

INTERVIEW WITH HANK WILLIS THOMAS FOR QUESTION BRIDGE

ICP Curator Pauline Vermare Talks to the 2015 Infinity Awards Recipient for New Media

[INTERVIEW](#)

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Screenshot from *Question Bridge: Black Males* website.

What inspired your turn to photography?

I came to photography through my mother, [Deborah Willis](#), and I really think it is almost through osmosis that I became a photographer, because pictures and cameras and darkrooms were everywhere when I was growing up.

How did *Question Bridge* come about?

The idea of *Question Bridge* as a project came from my collaborator Chris Johnson, who realized that video could be used as a way to facilitate a conversation between people in communities that don't talk about certain issues very well. *Question Bridge: Black Males* is a way to talk about there being as much diversity within any demographic as there is outside of it. Asking African American men—or people who identify as African American men—to ask and answer each other's questions, we realized that they're actually very different people, and that each person is an individual, and that starts to call into question the necessity of defining people based on narrow group identity, or demographic identities.

***Question Bridge* is a brilliant art installation as well as an amazingly important social project. How was it received?**

We premiered it in five places at once, including the Brooklyn Museum and the Sundance Film Festival. We've now traveled the show to more than 38 venues

around the country, and also done about 50 screenings of it, so it's been extremely well received, as an art installation, curriculum, website, etc. And we've had over half a million people interacting with the project to date. The fact that it's transmedia, that it doesn't just exist in one or two forms but actually exists in five forms, means that people can approach it from a variety of perspectives and spend different kinds of time with it. That's what we love.

Was social media an important tool for the project?

Yes, more and more recently, after we launched the website. We were able to use social media as a way to engage people in the conversation, and it's been really exciting to see the response that people have and also having people log on and create their own identity profiles and Question Bridges.

What is the future of *Question Bridge*?

We shall see. One idea is to build other Question Bridges that aren't race or gender specific, so that people can make a Question Bridge about whatever communities they see themselves being part of.

A few words about ICP?

I've been going to ICP since my childhood, since it was on Fifth Avenue uptown, and I have maintained relationships with the staff, especially our dear Lacy Austin—so many wonderful staff and curators—and I've even had the opportunity to be a visiting professor at ICP. As I've traveled around the country and also around the world, I have so many friends who are amazing photographers, whose entry into the photography world was through taking classes at ICP. And so I see ICP not only as an exhibition space but as an education space, an outreach in creative thinking kind of resource in the city for photography. It's been extraordinarily important and essential. And not to mention that my mother's won the Infinity Award and I got to be there when she won it, and it was really exciting (Infinity Award for Writing, 1995). I never thought that I would receive such an award.

Question Bridge: Black Males was created by Chris Johnson, Hank Willis Thomas, Bayeté Ross Smith and Kamal Sinclair. The Executive Producers are Delroy Lindo, Deborah Willis and Jesse Williams.