

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: December 14, 2007

Williams College Museum of Art Presents

Unchained Legacies

January 26 – June 29, 2008

Williamstown, MA—The Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA) presents *Unchained Legacies*, an exhibition featuring two of the museum's new contemporary art acquisitions—*Stowage* (1997) by Willie Cole and *Absolut Power* (2003) by Hank Willis Thomas—as well as a selection of historical documents related to the Middle Passage from the Chapin Library of rare books at Williams College.

Hank Willis Thomas's work *Absolut Power* mines the language of advertising to talk about race, class, and history. *Absolut Power* employs the popular advertising campaign to remind viewers of economic implications of the transatlantic slave trade. Similarly, artist Willie Cole uses the imagery of brands and branding, taking domestic irons and literally scorching the paper on which he worked, leaving behind different patterns that are a *double entendre* for the branding of animals and slaves. These two contemporary works will be displayed alongside Thomas Jefferson's copy of Thomas Clarkson's *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-trade, by the British Parliament* (Philadelphia, 1808), which contains the famous Brookes slave ship diagram that Thomas and Cole visually reference: evidence

of the organization of human cargo during transport from Africa, or what has become known as the “Middle Passage.” The exhibition, a collaboration with the Chapin Library, provides a historical context for the contemporary use of this much reproduced image.

"Middle Passage" refers to the forced transportation of Africans to the New World from the 15th to the 19th century. It was the middle leg of the triangular trade, where ships from Europe sold or traded their goods for prisoners on the African coast and then sailed to the Americas and the Caribbean, where African people were sold or traded for goods bound for European markets.

This exhibition has been organized by Vivian Patterson, Curator of Collections, with Leslie Wingard, Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in Visual Culture at Williams College. Special thanks to Robert L. Volz, Custodian of the Chapin Library, Wayne G. Hammond, Assistant Chapin Librarian, Caton C. Lee, Williams Class of 2009, Jennifer C. Bees, Class of 2008, and Caitlin Higgins, Class of 2008, who have helped in organizing this exhibition.

Programming

Season Premiere Party

Wednesday, February 20

5:30 pm

Celebrate the museum's new spring exhibitions with this free, public event at the museum.

Symposium: Artistic Crossings of the Black Atlantic: The Migratory Aesthetic in Contemporary Art

A Williams College Museum of Art / Clark Artist Symposium

Saturday, March 1

9:30 am–6:00 pm: Registration and Symposium at the Clark, 225 South Street, Williamstown

6:00–8:00 pm: Reception at the Williams College Museum of Art

This day-long symposium invites five acclaimed artists—sculptor Willie Cole, multi-media artist Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, British filmmaker Isaac Julien, photographer Hank Willis Thomas, and installation artist and MacArthur

Fellow Fred Wilson—to discuss the Black Atlantic aesthetic. Through transatlantic connections among Africa, Britain, the Caribbean, and the United States, Black intellectuals and literary figures such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Richard Wright fashioned a Black Atlantic culture that made a central contribution to the modernist aesthetic. Today this Black Atlantic aesthetic extends into the realm of the visual as international artists critically engage cross-Atlantic migration as a principal focus of their work.

Admission: \$20 per person, \$10 for members of the Williams College Museum of Art and the Clark. Free to Williams students and faculty. For more information please visit www.wcma.org or www.clarkart.edu/research_and_academic

This program has been organized by the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute and the Williams College Museum of Art; it is presented in conjunction with related exhibitions at the Williams College Museum of Art.

Concert

Musical Legacies: Freddie Bryant

Sunday, April 13

2:00 pm

In response to the exhibition, *Unchained Legacies*, guitarist Freddie Bryant will perform new compositions and improvisations that explore the musical legacies of the African diaspora. From spirituals, blues, and jazz to Brazilian and Afro-Caribbean styles, his music will celebrate the cultural richness that has survived the Middle Passage and slavery as each generation rejoices in musical legacies—unchained and influencing the world. He will be playing acoustic/nylon, electric, and 12-string guitars, as well as various percussion instruments. *Part of the Williamstown Jazz Festival.*

Williams College Museum of Art

The Williams College Museum of Art is open Tuesday through Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and on Sunday from 1 to 5 p.m. Admission is free and the museum is wheelchair accessible. Contact: Suzanne A. Silitch, Director of Public Relations and External Affairs, 413.597.3178.

