

## **James Merle Thomas Appointed as Inaugural Deputy Director of Helen Frankenthaler Foundation**

### **Creation of New Leadership Position Reflects Foundation's Expanding Program as it Moves into Second Decade of Activity**

**NEW YORK, December 7, 2022** – The Helen Frankenthaler Foundation announced today that James Merle Thomas has been appointed as its inaugural Deputy Director. A scholar, curator, and arts administrator, Thomas brings more than 15 years of experience working across the visual arts and academia, including leadership roles at foundations, university art museums, and nonprofits supporting contemporary artists. He comes to the Foundation from the Aspen Institute, where he served as the inaugural Executive Director of the Resnick Center for Herbert Bayer Studies, and previously worked as Executive Editor and Assistant Curator to Okwui Enwezor. Thomas will begin at the Foundation in January 2023.

Thomas's appointment marks a new chapter as the Foundation nears completion of its first decade of ambitious growth. Created by Frankenthaler during her lifetime with a broad philanthropic mission, the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation became active in 2013 and in the years since has strategically expanded its grantmaking programs, including scholarships and fellowships in higher education in the arts and art history, emergency grants supporting artists on a global level, and the groundbreaking Frankenthaler Climate Initiative, among others. As the Foundation's first Deputy Director, Thomas will work closely with Executive Director Elizabeth Smith and the Board of Directors to advance these programs, and identify new opportunities and partnerships that deepen the Foundation's impact. Additionally, Thomas will collaborate with Doug Dreishpoon, the Director of the Helen Frankenthaler Catalogue Raisonné, to develop new public programs and initiatives that bolster the reach of the Foundation's exhibitions, publications, and scholarship.

"We are thrilled to welcome James to the Foundation's senior leadership team," said Dr. Lise Motherwell, Chair of the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation Board of Directors. "The Foundation has undergone significant growth during its first decade and bringing on Jim as our first Deputy Director will ensure that we can continue to expand the Foundation's operations and impact. We see ourselves not only as stewards of Helen's legacy but also as drivers of change, creating initiatives that respond to the major issues of our time. To commit to that innovation means expanding our team and what we can make possible."

"Jim brings a myriad of experiences to the position of Deputy Director. His past scholarly pursuits as a curator, writer, art historian and educator, alongside his experience in leadership roles at a range of arts nonprofits, will inform our dynamic approach to the Foundation's continued work. My colleague Doug Dreishpoon and I look forward to working with him closely as a partner and collaborator," remarks Elizabeth Smith, Executive Director of Helen Frankenthaler Foundation.

Thomas adds, "The Helen Frankenthaler Foundation is a leader among artist-endowed foundations for its grantmaking initiatives that have served to not only advance the art, legacy, and scholarship of its namesake, but also the field at large. I'm excited to join the team and think critically, creatively, and collaboratively about the ways the Foundation can continue to make a difference."

At the Aspen Institute's Colorado campus, Thomas worked with key stakeholders to launch the Institute's first permanent museum, the Resnick Center for Herbert Bayer Studies, which opened in June 2022 with a mission dedicated to promoting the legacy of the Bauhaus artist and designer who helped shape the Aspen Institute's early programmatic vision. As Executive Director, Thomas oversaw the development of the museum's initial curatorial and public programs; worked to secure a \$2.4M endowment supporting an ongoing DEAI (Diversity Equity Accessibility Inclusivity) focused curatorial fellowship; and deepened relationships with local communities through innovative partnerships, among other key initiatives. Throughout his tenure, Thomas also served as a senior artistic advisor on the Institute's various cultural programs, and produced projects with, among others, the arts organization Monument Lab and author Clint Smith.

Thomas previously served as Assistant Professor of Art History at the Tyler School of Art and Architecture at Temple University. During this time, he also held positions as Curator at the University of Pennsylvania-affiliated gallery Slought; and Executive Director of Vox Populi, a Philadelphia-based arts nonprofit. From 2011 through 2015, Thomas served as a curatorial fellow and guest curator at the Cantor Center for the Arts at Stanford University, where he produced special exhibitions dedicated to the university museum's collection of prints by Frank Stella and Robert Rauschenberg. From 2004 through 2012, Thomas was a core team member working with curator Okwui Enwezor on the research and development of a series of major group exhibitions and related publications, among them the Second Seville Biennial, the Seventh Gwangju Biennale, and the Third Paris Triennale.

Thomas received a Ph.D. from Stanford University's Department of Art History, a Master of Arts in German Literature from the University of Pittsburgh, and a Bachelor of Arts from Juniata College.

#### **About the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation**

Established and endowed by Helen Frankenthaler during her lifetime, the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation advances the artist's legacy and inspires a new generation of practitioners through a range of philanthropic, educational, and research initiatives. Since becoming active in 2013, the Foundation has continued to strategically expand its program, which includes organizing and supporting significant exhibitions of the artist's work, fostering new research and publications, advancing educational programs in partnership with arts organizations around the world, and launching groundbreaking initiatives that foster systemic change in the field. As a primary resource on the artist, and a steward of her collection and archive, the Foundation holds an extensive selection of Frankenthaler's work in a variety of mediums, her collection of works by other artists, and original papers and materials pertaining to her life and work.

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