



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Images available upon request.

**SANTA CRUZ MAH AND
THE INSTITUTE OF THE ARTS AND SCIENCES AT UCSC
ANNOUNCE *THE WRITING ON THE WALL*
An installation by Hank Willis Thomas and Dr. Baz Dreisinger
March 10–July 9, 2023**

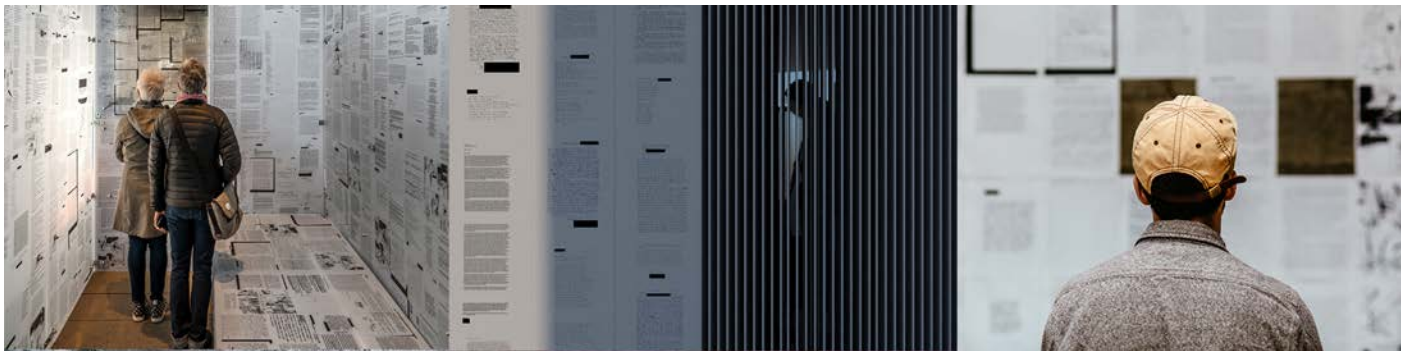


IMAGE CREDITS (FROM LEFT): *THE WRITING ON THE WALL*, PHOTOS BY OR COURTESY OF CAMERON BLAYLOCK, MASS DESIGN GROUP, AND SY ADUBU/ NYCLU.

SANTA CRUZ, CA (March 8, 2023) — The **Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History (MAH)** in partnership with the **Institute of the Arts and Sciences (IAS)** at **UC Santa Cruz** is pleased to announce *The Writing on the Wall*, an installation of writings by incarcerated individuals from around the world. The project is a collaboration between **Hank Willis Thomas, Dr. Baz Dreisinger** and **Incarceration Nations Network**, a global network of justice re-imaginers and prison reformers. The work will be on view at the MAH from **March 10–July 9, 2023**.

Emulating a prison cell, *The Writing on the Wall* recreates these largely unseen spaces in a public sphere. The installation’s design references the palimpsest-like writing on the walls of prison cells and layers these onto opaque and transparent acrylic panels arranged in modules. The arrangement of the installation is based on measurements of cell blocks, providing a spatial context for visitors and immersing them in the words of the incarcerated. The writings were collected, with the authors’ permission, by Dr. Dreisinger during her years teaching in U.S. and international prisons. As a presentation of the crisis of global criminal justice systems, these letters visually convey the narratives, thoughts, and emotions of the people behind bars.

“*The Writing on the Wall* is a vital contribution to a new movement of artists and activists who are using the power of the arts to draw attention to the ongoing catastrophe of incarceration around the world,” says Luke Fidler, manager of the Visualizing Abolition initiative and curator at

the Institute of the Arts and Sciences. “Just as the work’s earlier installation at the Davenport Jail helped us see our local community’s carceral history in new ways, the exhibition at the MAH reminds us that confronting the prison system’s violence is a project that connects Santa Cruz to the rest of the globe.”

Later this spring, the work will be presented guerilla-style as a series of pop-up, outdoor projections on local justice buildings, including the structure immediately next to the MAH in Abbott Square that served as the Santa Cruz County Jail and Courthouse from 1937 to 1986.

The Writing on the Wall is organized by Rachel Nelson and Gina Dent in partnership with the MAH as part of Visualizing Abolition, a public scholarship initiative at UC Santa Cruz designed to shift the social attachment to prisons through art and education. Funding for Visualizing Abolition is provided by the Mellon Foundation.

The work has been exhibited in: Detroit; New Orleans; Philadelphia; Miami; Washington DC; Columbus; Boise; Indianapolis; Mexico City; Santiago, Chile; and Santiago, Dominican Republic. In New York City it debuted for eight days on the High Line park, the most trafficked public park in the world.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Hank Willis Thomas is a conceptual artist working primarily with themes related to perspective, identity, commodity, media, and popular culture, often seeking out and utilizing recognizable icons from popular branding and marketing campaigns. In using icons and other nods to popular culture, he encourages the viewer to question commercial consumer representation and the racial stereotypes it perpetuates. A common practice in his artistic process, Thomas looks to the ways popular imagery informs how people perceive themselves and others around the world, comparing this practice to the one of a “visual cultural archaeologist.” A trained photographer, his work spans across many disciplines and media, and his public works always encourage a form of viewer participation and contribution.

Dr. Baz Dreisinger is the founder of the Prison-to-College Pipeline program at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, and the founder and executive director of the Incarceration Nations Network. Founded in 2018, the Incarceration Nations Network is a global network that fosters and elevates innovative justice work worldwide. Dr. Dreisinger is also the author of the acclaimed book *Incarceration Nations: A Journey to Justice in Prisons Around the World* and a 2018 Global Fulbright Scholar.

ABOUT THE INN

Incarceration Nations Network (INN) is a global network that looks to support initiatives and bring to the fore innovative prison reform and efforts toward reimagining justice around the world. Working globally but grounded locally, INN looks at the problems while striving for solutions, focused on systemic change.

ABOUT THE MAH

The Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History (MAH) is a thriving community gathering place that offers rotating art and history exhibitions, visual and performing artworks, public festivals, education and outreach programs, and cultural celebrations in collaboration with its many partners. It maintains a permanent collection of regionally significant art and artifacts, a research library, a historical archive, and historic sites including the Evergreen Cemetery, Octagon Building, and Davenport Jail. It is also home to Abbott Square, a vibrant public plaza on the museum's doorstep that offers food, social events, and year-round creative happenings.

ABOUT IAS

The Institute of the Arts and Sciences (IAS) is the Central Coast's premier university art and research center. Through groundbreaking, national-caliber art exhibitions and social justice initiatives, the IAS creatively educates students and the public about urgent issues impacting our society with innovative approaches to art and equity. The IAS features state-of-the-art galleries, a screening room featuring curated programs of short, experimental films, and an event space for performances and lectures. The galleries are a vital hub for UC Santa Cruz and the region, bringing national and internationally acclaimed artists and projects to enliven the culture of our communities.

###

Media Contacts:

Robb Woulfe
Executive Director
(831) 429-1964 x 7018
robb@santacruzmah.org

Nikki Patterson
Director of Development & Communications
(831) 429-1964 x 7025
nikki@santacruzmah.org