City.

Coral Gables December 2018 Proposal

Hank Willis Thomas

Hank Willis Thomas continued exploration of identity, history and popular culture will be visualized in Coral Gables in two ways: by using large 3-dimensional speech bubbles installed on posts throughout Miracle Mile, and speech bubble-inspired bench designs in diverse sites throughout the villages of Coral Gables. The culmination of this 2-part installation will invite us to approach our different perspectives on truth with a new sense of understanding.

Each hanging speech bubble sign will contain a line from the poem *the truth is i am you* written by Hank Willis Thomas and Ryan Alexiev translated into the most spoken languages in Coral Gables. The phrases of the poem feature universal statements about the human condition and the translations communicate the essence of each English statement, as opposed to a direct translation.

The benches will seek to enhance public space as a portal to consider who we are, what we value, where we come from, and where we are going as a diverse group of people sharing the same space and social goals. In Coral Gables, the installation will explore the nature of truth and understanding across cultures by drawing upon the area's distinct architectural villages, including the Chinese, French, Dutch South African, and McFarland Homestead, to name a few. This interactive installation will act as a connector by offering a collective space of contemplation.

Pedestrians become part of the piece by walking through the sign populated areas or sitting in the benches. The installation provides a moment of pause in the fast pace lives of community members who will have an opportunity to reflect on the abundance of ways an idea can be common to all and expressed, as well as communicated, to a wide range of people. Made of bright colors and rolled steel, the benches will create spaces not just to reflect upon the vibrancy of the surrounding environment, but also to provide a place of introspection.

Speech Bubble Signs currently installed on Miracle Mile



Speech Bubble Signs

Previous Installation Examples:



“The Truth Is...” 2015, Installation at MetroTech Commons, Brooklyn, NY

Proposed Location:

Miracle Mile



The Miracle Mile light poles pose an ideal location for “the truth is i am you” hanging signs. Visitors will be welcomed into the heart of Coral Gables with messages of truths in the most spoken languages of the community. The work is activated by pedestrians who appear as if they are issuing the phrases themselves, either by intentionally standing underneath them or by appearing underneath them to the perspective of other viewers.

the truth is i am you

written by Hank Willis Thomas and Ryan Alexiev

the truth is i love you

the truth is i know you

the truth is i see you

the truth is i hear you

the truth is i fear you

the truth is i feel you

the truth is i believe you

the truth is i become you

the truth is i judge you

the truth is i respect you

the truth is i remember you

the truth is i remind you

the truth is i am you