



JENKINS JOHNSON GALLERY

CONNECTIONS

February 5 – March 28, 2009



Sheila Pree Bright, Dave Gutierrez, from the series "Young Americans", 2008 chromogenic print, 30 x 40", edition of 5; 65 x 48", edition of 3.

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Hank Willis Thomas, *Who Can Say No to a Gorgeous Brunette?*, 1970/2007, 2007 light-jet print, 51 x 51".

Jenkins Johnson Gallery is pleased to announce CONNECTIONS, opening in San Francisco, Thursday, February 5th, from 5:30-7:30 p.m. and in New York February 7th, 6:00 to 8:00 pm. The exhibition continues through March 28th in both galleries.

"Our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus, and non-believers. We are shaped by every language and culture. Drawn from every end of this earth ... we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united."
- President Barack Obama, January 20, 2009 Inauguration Speech

In collaboration, owner Karen Jenkins-Johnson and independent curator Lisa Henry examine artists who boldly speak on topics of race, ethnicity, identity and gender in America. At a time of a historic political change CONNECTIONS presents: iconic and legendary black artists of the Harlem Renaissance; established mid-career artists that continue to strengthen the African American presence in the art world; and the significant emerging artists that not only transcend aesthetic boundaries but have created a powerful discourse around social condition, personal identity, and cultural heritage in America.

Co-curator Henry states "works in CONNECTIONS reflect the ongoing conversations about appropriation, commodity culture, beauty, subjectivity, and desire that continue throughout the mainstream of the American art world." Artists have the ability to expose the truth behind political machines, corporate giants, social circumstance as well as praise that which is good in a culture. From the 1960's, Romare Bearden's seminal figurative mixed media collage works expressively illustrate the human struggle in oppressed conditions. Similarly, contemporary artist Hank Willis Thomas, featured in "30 AMERICANS" (Rubell Family Collection, Miami, FL), presents a fresh and compelling message of objectification through consumerism. In "Smokin' Joe ain't Je'mama" 1978/2006, from his innovative "Unbranded" series, Thomas reveals how an African-American man depicted in an advertisement is immediately stereotyped and objectified - this series looks at ads over the past 40-years, stripping them of text and logos to emphasize a sometimes uncomfortable truth. The photography of emerging artist Sheila Pree Bright in "Young Americans," is a timely and intense series focusing on the complex identities of Generation Y, American's aged 18-25, at a time when their political power has helped change the course of this nation by participating in huge numbers in this historic presidential election. In contrast to the more socially confrontational works, artists like photographer Gerald Cyrus and Sculptor John Wilson show another side of CONNECTIONS. Cyrus, famous for his vibrant images of the historic jazz clubs in Harlem, brings levity to his images. Renowned painter Jacob Lawrence's works depict myriads of geometric shapes of primary colors that focus on celebration and daily life from the 40s up until his death in 2000. Also featured are works by John Wilson, the artist selected to create the bust of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. that sits in the United States Capitol.

In a land and time where we fight to speak against social injustices and prejudices, artists have used their craft to do so loudly and distinctively. Carrie Mae Weems, winner of the Distinguished Photographer's Award, places powerful words on poignant images depicting African Americans ripped of their personal identity. Similarly, the highly praised and extraordinary conceptual mixed media works of Lorna Simpson use aesthetic methods to arouse discussions on the topics of race, cultural background, and gender. California artists, Carla Williams & Deirdre Visser, have photographed the American landscape in such a way that viewers are made to grapple with both our nation's beauty and our disturbing racial history as seen in *Negro Island*, an ironic depiction of Negro Island, FL. The exhibition continues to examine connections in American's diverse cultural makeup with the notable photography of Keliy Anderson-Staley, Hiroshi Watanabe, and Qiana Mestrich, that magnificently illustrate the beauty of difference and humanity through portraiture. As Lisa Henry states, each of these works viewed side-by-side, "may connect with viewers in new ways and point us towards new paths."

The 2009 exhibition will showcase the work of: Keliy Anderson-Staley, John Bankston, Emilio Bañuelos, Romare Bearden, Sheila Pree Bright, Elizabeth Catlett, Robert Colescott, Gerald Cyrus, Kira Lynn Harris, Deborah Jack, Jacob Lawrence, Sonya Lawyer, Glenn Ligon, Thomas McGovern, Felicia Megginson, Qiana Mestrich, Gordan Parks, Lorna Simpson, Hank Willis Thomas, George Tooker, James VanDerZee, Hiroshi Watanabe, Carrie Mae Weems, Carla Williams & Deirdre Visser, Philemona Williamson, John Wilson, lauren woods, Reggie Woolery, and Mark Wyse. Not all artists will exhibit at both locations.