



Hank Willis Thomas, *Black Power* (from the *Branded* series), 2008, C-print

off the wall:

Hank Willis Thomas

Bench marks

September 1 – November 30, 2014

Opening reception:

Thursday, September 11, 6-8pm

Voices lecture at Gallery 400:

Wednesday, September 17, 6pm

EXPO /Dialogue Artist Talk:

Sunday, September 21, 1pm

Monique Meloche Gallery is pleased to present Hank Willis Thomas: *Bench Marks* as our debut **off the wall** project. During the fall of 2014, *Bench Marks* will be installed onto various public bus benches throughout Chicago's Wicker Park Bucktown neighborhood. This project is concerned with the language of advertising and the visual methods it uses to construct the idea of "blackness" as a marketing strategy. The installation includes a selection of images from three different bodies of the artist's work, namely: *Branded*, *Fair Warning* and *Strange Fruit*. Within each of the aforementioned projects, Thomas explores how black identity functions as commerce, and the similarities between the exploit of the black male body through the practice of sharecropping during the Jim Crow era and that of the black male athlete in sports today.

Hank Willis Thomas (b. 1976 lives and works in New York) is a photo conceptual artist working primarily with themes related to identity, history and popular culture. He received a BFA in Photography and Africana studies from New York University and his MFA/MA in Photography and Visual Criticism from the California College of Arts. Thomas' monograph, *Pitch Blackness*, was published by Aperture in 2008. He has exhibited throughout the U.S. and abroad. Thomas' work is in numerous public collections including The Museum of Modern Art New York, The Guggenheim Museum, The Whitney Museum of American Art, The Brooklyn Museum, The High Museum of Art and the Museum of Fine Arts Houston. His collaborative projects have been featured at the Sundance Film Festival and installed publicly at the Oakland International Airport, The Birmingham International Airport, The Oakland Museum of California and the University of California, San Francisco. Recent notable exhibitions include *Hank Willis Thomas* at the Cleveland Museum of Art, *Strange Fruit* at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, *Picture Windows: Hank Willis Thomas* in collaboration with Sanford Biggers at the International Center for Photography, and the Istanbul Biennial.

Off the wall is a public art initiative that invites artists to produce site specific installations throughout the Wicker Park Bucktown neighborhood. The impetus for this project is to provide a more open platform for contemporary art that engages the public at large on a daily basis. The series reaches a demographic much larger than the standard gallery-goers and provides an open-armed invitation to discover the arts and the potential they have to influence everyday life. The project is inspired by the success of the gallery's "on the wall" project, which has been produced in the storefront windows of moniquemeloche since 2010. Both projects are generously supported by a grant from the Wicker Park/Bucktown SSA #33.

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