

Cincinnati Art Museum *Hank Willis Thomas: All Things Being Equal...* Workshop

Trudy Gaba - *Freedom for Soweto* Response Transcript

00:00:00,490 --> 00:00:06,444

My name is Trudy and this video is in response to the artwork,

00:00:06,444 --> 00:00:07,818

Freedom for Soweto.

00:00:09,770 --> 00:00:15,474

Sometimes the most successful and effective acts of defiance

00:00:16,090 --> 00:00:22,770

are not accomplished by matching one's oppressor or abuser with

00:00:22,770 --> 00:00:29,450

the same show of excessive force, an you know, brutality.

00:00:30,860 --> 00:00:36,822

The gentleman in the center of this image is standing in

00:00:36,822 --> 00:00:39,850

isolation, and I think most,

00:00:40,790 --> 00:00:43,460

you know, poignantly he is standing

00:00:44,840 --> 00:00:48,206

in a stance of complete vulnerability.

00:00:49,860 --> 00:00:54,054

His arms are his only means of real defense,

00:00:55,220 --> 00:00:56,888

but he does not wield them.

00:00:57,790 --> 00:01:00,370

His hands brandish no weapon.

00:01:00,950 --> 00:01:04,318

They only hold in them  
symbols of peace.

00:01:05,660 --> 00:01:12,560

Which is a stark contrast  
to the foreground of the

00:01:12,560 --> 00:01:19,460

image, where you can see  
the faintest silhouettes of the

00:01:19,460 --> 00:01:25,817

policemen and their canines,  
which are clearly agitated and

00:01:25,817 --> 00:01:30,436

there, gnashing their teeth,  
ready to attack

00:01:31,070 --> 00:01:33,737

their intended target in  
front of them.

00:01:35,260 --> 00:01:37,210

In this moment,

00:01:38,270 --> 00:01:39,570

instinctually,

00:01:41,010 --> 00:01:46,930

this young man would perhaps  
recoil and make himself smaller.

00:01:47,960 --> 00:01:53,873

Curling inward into oneself  
to form some sort of

00:01:53,873 --> 00:01:55,187

protective shield.

00:01:56,520 --> 00:01:58,626

But he does the exact opposite.

00:01:59,570 --> 00:02:04,619

He standing, you know, firmly

in place, defenseless and

00:02:04,619 --> 00:02:07,985  
vulnerable and in every way  
imaginable.

00:02:10,300 --> 00:02:14,210  
Hank's erasure of the background

00:02:15,360 --> 00:02:22,653  
is very effective here. It  
dislocates this young man from a

00:02:22,653 --> 00:02:25,968  
specific time setting or event.

00:02:26,690 --> 00:02:30,520  
And that absence of

00:02:30,520 --> 00:02:36,048  
context creates this sort  
of archetypal figure

00:02:37,300 --> 00:02:41,360  
who is confronting  
unchecked, unrestrained

00:02:42,730 --> 00:02:47,287  
government sanctioned  
terror and meeting it with

00:02:47,287 --> 00:02:48,589  
peaceful resistance.

00:02:50,280 --> 00:02:54,095  
He is Minnesota. He is

00:02:54,095 --> 00:02:58,470  
Selma. He is  
Soweto.

00:02:59,800 --> 00:03:04,723  
People on every continent  
have stood where he stands

00:03:04,723 --> 00:03:09,099  
through decades and centuries

before people have been

00:03:09,099 --> 00:03:14,569  
compelled by the same moral  
obligation to stand up, speak

00:03:14,569 --> 00:03:16,757  
up, and speak out

00:03:18,070 --> 00:03:19,678  
when they see injustice.

00:03:23,280 --> 00:03:30,266  
In the words of the late John  
Lewis, he is what we would call

00:03:30,266 --> 00:03:32,262  
"good trouble, necessary trouble."

00:03:33,260 --> 00:03:37,397  
An ordinary person with  
an extraordinary vision

00:03:38,640 --> 00:03:42,644  
of seeing a world with true  
freedom and equality for all,

00:03:42,644 --> 00:03:44,828  
not just for a select few.