



Chiffon THOMAS

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Rose Window Tower Iteration II, 2022. Photo Karl Puchlik/Courtesy P·P·O·W, New York

As Chiffon Thomas prepares for his first solo museum show—“The Cavernous,” opening in September at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Connecticut—he is mining the legacy of the geodesic dome, plumbing it for contemporary resonances. The utopian “hippie modernist” structure, as popularized by American architect and systems theorist Buckminster Fuller, was an effort to make shelter more efficient and affordable at a time when the United States faced a serious housing shortage.

When I visited Thomas’s Los Angeles studio this summer, I encountered the large metallic frame of a geodesic dome. Triangular, faintly iridescent mica plates dominated the space. Thomas built the dome to serve as a site for performances set to take place at the Aldrich. A sculptural human figure was fused to the structure, and its body appeared either crushed or subsumed by the dome, creating a strange human-architectural hybrid. The effect was both tender and sinister.

Thomas became fascinated by the relationship between the body and the built environment while completing his MFA at Yale, where he also made figurative embroideries, before moving west in 2020. For his earlier sculptures, he often reshaped wooden materials he reclaimed from the colonial architecture of New England—columns, decorative spindles, windows, and doorways—into assemblages that convey a sense of

destruction or collapse. Reconfiguring these elements, Thomas parsed the material and social legacies of historical structures that colonialism and enslavement produced, emphasizing the haunted qualities of ornate architectural adornments. He developed a distinctive visual palette defined by neutral colors and pervasive patina, often torching fragments of debris to create a blackened and burnt finish. With a distinctive resourcefulness, he combines these components into structures all his own.



Chiffon Thomas: *Betrothal I*, 2021. Photo Dario Lasagni/Courtesy P·P·O·W, New York

Now that he works in Southern California, Thomas is drawing on the influence of 20th-century design and the natural world around him. Specifically, Thomas is exploring the resemblance between Fuller's geodesic domes and the shapes of tents that serve as shelter for many among the unhoused population of LA—a dark refraction of earlier hopes that the domes would provide much-needed housing.

Informed in part by memories of his religious upbringing in Chicago, Thomas has also begun experimenting with stained glass, bringing more color into his work. A new series premiering at the Aldrich features pyramidal forms atop rectangular metal columns. Stained glass panels form three sides of these pyramids, which will emit blue and red light when illuminated from within. The fourth side is stitched-up, skin-like silicone that lends bodily associations to these geometric sculptures.

In October, Thomas is also showing work in the latest edition of Made in L.A., the Hammer Museum's biennial showcase of Los Angeles-based artists, including the effigy-like sculpture *Betrothal I* (2021). Comprising a sofa cover encased in layers of resin, it is heavy but lacy. Hoisted almost violently by a mechanical apparatus, it approximates the size of a human body. Throughout his practice, Thomas suggests that, while the social and architectural structures we inhabit may provide comfort and shelter, they just as easily become tools of subjugation.

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