

Arts & ENTERTAINMENT

All Things Being Equal Artist explores discrimination in popular culture



Hank Willis Thomas



"The Cotton Bowl" by multimedia artist Hank Willis Thomas from his "All Things Being Equal" exhibit that opens Saturday, Oct. 12 at the Portland Art Museum.

BY BEVERLY CORBELL
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

A thought-provoking look at how art can give a window into how modern culture perpetuates discrimination, titled "All Things Being Equal" by African American artist Hank Willis Thomas, will open Saturday, Oct. 12 at the Portland Art Museum.

This is the first major retrospective of Thomas' work, said Portland Art Museum spokesman Ian Gillingham, and reflects the museum's efforts to build equity with its patrons, artists and exhibits.

"He looks at the language of advertising and marketing and branding in a way that deconstructs American commercialism to show how that language reflects and perpetuates historical systems of oppression," Gillingham said.

Utilizing photographs, sculptures, videos and other public art, the exhibit is formulated to draw out the role popular culture has in instituting discrimination and how art can raise awareness to the on-



"Branded Head" one of the thought-provoking artworks by African American multimedia artist Hank Willis Thomas. The Portland Art Museum presents his "All Things Being Equal" exhibit, opening at the Portland Art Museum on Oct. 12 and running through Jan. 12.

going struggles for social justice and civil rights.

The human toll of gun violence, for example, is reflected in a new piece commissioned for the exhib-

it that was inspired by the gunshot murder of Thomas' cousin, an innocent bystander in a robbery where another man was targeted for his gold chain, Gillingham said.

He described the new piece as monumental, inspired by the American flag but composed of strips of textiles that go from floor to ceiling in the museum's entrance hall.

"On those strips are 14,719 stars, representing lives lost to gun violence in 2018," he said.

Another work, a photo collage titled "The Cotton Bowl" inspires amusement as well as consternation by displaying a football player at the line of scrimmage across from a man in a straw hat picking cotton. More disturbing, and even more thought-provoking, is a photo showing half of a black man's bald head with the Nike symbol that looks like it's formed of scar tissue.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

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