

## THE WORK OF CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS KARA WALKER AND HANK WILLIS THOMAS COME TOGETHER IN INSTALLATION AT THE BMA

**BALTIMORE, MD** (May 30, 2017)—The Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) presents two compelling works that explore the legacy of slavery in America in *Black Box: Kara Walker & Hank Willis Thomas*. On view June 28, 2017–March 18, 2018, the installation brings together Kara Walker’s *Salvation*, one of the most significant works in the BMA’s contemporary collection, and Hank Willis Thomas’ *And I Can’t Run*, a recent promised gift to the museum.



“These powerful pieces by Walker and Thomas are among the important works in the BMA’s collection that confront us with the traumatic and tragic history of race in America and inspire us to make critical changes as we go forward,” said Kristen Hileman, Senior Curator of Contemporary Art. “One of the strengths of the museum’s contemporary collection are works like these that take a forceful position on the critical issues of our times.”



Walker’s *Salvation* (2000) is a complex consideration of African American and female identity within the tragic history of American slavery. The central silhouetted female figure is characteristic of the artist’s work, which collides racial stereotypes and violent scenes with the genteel tradition of cut paper silhouettes. The art depicts a figure gasping, perhaps drowning, in a swamp. Its title, *Salvation*, could suggest the woman has taken to the water to escape her enslavement. A grim possibility is that a death by drowning offers the only salvation from the horrors she has experienced. The foreboding and haunting scene is heightened through dim lighting and shadowy layers of imagery generated by an overhead projector.

Light is also critical to understanding the imagery of Thomas’ *And I Can’t Run* (2013). Initially appearing as an almost illegible group of white-on-white forms on a rectangular field, a chilling photographic image of a black man shackled before aggressive white onlookers emerges once the work is photographed with a cell phone using a flash.

Where Walker returns to the centuries-old silhouette craft to examine the legacy of slavery in American, Thomas brings contemporary technology to the subject. Both artists, however, find contrasts of light and dark, white and black, and obscurity and revelation to be powerful metaphors for horrific violence and racial inequality in the United States.

*Black Box: Kara Walker & Hank Willis Thomas* is curated by Kristen Hileman, Senior Curator of Contemporary Art.

## ARTIST BIOS

Kara Walker (American, b. 1969) is best known for her exploration of race, gender, and sexuality. She received a BFA from the Atlanta College of Art and an MFA from the Rhode Island School of Design, both in painting and printmaking. Walker's work, with its signature format of black-and-white silhouetted figures, has been exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. The New York-based artist was a recipient of the MacArthur Fellowship in 1997, one of the youngest to receive the "genius grant," as well as the United States representative to the São Paulo Art Biennial.

Hank Willis Thomas (American, b. 1976) is a conceptual artist, who often works with photography to explore themes related to identity, history, and popular culture. He received a BFA in photography and Africana studies from New York University and an MFA/MA in photography and visual criticism from the California College of Arts. Thomas' monograph, *Pitch Blackness*, was published by Aperture. He has exhibited internationally at such venues as the International Center of Photography, New York; Public Art Fund, New York; The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, Bizkaia, Spain; Studio Museum in Harlem; Musée du quai Branly, Paris; and the Cleveland Museum of Art.

## THE BALTIMORE MUSEUM OF ART

Founded in 1914, The Baltimore Museum of Art is a major cultural destination recognized for engaging diverse audiences through dynamic exhibitions and innovative educational and community outreach programs. The BMA's internationally renowned collection of 95,000 objects encompasses more than 1,000 works by Henri Matisse anchored by the famed Cone Collection of modern art, as well as one of the nation's finest holdings of prints, drawings, and photographs. The galleries showcase an exceptional collection of art from Africa; important works by established and emerging contemporary artists; outstanding European and American paintings, sculpture, and decorative arts; significant artworks from China; ancient Antioch mosaics; and exquisite textiles from around the world. The 210,000- square-foot museum is also distinguished by a grand historic building designed in the 1920s by renowned American architect John Russell Pope and two beautifully landscaped gardens featuring an array of 20th-century sculpture. The BMA is located in Charles Village, three miles north of the Inner Harbor, and is adjacent to the main campus of Johns Hopkins University. General admission to the BMA is free so that everyone can enjoy the power of art.

## VISITOR INFORMATION

General admission to the BMA is free. Special exhibitions may be ticketed. The BMA is open Wednesday through Sunday from 10 a.m.–5 p.m. The museum is closed Monday, Tuesday, New Year's Day, July 4, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. The BMA is located at 10 Art Museum Drive, three miles north of Baltimore's Inner Harbor. For general museum information, call 443-573-1700 or visit [artbma.org](http://artbma.org).

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Images, top to bottom: Kara Walker. *Salvation*. 2000. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Friends of Modern Art Fund, BMA 2001.14. © Kara Walker. Hank Willis Thomas. *And I Can't Run*. 2013. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Promised gift of a MAD Gathering to The Baltimore Museum of Art. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.