

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

Bhavik Joshi – *Cotton Bowl* Response Transcript

00:00:00,880 --> 00:00:05,110

I have been fascinated by Hank Willis Thomas's depiction of

00:00:05,110 --> 00:00:09,340

competitive sports as modern day allegory's for old and barbaric

00:00:09,340 --> 00:00:13,993

practices like war or slavery. And one such piece that really

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spoke to me quite deeply is the Cotton Bowl that Willis created

00:00:19,492 --> 00:00:24,145

in 2011. The image itself is incredibly striking. On the left

00:00:24,145 --> 00:00:30,067

is a Black slave bending to pick cotton and on the right is a

00:00:30,067 --> 00:00:34,244

mirror image of him, Black man in full football gear.

00:00:35,200 --> 00:00:40,590

Now, as soon as I saw it, I imagined the ghosts of the past

00:00:40,590 --> 00:00:45,595

were looking at the men of the future, and I started to imagine

00:00:45,595 --> 00:00:49,445

them having a conversation. I started to imagine the past

00:00:49,445 --> 00:00:53,295

asking the future, "Hey, man, are things better? Is anything

00:00:53,295 --> 00:00:55,220

better? Have things changed or

00:00:55,220 --> 00:00:59,434

improved?" And sadly, I also imagined the future not being

00:00:59,434 --> 00:01:02,202

able to give the past a lot of

00:01:02,202 --> 00:01:07,825

hope. Because even in this day
and age, not only in football

00:01:07,825 --> 00:01:12,500

but all of sports, we still use
terminology like trading and

00:01:12,500 --> 00:01:14,200

cutting, and free agent.

00:01:14,800 --> 00:01:18,553

Old white men still profit
from this superhuman feats

00:01:18,553 --> 00:01:19,804

of young Black

00:01:20,830 --> 00:01:26,278

men and women, the same Black men and women whose entire humanity

00:01:26,278 --> 00:01:30,818

is abstracted and summarized
into one skill set for the

00:01:30,818 --> 00:01:32,180

purposes of entertainment.

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And sadly, the same Black men and women who are constantly

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asked not to raise their voices
in protest of the larger social

00:01:41,678 --> 00:01:44,380

cultural injustices happening in
the world today.

00:01:45,190 --> 00:01:50,038

They are told shut up and
dribble or that you are a

00:01:50,038 --> 00:01:54,482

football player and not a social justice warrior or that you're

00:01:54,482 --> 00:01:58,118
kneeling during the national
anthem is offensive to my

00:01:58,118 --> 00:02:02,158
brother who's fighting a war
somewhere, or that all lives

00:02:02,158 --> 00:02:03,774
matter. It's really frustrating.

00:02:04,610 --> 00:02:10,442
But at the same time, I feel
hopeful looking at the 2020

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sports season where amidst the global pandemic, both the NFL and

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the NBA are most known for the
players protesting in support

00:02:21,134 --> 00:02:26,707
of George Floyd, Brianna Taylor and the Black Lives Matter

00:02:26,707 --> 00:02:29,270
movement. So it's really a case

00:02:29,270 --> 00:02:32,440
of art mimicking life making art.