

Liu Shiming Art Foundation to Present *People Everyday*, an
Exhibition of Work by Hank Willis Thomas and Liu Shiming
May 27 - July 31, 2025



Hank Willis Thomas, *The Embrace* (2023)
polished bronze, 7.5 x 10 x 10"
© Hank Willis Thomas, courtesy Pace Gallery



Liu Shiming, *Cutting through Mountains to Bring in Water* (1958)
Bronze, 34 x 37.5 x 18"
Courtesy of Liu Shiming Art Foundation

New York, New York – May 16, 2025 – **Liu Shiming Art Foundation** is pleased to present ***People Everyday***, an exhibition that brings together the work of **Hank Willis Thomas** and **Liu Shiming** to illuminate their common creative interests in the human form, the caregiving figure, and their conceptions of community as sites of power, memory, and social transformation. Over 35 works by Thomas and Liu will be on view, including sculpture, paintings, prints, and drawings. The exhibition, curated by **Emann Odufu**, will be on view from May 27 through July 31, 2025.

The works in *People Everyday* foreground Liu Shiming's and Hank Willis Thomas' explorations of pivotal moments of national transformation through the narratives of the everyday individuals they observe. Liu approaches the Cultural Revolution in China through depictions of rural life and its inhabitants, while Thomas approaches the shifting narratives around Black identity in the United States through representations of anonymous individuals caught in gestures of resistance or care. Both artists share a sculptural language rooted in the body, viewing the specificity of the body as essential to navigating moments of cultural change.

In Thomas' *"Icarus in the Sunlight"* and *"Icarus in the Moonlight,"* two 2024 works, limbs are essential to ideas of freedom and fragility. In both, limbs of a Black figure are in the process of beginning to extend. It is unclear if the figure is ascending or falling, but regardless, they reach for the sun and keep their face held high. These works, with their ambiguous sense of motion, evoke the precariousness and aspiration inherent in the pursuit of liberation.

In Liu's 1958 sculpture *"Cutting Through Mountains to Bring in Water,"* an imposing, heroic figure presses through the landscape as if he's found the strength to part rock. The work contrasts the sculptural orthodoxy of the time at China's Central Academy of Fine Arts, which preferred Western traditions that emphasized the figure in softer, solitary ways like in Rodin's *"The Thinker"* or Paul Landowski's *"Christ the Redeemer."* Liu created this work during China's "Great Leap Forward" campaign (1958-1962). His merging of figure and environment suggest his desire to advocate for culturally and bodily grounded views of human experience and resistance.

Both Liu and Thomas also explore how bodies that interact with each other can be performing essential acts of sharing hope and care. In a 1992 sculpture *"Fuse (big),"* Liu distills the act of a union of two individuals into a compact, meaningful gesture, emphasizing the profound intimacy and interconnectedness found in human relationships. In Thomas' famous 2023 work *"The Embrace,"* he immortalizes the arms of Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King in the titular position, focusing on the parts of their bodies that are most linked at that moment rather than on their heads and what occupies them.

Odufu, curator of *People Everyday*, said of the exhibition, "Whether sculpting rural mothers, boatmen, or intertwined hands, both Liu and Thomas reject the glorification of the powerful. Instead, they elevate those who carry, cradle, walk, and row—those whose quiet or bold gestures sustain the world. Their work affirms that history belongs not just to icons, but to the everyday people who endure, nurture, and resist."

Executive Director of the Liu Shiming Art Foundation, Puiking Hui, said, “This exhibition aligns beautifully with one of our core missions: to nurture discourse between the Liu Shiming legacy and some of the world’s most important contemporary voices. Thankfully we are in an era when many underrecognized artists such as Liu are being revisited and recontextualized in order to foreground their impact on visual arts history. The Foundation is proud to be a part of this journey.

On June 16, editor, journalist, and board member of the Liu Shiming Art Foundation Andrew Serwer will moderate a conversation between Hank Willis Thomas and Emann Odufu about the themes explored in the exhibition. Additional information about the talk, including how to register, will be announced soon.

About Hank Willis Thomas

Thomas (b. 1976 Plainfield, NJ; lives and works in New York, NY) is a conceptual artist focusing on themes relating to perspective, identity, commodity, media and popular culture. His work often incorporates widely-recognizable icons—many from well-known advertising or branding campaigns—to explore their ability to reinforce generalizations developed around race, gender and ethnicity. Thomas created one of his most iconic photography series in 2006, *B[®]anded*, where he superimposed bodies of Black men with the Nike swoosh logo recalling the history of branding slaves in America as well as the literal and figural objectification of Black male bodies in contemporary culture.

A trained photographer, Thomas has evolved his practice over the past several years to incorporate a variety of media including mirrors and retroreflective vinyl—an industrial material rarely used in the arts—to challenge perspectives in his work and explore 20th century protest images. Many of these protest images are activated by flash photography playing with role reversal by having the viewer step into the position of image maker. By adding multiple, hidden layers, Thomas also asks the viewer to consider who is included in history and who is erased, revealing the complicated nature of storytelling and the bias of history. Influenced by social history and the hard-fought, perennial battle for equality in all areas of his work, Thomas

co-founded For Freedoms with Eric Gottesman, Michelle Woo, and Wyatt Gallery in 2016 as a platform for creative civic engagement in America. Inspired by American artist Norman Rockwell's paintings of Franklin D. Roosevelt's Four Freedoms [1941]—freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear—For Freedoms uses art to encourage and deepen public explorations of freedom in the 21st century.

About Liu Shiming

Liu (1926-2010) is a revered Chinese artist whose works have had a distinct impact on the course of modern Chinese sculpture. Born in Tianjin, Liu attended the prestigious Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) in Beijing where he was part of the first generation of sculptors trained by the People's Republic of China to study both traditional Chinese art and French modernist principles. He continued to create and exhibit his sculpture in China until his death. Less than decade later, Liu's sculpture began to be shown outside of China, appearing in public spaces and special exhibitions, notably at the Oculus in New York City and the Asian Cultural Center in Washington, DC. More recently, he has shown in university galleries and museums throughout the US and Canada, with exhibitions planned for Europe in the next year. His works are in the permanent collections of the American University in Cairo, Egypt; Czech National Museum in Prague; Georgia State University, Atlanta; Henan Art Museum, Zhengzhou, China; Macaulay Honors College in New York City; and the National Art Museum of China and the National Museum of Chinese History in Beijing.

The Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing established the Liu Shiming Sculpture Museum in 2018, honoring his legacy and the historical significance of his works. In the Spring of 2024 the Liu Shiming Art Gallery opened in midtown Manhattan, dedicated to presenting the artist's work through both thematic and chronological exhibitions, and creating dialogue with other artists who work in the same or similar traditions.

About The Liu Shiming Art Foundation

Established in 2021, the Liu Shiming Art Foundation supports contemporary art worldwide while elevating and preserving the art of renowned Chinese artist Liu Shiming (1926-2010). Based in New York, the Foundation curates contemporary art exhibitions and provides scholarships, grants, and exchange opportunities to cultivate and grow a global arts discourse that recognizes common humanity, as Liu Shiming did as a teacher, through his art and life. ismartfund.org.

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