

The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum

For Immediate Release

CHIFFON THOMAS: THE CAVERNOUS September 15, 2023 to March 17, 2024

Chiffon Thomas' first solo museum exhibition will unveil a new body of work including the artist's first public sculpture

The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum is pleased to announce *Chiffon Thomas: The Cavernous*, the first solo museum exhibition of artist Chiffon Thomas (b. 1991). The exhibition will unveil a new body of work including the artist's first public sculpture sited on the Museum's campus along Ridgefield's historic Main Street. *Chiffon Thomas: The Cavernous* will be on view September 15, 2023 to March 17, 2024, and will be accompanied by the artist's first museum catalogue and a performance by the artist.



Chiffon Thomas, *Untitled*, 2023
Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Karl Puchlik

Thomas' interdisciplinary practice, spanning embroidery, collage, sculpture, drawing, performance, and installation, examines the ruptures that exist where race, gender expression, and biography intersect. Thomas' practice is informed by his background in education, percussion, and stop motion animation, as well as a childhood steeped in religion. The artist cites artists Noah Purifoy, Louise Bourgeois, Odilon Redon, Torkwase Dyson, and Martin Puryear, authors Octavia E. Butler and bell hooks among his inspirations. Mining imagery and content from architecture, science fiction, and art history, Thomas interweaves narratives that collapse time and circumstance to survey the adaptability of identity and to scrutinize systems and structures of power and control. He joins material in architectural forms with ambiguous forms of his and others' bodies, structured and sutured in urethane, foam, plaster, and leather, to illustrate portals of regenerative space. Interrogating a legacy of colonization, Black injustice, and classism in the US, Thomas entwines materials resonant with personal and collective histories of trauma and repair, as well as resilience and transformation. Sliding between representation and abstraction, Thomas' methodology underscores society's binary opposition, finding agency and care within the gaps and fissures that endure.

The exhibition features drawings and sculptures at varying sizes and tempos, including Thomas' largest works to date and latest experimentations with new materials and fabrication methods. The centerpieces of the exhibition are three monumental sculptures, spanning approximately 12 feet high and 18 feet wide, installed inside the galleries and on the Museum's grounds. Each combines life-size fiberglass casts of a human body, weathered to appear almost sunbaked, with geodesic domes of steel and mica that appear illuminated. The solitary figure, cast in recumbent and seated postures, appears entangled, interned, and engulfed by the immersive domes' dense matrix of triangular planes. Twentieth-century American architect, engineer, and futurist Buckminster Fuller (1895-1983) received a patent for the geodesic dome in 1954 as his solution to the then ballooning housing crisis. Its novel design, although futuristic and environmentally efficient, never caught on in part due to a far-off

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appearance and challenging internal blueprint. Surveying the relationship between the structural efficiency of the human body and Fuller's utopian vision, Thomas bridges figuration with engineering, foreseeing a machine being or what he refers to as an "impossible body."

The exhibition's title, *The Cavernous*, alludes not only to the structure's capacious shape but also to a world of imagination, a realm from the distant past or a faraway future as inferred by a vast and boundless interiority. Evocative of bellies, wombs, and crania as well as housing, temporary shelters, and playground equipment, their preternatural mood is amplified by a shifting materiality that sets them aglow. Thomas has furnished the domes with miniaturized hatches, suggestive of portals and vessels to an undetermined or not yet realized landscape. At a scheduled event, the artist will perform inside the large sculpture, using sound as a catalyst to guide healing, transition, and impending regeneration.

Chiffon Thomas was born in 1991 in Chicago and lives and works in Los Angeles. He received an MFA from Yale University and a BFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and has been awarded residencies at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture and the Fountainhead Residency in Miami and is a current fellow of the Joan Mitchell Foundation. Thomas' work is in the permanent collections of the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami; Pérez Art Museum, Miami; and the Currier Museum of Art, Manchester, NH; among others. He has exhibited his work at Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles; P.P.O.W., New York; Kavi Gupta, Chicago; and SculptureCenter, New York.

Chiffon Thomas: The Cavernous is curated by Amy Smith-Stewart, Chief Curator. The exhibition will be accompanied by the artist's first museum catalogue, featuring an essay by Smith-Stewart.

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