New Museum Announces the First New York Museum Survey Exhibition Devoted to Theaster Gates

Opening in November 2022

New York, NY—In November 2022, the New Museum will present the first New York museum survey exhibition devoted to the Chicago-based artist Theaster Gates (b. 1973, Chicago, IL). Gates’s work across the areas of sculpture, social practice, interdisciplinary performance, and archiving has made him one of the most compelling artists active today.

Gates emerged in the early 2000s with a sculptural practice characterized by its use of salvaged
materials and deeply researched interdisciplinary histories—a mode of working that he maintains today. The elegiac formalism of Gates’s large-scale tar paintings, experimental clay vessels, and immersive architectural installations can be linked to both personal and collective narratives of labor and spirituality. Alongside his early sculptural production, Gates undertook an ambitious project to transform his neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago by rescuing unused buildings and turning them into experimental spaces for the exploration of Black culture. In recent years, Gates has linked these activities by rescuing a variety of historical collections of images and objects in Chicago, creating both architectural spaces and sculptural structures for their preservation and dissemination to wider audiences. Combining an intimate, poetic sensibility and a sense of civic commitment, Gates’s work re-imagines art as a form of social sculpture that can open up new modes of collectivity and knowledge production even in the most surprising contemporary settings.

Taking place across the entire museum, this exhibition will encapsulate the full range of Gates’s artistic activities, featuring artworks produced over the past twenty years and site-specific environments created by the artist to frame his archival collections. Gates has titled the exhibition, “Young Lords and Their Traces” in honor of the radical thinkers who have shaped his home city of Chicago and America as a whole. For Gates, collective forms of knowledge are built across objects, images, sounds, movements, and most importantly, through the relationships between people. This survey exhibition will comprise a choreography of works including paintings, sculptures, videos, performances, and archival collections that work together to memorialize both heroic figures and more humble, everyday icons. Gates’s elevation of these quieter sources of knowledge, and his assertion that collecting and archiving are forms not only of preservation but also of devotion and remembrance, have made his work reverberate both locally and internationally. “Young Lords and Their Traces” demonstrates the emotional and critical depth of Gates’s consistently surprising art.

“Theaster Gates: Young Lords and Their Traces” is curated by Massimiliano Gioni, Edlis Neeson Artistic Director, and Gary Carrion-Murayari, Kraus Family Curator. The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalog co-published by the New Museum and Phaidon featuring new essays by Jessica Bell Brown, Gary Carrion-Murayari, Ryan Dohoney, Coco Fusco, Dieter Roelstraete, and a new interview between Theaster Gates and Massimiliano Gioni.

Theaster Gates was born in Chicago, IL in 1973. Gates’s work has been shown in museums and galleries around the world. In recent years, he has had solo exhibitions at international institutions including Whitechapel Gallery, London; Pérez Art Museum, Miami; Haus der Kunst, Munich; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Fondazione Prada, Milan; and Kunstmuseum Basel, among many others. His work has been included in several prominent group exhibitions and biennials including “Grief and Grievance: Art & Mourning in America,” New Museum, New York (2021); “The Dirty South: Contemporary Art, Material Culture, and Sonic Impulse,” Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Virginia, and Crystal Bridges Museum, Bentonville, Arkansas (2021); Bamako Biennial, Bamako, Mali (2019); Chicago Architecture Biennial, Chicago (2019); 14th Istanbul Biennial (2015); 56th Venice Biennale (2015); Prospect 3, New Orleans (2014); Documenta 13, Kassel, Germany (2012); the 2010 Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, and many more. Gate has won numerous awards and honors including the Frederick Kiesler Prize for Architecture and the Arts (2021); the Kurt Schwitters Prize (2018); the Nasher Sculpture Prize (2018); Artes Mundi 6; and the New School Vera List Center Prize for Art and Politics (2012). He lives and works in Chicago.
ABOUT NEW MUSEUM
The New Museum is the only museum in New York City exclusively devoted to contemporary art. Founded in 1977, the New Museum is a center for exhibitions, information, and documentation about living artists from around the world. From its beginnings as a one-room office on Hudson Street to the inauguration of its first freestanding building on the Bowery in 2007, the New Museum continues to be a place of experimentation and a hub of new art and new ideas.