

HANK WILLIS THOMAS & MAN RAY

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TOMORROW I SHALL CONTRADICT MYSELF

25.09.2026 – 30.01.2027

Opening Saturday 26 September 2026 | 18.00 – 24.00

At GALLERIA CONTINUA / San Gimignano

GALLERIA CONTINUA is pleased to present, for the first time, the work of Hank Willis Thomas at its San Gimignano gallery and, simultaneously in Rome. Organized in collaboration with Territorio and titled *Tomorrow I Shall Contradict Myself*, the project unfolds across two exhibitions conceived in dialogue with the work of Man Ray, an artist who has long been an important point of reference in Thomas's practice. The exhibitions mark the beginning of Galleria Continua's collaboration with Hank Willis Thomas.

Bringing the two artists together highlights a connection that runs throughout Thomas's work. His affinity with Man Ray lies not only in formal parallels or their shared interest in photographic experimentation, but above all in the way both artists approach the image and its possibilities. For both, photography is never simply a means of recording reality, but a space for transformation – one capable of challenging what we see and the ways we have learned to look. "I first encountered Man Ray's work during my first year studying photography at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts," says Hank Willis Thomas, "where we had the opportunity to experiment in the darkroom with photograms and solarization. Looking back now, though, I realize that experimentation had begun even earlier, in the makeshift darkroom in my mother's kitchen. My mother is Deborah Willis – a photographer, artist, curator, and educator – and through her, I was already in a kind of dialogue with Man Ray's ideas long before I fully understood their significance. "There is also a more unusual and personal connection: I was born shortly after Man Ray died. What fascinated me most about his work was the way he pushed beyond the boundaries of the photographic frame, questioning where an image truly begins and where it ends.

That question became the starting point for my first project, *A Thousand Words*, which focused on ideas of framing and context. "Since then, my practice has remained open and multifaceted, moving between photography, sculpture, painting, and any other medium that feeds my sense of play and curiosity, much as Man Ray moved freely between different forms of expression. If Ray bent light itself to reveal what the camera alone could not capture – solarizing an image until light and shadow were reversed, or placing objects directly onto photographic paper to capture their imprint in a rayograph – I have pursued that same fascination with light through different materials and processes. "Some images in my retroreflective works remain quiet and still until struck by a flash or beam of light; only then does a second, hidden image emerge from the first. It is the same question Man Ray asked in the darkroom: what does light choose to reveal, and what does it conceal until we look closely enough? To exhibit alongside him now, at Galleria Continua, feels like coming full circle – back to something that began decades ago in my mother's kitchen."

Tomorrow I Shall Contradict Myself, brings together works from different periods and contexts, revealing resonances, continuities, and points of departure between the two artists. Man Ray helped free the photographic image from the need to faithfully represent the world, opening it instead to experimentation, ambiguity, and the unexpected. Hank Willis Thomas builds on and reinterprets this legacy through a distinctly contemporary lens. In his work, the image becomes a means of questioning how we perceive and represent the world, as well as the cultural and social structures that shape what we see – and what so often remains invisible. Bringing Thomas's work into

dialogue with Man Ray offers a new perspective on his practice, situating it within a broader exploration of history and the power of images.

"I like contradictions. We have never attained the infinite variety and contradictions that exist in nature. Tomorrow I shall contradict myself. That is the only way I have of asserting my liberty, the true liberty one does not find as a member of society," Man Ray stated. A pioneer of Surrealist photography, Man Ray broke with traditional approaches to artmaking, embracing chance, spontaneity, and experimentation with materials. His practice spanned painting, sculpture, film, and writing, driven by an innate restlessness and an insatiable curiosity about what art could be and do. In his photography, experiments with light and darkroom processes transformed the familiar into something unexpected: through rayographs, solarization, and bold image-making techniques, bodies and objects shed their original functions and assumed enigmatic, surreal forms. His sculptures and objects similarly transformed the everyday through unexpected associations, alterations, and gestures of irony, challenging the boundary between artwork and ordinary object. Painting offered yet another space for experimentation, where forms, symbols, and dreamlike imagery came together in compositions that resisted any single interpretation. Across these different mediums, Man Ray continually challenged conventions of perception and authorship, rejecting fixed categories and embracing contradiction as both a method and a philosophy.

