

## THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Michelle Jones, "Frist's '30 Americans' is contemporary, provocative", Knoxnews.com, December 21, 2013

A photograph midway through "30 Americans" shows 16 of the artists standing or sitting in a row under Glenn Ligon's neon "America" sculpture. The artists include young ones just making their names in contemporary art and older ones who inspired them. A few of the artists face each other, caught in conversation or sharing a smile; Carrie Mae Weems has a finger raised while making a point to Lorna Simpson.

"30 Americans" remains on view through Jan. 12 at the Frist Center for the Visual Arts in Nashville and is a small sample of the works in the Rubell Family Collection, Miami. The collection was started in 1964 by newlyweds Donald and Mera Rubell.

This incarnation of "30 Americans" is a carefully selected survey offering commentary on the American experience, particularly in terms of individuals seeking and asserting their place in society and others observing and critiquing aspects of our culture.

Big statements are made in the opening gallery, where a "soundsuit" by Nick Cave occupies center stage. Covered in long strands of synthetic hair, it's Chewbacca meets Mardi Gras Indian, a combination of vibrant colors and fuzzy texture. Coordinating socks woven in geometric patterns complete the piece.

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PHOTO BY JAMES PRINZ PHOTOGRAPHY

Soundsuit by Nick Cave is among the works included in "30 Americans" at the Frist Center for the Visual Arts in Nashville.

This, from 2008, is one of five soundsuits sprinkled throughout the show; others are covered in a burst of flowers, sequins or embroidery with backs that are often even more riotous than the fronts. Footage of Cave performing in the suits can be viewed in the ArtQuest gallery upstairs.

Provocative, clever

A series of colorful graffiti-inspired paintings by Jean-Michel Basquiat open the second gallery; later, Kara Walker's cut-paper silhouette "Camptown Ladies" stretches across a long wall.

His "Stranger #21" (2005) hangs nearby, a powerful yet subtle composition in which a silkscreened excerpt from James Baldwin's 1953 essay "Stranger in the Village" is covered in layers of coal dust.

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RUBELL FAMILY COLLECTION

"Branded Head" by Hank Willis Thomas

Appropriation of language, artistic traditions, imagery and even symbols of hatred and racism are found throughout this selection of works. Examples include Weems' red-tinged prints from Harvard's archive of slave photographs (displayed so effectively in last fall's Frist Center-organized Weems retrospective), Hank Willis Thomas' advertising-derived posters and Iona Rozeal Brown's fusing of Japanese "ganguro" culture with imagery from traditional Japanese woodcuts.

The Frist Center showing of "30 Americans" is the last stop on the exhibition's tour. This mix of work spans genre and is at times provocative, often clever and sometimes just funny. An exhibition catalog (including pieces not selected for this installation) is available in the museum shop.