

**Jamal Thorne**  
*Freeze Tag Hustlers Gang*



**September 14 - October 15, 2023**

**Special Event**

Artist Talk with Rob “ProBlak” Gibbs: September 28 from 7 to 8 pm EST on Zoom

(August 7, 2023 – Brookline, MA) *Freeze Tag Hustlers Gang* by Boston-based artist Jamal Thorne is an exhibition nearly three years in development, conceived during Praise Shadows Art Gallery’s earliest days. The gallery is honored to present a new group of nine collages created specifically for this exhibition, coinciding with and inspired by a pivotal recent moment in the artist’s life: fatherhood.

The title *Freeze Tag Hustlers Gang* refers to the figures depicted in Thorne’s collages, imagined co-defendants in court who have hustled and cheated to survive a system that, according to the

artist, “is openly hostile towards Black men.” They are living proof of the possibility of escape. Their “trial” is poised to turn them into martyrs for the cause of growth, elevation, evolution, and freedom.

In these works, the artist draws the comparison between life as a Black man and a game of freeze tag. The artist states:

“In the game, if you are tagged by the person who’s ‘it,’ you’re out of the game or you’re not allowed to move. In my comparison, there are many things that can ‘tag’ Black men. I have to avoid getting tagged by a two-tiered justice system, emotional and physical violence, underfunded education systems, etc. If we get tagged, then we lose the game, and the stakes are high.”

In conceiving the portraits, Thorne looked at men such as the late actor Chadwick Bozeman, and the late rapper Nipsey Hussle, who had “beat the system,” emerging from adversity as heroes despite their long odds. They are depicted in Thorne’s singular style of intricately detailed portrait drawings partially subsumed by painted layers of collage. They represent a vision of the potential that exists in Black men. In that way, they’ve done more than beat the system. In fact, they’ve transcended it because of their continued impact within the Black community.

In the largest collage of the series, *Co-Defendant No. 5*, the drawn torsos of three figures are depicted side-by-side in a police line-up. Situated among a purple ground with pink tones made of tape and torn cardboard, the dissonance between the subject matter and the colors is jarring. Thorne’s painting addresses a conundrum for these men, or rather, for the universality of the Black man: their crime is having survived, and in order to escape this institutional predicament, they must defend themselves and each other from being identified.

Thorne has been making art since the age of 15, starting as a graffiti artist (tag name *Peace*) who loved feeling connected to the physicality of the space, marking walls at night and feeling alive. In his current work, he adopts the same additive process to the wall in lieu of a canvas. In fact, he prefers to break from the rectangle, gravitating toward shapes and surfaces that allow him to carve and extract. In his practice, the artwork format invites, rather than dictates, the conversation.

In the midst of planning for this exhibition, Thorne learned that he and his wife would be expecting a son. The emotional preparation took on new dimensions, as he began to experience feelings of excitement, intimidation, and fear. How does one prepare to raise a Black boy in our world? The faces he had been drawing became vessels for him to connect to a heightened sense of mortality. These are visual references, scenarios, for Thorne to understand how he might make sense of speaking to his son about life. Perhaps one day, they will inform the answers to his son’s questions.

## **About the artist**

Jamal Thorne is an African-American artist from Maryland with a reputation for visually captivating drawings and mixed media collages. His artistic journey began at the age of 15 as a graffiti artist, igniting a lifelong passion for creative expression. Graduating from Morgan State University in Baltimore with a degree in fine art, Thorne further cultivated his artistic identity by completing a master's degree in fine arts from the School of the Museum of Fine Art and Northeastern University. Thorne is a recipient of the Joan Mitchell Grant for painting.

Thorne is currently a professor of art and design at Northeastern University, while maintaining an active studio practice in Boston. His body of work centers predominantly around his personal experiences as a Black man, delving into themes of identity performance, consumption habits, and the emotional labor inherent in everyday life. Initially focused on drawing in charcoal and graphite, Thorne has developed his artistic style into multilayered collages that blend drawings of cultural iconography, found materials, and acrylic paint.

## **About Praise Shadows Art Gallery**

Praise Shadows Art Gallery is a contemporary art program based in the Boston area with a focus on exceptional artists working in all artistic disciplines. Our worldview is informed by the notion that the artworld's untapped and unrecognized potential is worth cultivating, supporting, and championing. Since our founding in December 2020, the gallery has placed artworks by our artists in esteemed public collections, and our exhibitions have been covered widely in major international media outlets. Our work is grounded by partnering closely with artists to develop opportunities in traditional and emerging models of creativity and entrepreneurship — exhibitions, commissions, brand partnerships, new technologies, and original concepts that no one has ever tried before. [www.praiseshadows.com](http://www.praiseshadows.com)

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IMAGE:

### **Jamal Thorne**

*Co-Defendant No. 3, 2023*

Found materials, acrylic paint, cardboard

36 x 34 inches unframed

43 x 40 inches framed

Courtesy the artist and Praise Shadows Art Gallery  
(JT001)