Man Ray uses photography and sculpture to destabilize the familiar, transforming everyday objects and motifs into forms charged with desire, irony, and a subtle sense of unease. Thomas, meanwhile, turns to sculpture to capture gestures and moments of profound symbolic significance and give them new resonance. By isolating essential actions, he explores their expressive power and their ability to evoke questions of individual and collective identity, ambition, perseverance, and community. Gestures that are at once immediate and universal – two hands clasped together, a fist raised in solidarity – are removed from the fleeting moment and rendered monumental in veined marble. Through material and scale, Thomas gives these gestures both an intimate and a public presence, transforming them into monuments to the power of collective action. The use of marble also brings the works into direct dialogue with the art-historical tradition of classical sculpture, reinterpreting its forms and language through the narratives and concerns of the present. Aimé and Suzanne Césaire, Martinican writers and theorists associated with Surrealism, saw the movement as a means of radically transforming the mind – an ethical and intellectual approach that Man Ray embodied through irony, an openness to chance, and a constant willingness to push formal boundaries. Drawing on this legacy of freedom

and subversion, Hank Willis Thomas explores new connections between the histories of art and colonialism, questioning the narratives and systems of representation that have shaped both. Thomas creates a kind of visual chronology in which art history, conquest, and struggles for emancipation are reconsidered in relation to one another. By layering archival material, imagery drawn from the art-historical canon, and references to popular culture, he reveals the ways in which power, struggles for independence, and the growth of commercial exchange have shaped the Western imagination. His work invites us to critically examine the structures that determine what we see, how we see it, and, above all, who has historically been granted the right to be represented.

About the artists:

Hank Willis Thomas lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. His work has been presented at major institutions across the United States and internationally, including the International Center of Photography, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, the Musée du quai Branly, the Hong Kong Arts Centre, and the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art. Collaboration and participation are central to his practice. Among his best-known projects are *Question Bridge: Black Males*, *In Search of the Truth (The Truth Booth)*, *The Writing on the Wall*, and *The Gun Violence Memorial Project*. He is also co-founder of *For Freedoms*, an artist-led organisation that fosters new forms of civic engagement through creativity, dialogue, and collective action. Throughout his career, Thomas has received numerous awards and honours. In 2022, he was awarded the Medal of Arts by the U.S. Department of State's Art in Embassies program. Other distinctions include the Gordon Parks Foundation Fellowship (2019), a Guggenheim Fellowship (2018), the AIMIA | AGO Photography Prize and the Soros Equality Fellowship (both 2017), the Aperture West Book Prize (2008), the Rockefeller Foundation Renew Media Arts Fellowship (2007), and the New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship (2006). He also served as a member of the New York City Public Design Commission.

Thomas's practice extends significantly into the realm of public art, with permanent works installed in cities across the United States. These include *The Embrace* (2023) at Boston Common in Boston; *REACH* (2023), created in collaboration with Coby Kennedy for Chicago O'Hare International Airport; *Duality* (2023) at The Underline in Miami; and *The Truth Is I Love You* at the Austin Public Library. Other permanent public works include *Unity* in downtown Brooklyn, *Love Over Rules* in San Francisco, and *All Power to All People* in Opa-locka, Florida. Thomas received his

Bachelor of Fine Arts (B.F.A.) from New York University in 1998 and his Master of Arts/Master of Fine Arts (M.A./M.F.A.) from the California College of the Arts in San Francisco in 2004. In 2024, the California College of the Arts awarded him an honorary doctorate. He had previously received honorary degrees from the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore and the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts in Portland, Maine, in 2017.

Man Ray, the pseudonym of Emmanuel Radnitzky (Philadelphia, 1890–Paris, 1976), was one of the leading figures of the twentieth-century avant-garde. After studying in New York and meeting Alfred Stieglitz and Marcel Duchamp, he became a central figure in American Dada, contributing to the founding of the Society of Independent Artists and the Société Anonyme. In 1921, he moved to Paris, where he joined the Surrealist group and developed a pioneering practice spanning photography, painting, film, assemblage, and *objets trouvés*. Renowned for his rayographs and his experimentation with solarisation, he revolutionised the language of photography, transforming it into a vehicle for artistic expression.

After spending the Second World War years in Los Angeles, Man Ray returned to Paris in 1951, where he continued his prolific creative practice until his death in 1976. Today, his works are held in the collections of the world's leading museums and continue to be featured in major exhibitions and retrospectives around the world.

About the gallery:

Founded in 1990 in San Gimignano, Italy, GALLERIA CONTINUA has expanded its locations to Beijing, Les Moulins, Havana, São Paulo, Rome, and Paris. GALLERIA CONTINUA represents the desire for continuity between eras and the ambition to write a contemporary story. In thirty-six years of activity, thanks to its commitment to revitalizing and breathing new life into forgotten and unconventional spaces, the gallery has developed a strong and unique identity. Located within a former 1950s cinema-theatre, GALLERIA CONTINUA San Gimignano has hosted numerous exhibitions over the years, offering artists the opportunity to create memorable site-specific installations and tailor-made exhibition projects for these distinctive and character-rich spaces.

GALLERIA CONTINUA / San Gimignano

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For further information about the exhibition and photographic material:

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