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## A Random Invitation to Share Truth

Hank Willis Thomas's public-art project, 'The Truth Booth,' at MetroTech Commons



Artist Hank Willis Thomas in front 'The Truth Booth,' part of his solo exhibition 'The Truth is I See You,' a public-art project at MetroTech Commons. *PHOTO: ANDREW HINDERAKER FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

By **ANDY BATTAGLIA**

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The truth was both real and inflated in downtown Brooklyn—at least inside a public-art project installed Tuesday at MetroTech Commons.

“The Truth Booth,” part of an array of works by New York artist Hank Willis Thomas, rose up on MetroTech’s plaza in the shape of a giant white-and-black thought bubble.

With the single word “Truth” emblazoned in large block letters, it invited passersby inside, where they are asked to complete the sentence “The truth is...”

A curtain hides them from view, while a video camera records their private moments for posterity.

“I think of it as a generosity project: People offer things to others who they’ll likely never meet or even see,” said Mr. Thomas, whose art often focuses on matters of diversity and subjective truths.

Created in collaboration with members of the Cause Collective, a group of artists and designers, the booth is part of wider exhibit of Mr. Thomas’s art titled “The Truth Is I See You,” on view at MetroTech until next summer, in a presentation by the Public Art Fund. Other elements include thought bubbles with truthful messages hung on light posts and related sculptures.



One of the thought bubbles hanging from a light post. *PHOTO: ANDREW HINDERAKER FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

Started in 2011, the inflatable vinyl “Truth Booth” has toured the world, with stops in Afghanistan, South Africa, Ireland and sites around the U.S. So far, more than 5,000 people have filled it with confessions and thoughts.

After its one-day Brooklyn debut on Tuesday, the booth will appear again on Sept. 26 at Atlantic Center Terminal and at MetroTech once more in October, with a fourth date at a still-to-be-determined location next spring.

Participants’ responses live on via video documentation shared online—in archival logs at the project’s website [insearchofthetruth.net](http://insearchofthetruth.net) and at [publicartfund.org](http://publicartfund.org)—as well as on

an outdoor screen on the MetroTech plaza. It shows selections from past “Truth Booth” runs and will be updated with Brooklyn participants as the project continues elsewhere.

Thoughts as to what constitutes the truth Tuesday varied.

“We were really truthful—about our environment, work, our political situation,” said Keya Branch, who stopped with a friend while on lunch break from a communications job. “It was fun. It was random.”

“The truth is, I’m scared,” said Jessa Fisher, visiting from Park Slope. “That’s not the reality I want to be living in every day, but I guess it must be deep within me because it came out.”

She feared for her 2-year-old son, she said: “He’s so innocent, and it makes me wonder what the world is going to be like when he’s in his 30s.”

Kwesi Manwarin, a teacher from Canarsie, took a more lighthearted tack. “The truth is I love women,” he said, beaming. “And I love being black.”

“The truth is God loves each and every one of us,” said Andrea Campolo-Baez, who was struck by the display screen showing past iterations of the booth. “The truth is here, but only if you look for it.”

Giving voice to different perspectives is part of the project, said Mr. Thomas.

“Certain languages don’t even have a word for ‘truth,’ ” the artist said. “Something so simple and direct in English can have so much nuance in other languages.”

To make that point, his thought bubbles on the light posts include declarations of truth translated into 22 languages, with pronunciation guides on signs underneath. The goal: to get people in a global city in dialogue, across cultures and social constraints.

“I imagine star-crossed lovers yelling across the divide,” Mr. Thomas said.