

INEQUALITY IS

Hank Willis Thomas on the role of artists in fighting inequality

Artist Hank Willis Thomas says creative expression can help us better see and understand inequality, and transform people's perspectives.

A conversation about inequality in all its forms.

Transcript begins.

HANK WILLIS THOMAS: Inequality thrives on our ignorance, on our myopia, our inability to see things that sometimes are right in front of our faces. Interview, take one.

[Inequality is logo. A graphic black equal sign with an orange slash through it.
#InequalityIs. Hank Willis Thomas, visual artist. A Black man in his late thirties wearing a blue button-down shirt.]

The common denominator in my work is framing and context. Whoever is holding the frame gets to create the context for history, for the way we see ourselves, the way we see the world, the way we see others.

[A three-dimensional sculpture of several sets of anonymous hands grabbing onto a string of barbed-wire fencing.]

I think the role of an artist in society is to highlight the things that we'd rather ignore. What's visible to the naked eye isn't ever the entire story.

[A phone camera zooms in on a picture of an American flag, with silhouettes in the background. When exposed to light with the camera flash, the American Flag shows to be used as a weapon against a Black man during a protest.]

Inequality is as affected by the things we don't focus on as it is by the things we focus on. And I think one of the ways that I can address it through my art is by making work that forces the viewer to have to shift their perspective. To think about inequality on multiple planes. How do we think about it economically? How do we think about it culturally? How do we think about it politically? How do we think about it in interpersonal relationships?

[A crisp white wall. Twenty recreations and variations of the iconic 1960s "I Am A Man" poster: "Am I a man", "Ain't I a woman", "I am many", "I am human", "I am three-fifths man", "I am. Amen."]

I think ordinary people are the solution to inequality. The more of us who are asking and answering questions and solving the problems of our time, the easier it will be for us to make the huge strides we're going to need to survive.

[Inequality Is Logo. Join the conversation. #InequalityIs.]

End of transcript.