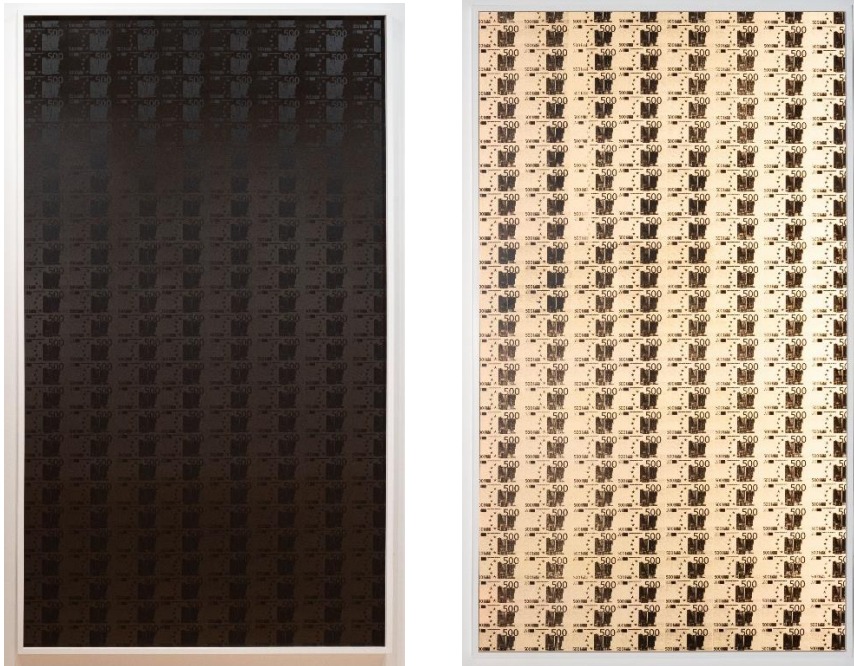


# BEN BROWN FINE ARTS



Hank Willis Thomas, *216 Five Hundred Euro Bills (Black)*, 2019, screenprint on retroreflective vinyl, mounted on Dibond, 213.4 x 121.9 cm; (84 x 48 in.) (left: no flash; right: flash)

## HANK WILLIS THOMAS

### ***DON'T LET MONEY CHANGE YOU***

21 September – 17 November 2020

Private view: Saturday, 19 September 2020, 12-5 pm

Ben Brown Fine Arts is proud to present Hank Willis Thomas's *Don't Let Money Change You* at the Hong Kong gallery. This is the artist's third solo exhibition with Ben Brown Fine Arts, following his highly acclaimed shows in London, *The Beautiful Game*, 2017, and Hong Kong, *My Life is Ours*, 2018. *Don't Let Money Change You* will bring together a new body of work from Thomas's innovative *retroreflective* series, depicting serial imagery of international currencies in bold monochromes.

This radically inventive body of work is achieved by hand-screen printing images, in this case striking grids of currencies, onto retroreflective vinyl sheeting, the industrial material used to make road signs visible in the dark. While traces of patterning are perceptible upon first inspection of these intriguing monochromes, it is only when the works are illuminated by a beam of light that the intricate details of the iconic imagery are fully revealed. The works must be 'activated' by the viewer, whether using the light on an iPhone or taking a photograph with a flash, encouraging an engagement and personalized experience with each work of art.

By combining the retroreflective material with the recognizable Warholian grid of currency notes, Thomas invites the viewer to step into the role of image maker and reflect on notions of fine art, commerce, branding, identity and value. As these familiar faces of currency (Chinese Yuan Renminbi, Euro, South African Rand, UK Pound Sterling, and US Dollar) become activated and revealed as the latent images, viewers are reminded of these ubiquitous fictional symbols which affect larger systems of power, economics and society. An important tenet of Thomas's artistic practice is to instigate

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pause, participation and reflection in his audience, which is successfully achieved through this engaging body of work.

In this series Thomas explores his fascination with repetition and mass-produced imagery, and ways that it can coalesce with the hand of the artist, similar to the investigations of 20<sup>th</sup> century masters Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg. While referencing both Pop Art and Abstract Expressionism, these works ultimately bring Thomas back to his roots as a traditionally trained photographer. The elaborate processes involved in creating the retroreflective works allows Thomas to evoke the wonder of experimentation and revelatory experiences found in the darkroom that originally drew him to photography.

Furthering Thomas's exploration of popular culture and colour theory, the works in the exhibition are contextualized against walls of the new gallery space covered by magnified imagery from the classic boardgame Monopoly. The juxtaposition of these universal symbols of wealth and power, one set derived from a family boardgame and the other from international governments' currency systems, highlights the value placed on symbols in culture and the fragility of such systems. This boardgame that is ingrained into our childhood experience was originally designed to highlight income inequalities and the greed of monopolists but upon mass-distribution morphed into a game whose one winner chases wealth and benefits from the bankruptcy of the other players, an apt metaphor for today's capitalist societies. The 'fake' money awarded in a Monopoly game is intended to evoke the same feelings of desire as real money. In referencing this game of fantasy, alongside reproductions of actual currencies, depicted in varying colours, sizes and textures, the installation examines our reliance upon symbolism as identity and society's obsession with wealth.

## About the artist

Hank Willis Thomas (b. 1976) received a BFA in Photography and Africana Studies from New York University and an MFA and MA in Photography and Visual Criticism from the California College of Arts, San Francisco. Thomas's work has been exhibited extensively throughout the United States and abroad, at institutions including the International Center of Photography, New York; Studio Museum, Harlem, New York; Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio; SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah, Georgia; Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; Art Gallery of Ontario, Canada; Musée du quai Branly, Paris; Hong Kong Arts Centre, Hong Kong; Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Netherlands; Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao; and Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa, Cape Town. His work is in numerous public and private collections including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Brooklyn Museum, New York; High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia; and the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, among others. Thomas's solo exhibition *All Things Being Equal...*, has travelled to the Portland Museum of Art, OR, and Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, AK, and will continue to the Cincinnati Museum of Art, OH. The artist currently lives and works in New York City.

**The artist is available for interviews on request.**

## **FOR FURTHER PRESS INFORMATION AND ENQUIRIES PLEASE CONTACT:**

Juliana Chan  
Ben Brown Fine Arts Hong Kong  
202 The Factory, 1 Yip Fat Street  
Wong Chuk Hang, Hong Kong  
T. +852 2522 9600  
E. [juliana@benbrownfinearts.com](mailto:juliana@benbrownfinearts.com)  
W: [www.benbrownfinearts.com](http://www.benbrownfinearts.com)

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