

# RENA BRANSTEN

## GALLERY

**Lava Thomas**

***Mugshot Portraits: Women of the Montgomery Bus Boycott***

**September 8 – October 27**

**Reception September 8 / 5-7pm**

Rena Bransten Gallery is pleased to present our first solo exhibition by Lava Thomas. Thomas (b. Los Angeles, CA) is a Bay Area-based visual artist whose work explores the events, figures, and movements that inform and shape our individual and collective histories. Central to her practice are notions of visibility, resilience, and healing, whether the artworks memorialize victims of racial violence, transform galleries into contemplative spaces, or stretch the conventions of portraiture and representation. Thomas is a multi-disciplinary artist and master draftsman whose oeuvre includes photography, costume design, painting, large-scale installations, and sculpture. She has for the past two years been focused on the under-acknowledged role of African American women in the Civil Rights Movement.

This exhibition centers around a new series of graphite and conté pencil portraits based on mugshots of the women of the 1955 yearlong Montgomery Bus Boycott, illuminating and emphasizing the leadership and sustained labor of women to the boycott's success. While mugshots intrinsically aim to dehumanize and criminalize, Thomas' life size, richly detailed portraits offer a counter narrative.

Leigh Raiford, photo historian and associate professor of African American Studies at UC Berkeley, and essayist for the accompanying exhibition catalog, notes:

“We might start with the striking visibility of Thomas' fine line work—intentional, deliberate—which renders these women as highly regarded sitters rather than mechanically-reproduced subjects of the state. The purposeful clarity of each hair, each coat thread, each worry line, functions here as a steady etching of history that needs to be carefully attended to. Further exceeding her source material, Thomas has accentuated eyes and hands, underscored a smirk or a side eye. The large-scale portraits, many times the size of a mugshot, are meant to be displayed so that our eyes look directly into theirs, a demand for mutual recognition.”

Lava acknowledges the egalitarian nature of graphite and conté pencil with this new series. The accessibility of the pencil is paired in this exhibition with a corollary body of work based on the

# RENA BRANSTEN

## GALLERY

tambourine, an intuitive instrument rooted in cultures around the globe and associated with gospel music, freedom songs of the Civil Rights Movement, protests, and marches.

This exhibition is in dialogue with the current political and social climate of the country: the resurgence of white nationalism, the rise of racial hostility and lethal violence, the ascent of white male supremacy in the Executive Branch of government, and the methodical erosion of hard won Civil Rights laws and protections by the current administration.

Lava Thomas' work has been exhibited at the Museum of the African Diaspora, San Francisco; the International Print Center New York; the Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco; the Bolder Museum of Contemporary Art, Colorado; the California African American Museum, Los Angeles; the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC; and the di Rosa Center for Contemporary Art, Napa, California, among many other venues. Her work is in the permanent collections of the United States Consulate in Johannesburg, South Africa; the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC; the de Young Museum, San Francisco; and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. She studied at UCLA's School of Art Practice and received a BFA from California College of the Arts.

\*A catalog with essay by Leigh Raiford accompanies the exhibition\*

# RENA BRANSTEN

## GALLERY

1



*Freedom Song #2, 2018*

Tambourines, pyrographic calligraphy on leather, suede, grosgrain ribbon, mirrored acrylic disc

72 x 145 x 2 inches

2



*Lottie Green Varner, 2018*

Graphite and conté pencil on paper

48 ¼ x 34 ½ inches

SOLD

3



*Addie J. Hamerter, 2018*

Graphite and conté pencil on paper

48 ¼ x 34 ½ inches

4



*Alberta J. James, 2018*

Graphite and conté pencil on paper

48 ¼ x 34 ½ inches

SOLD

5



*Cora McHaney, 2018*

Graphite and conté pencil on paper

48 ¼ x 34 ½ inches

SOLD

# RENA BRANSTEN

## GALLERY

6



*Jo Ann Robinson, 2018*  
Graphite and conté pencil on paper  
48 ¼ x 34 ½ inches

SOLD

7



*Rosa Parks, 2018*  
Graphite and conté pencil on paper  
48 ¼ x 34 ½ inches

SOLD

8



*Audrey Belle Langford, 2018*  
Graphite and conté pencil on paper  
48 ¼ x 34 ½ inches

SOLD

9



*Eurette F. Adair, 2018*  
Graphite and conté pencil on paper  
48 ¼ x 34 ½ inches

SOLD

10



*Ida Mae Caldwell, 2018*  
Graphite and conté pencil on paper  
48 ¼ x 34 ½ inches

11



*Jimmie L. Lowe, 2018*  
Graphite and conté pencil on paper  
48 ¼ x 34 ½ inches

# RENA BRANSTEN

## GALLERY

12



*Mentha L. Johnson*, 2018  
Graphite and conté pencil on paper  
48 ¼ x 34 ½ inches

13



*Mrs. A. W. West, Senior*, 2018  
Graphite and conté pencil on paper  
48 ¼ x 34 ½ inches

SOLD

14



*Righteous Indignation*, 2018  
pyrographic calligraphy on leather on panel  
24 x 36 x 2 inches

SOLD

15



*Freedom Song #3*, 2018  
Tambourines, lambskin, leather, suede, grosgrain ribbon  
39 x 30 1/2 x 2 inches

16



*Illuminated Anthem*, 2018  
Tambourines, pyrographic calligraphy on metallicized leather, grosgrain ribbon, mirrored acrylic disc  
69 x 113 x 2 inches

SOLD

17



*Civil Rights Act of 1960, Unfinished*, 2018  
pyrographic calligraphy on leather on panel  
24 x 36 x 2 inches

# RENA BRANSTEN

## GALLERY

18



*Civil Rights Act of 1964, Unfinished, 2018*  
pyrographic calligraphy on leather on panel  
24 x 36 x 2 inches

19



*Voting Rights Act of 1965, Unfinished, 2018*  
pyrographic calligraphy on leather on panel  
24 x 36 x 2 inches

SOLD