

# Contemporary Arts Museum Houston

5216 Montrose Boulevard  
Houston, Texas 77006  
CAMH.ORG | @camhouston

Trust Artists.

Press Release

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Exhibition

## *Theaster Gates: The Gift and The Renegade* May 17–October 20, 2024



Theaster Gates tarring in his Chicago studio. 2023. Photographer: Ryan Stefan. Image courtesy Theaster Gates Studio.

HOUSTON, TX (March 21, 2024) - Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (CAMH) is excited to announce the upcoming exhibition, *Theaster Gates: The Gift and The Renegade*, featuring a series of large-scale paintings, sculptures, and installations that reckon with histories of labor, material legacies, and the sociopolitical architecture of the built environment. Born out of a multi-layered engagement with historic bricks from Houston's Freedman's Town, *The Gift and The Renegade* contends with patterns of promise and retraction related to the fight for land, particularly for racialized and subjugated communities.

#TheasterGates  
#TheGiftandTheRenegade  
#TrustArtists

### Press Contact

For high-resolution images or media inquiries, contact:

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Houston's Mother Ward, Freedmen's Town in Fourth Ward is a community first built by newly freed Black people, who formed a vibrant community anchored by handmade and laid brick streets. Described as "the crown jewel of the Emancipation Trail," Freedmen's Town is a primary Black cultural landmark that includes seven sites recognized by the UNESCO Routes of Enslaved Peoples Project. This once thriving neighborhood has faced decades of disruptions, with loss of land, history, and infrastructure, including the partial destruction of its historic hand-made brick streets. Today, the remaining brick streets serve as an enduring reminder of the possibility of Black places.

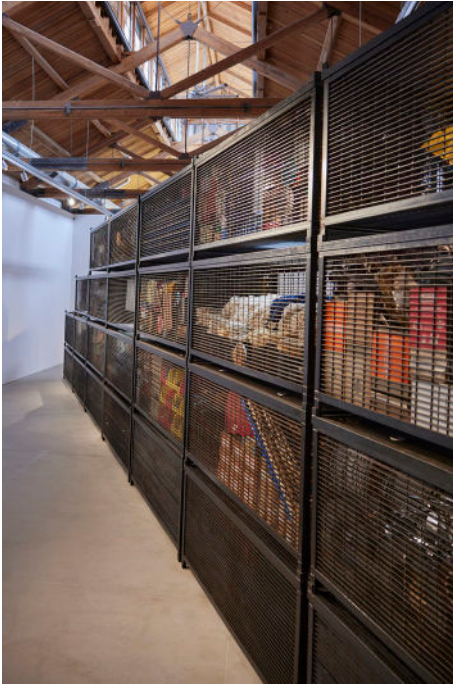
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Installation view of *Theaster Gates: How to Sell Hardware* at Gray Warehouse, 2021. Image courtesy Theaster Gates Studio.

To reimagine this potentiality of place, CAMH and Houston Freedmen's Town Conservancy (HFTC) have taken on a multi-year project called Rebirth in Action. The first part of this project resulted in local artist residencies (CAMHLAB in Freedmen's Town), fellowships, and a group show of 12 Houston-based artists at CAMH titled *THIS WAY: A Houston Group Show*. "The continuation of Rebirth in Action through *The Gift and The Renege* creates a platform for Theaster Gates to elevate the history and future of Freedmen's Town and neighborhoods like it across the United States," says CAMH Executive Director Hesse McGraw. "For CAMH, this exhibition presents the unique opportunity for the Museum to work beyond our walls in collaboration with the Freedmen's Town community to realize a long-awaited preservation effort that bridges art, infrastructure, and community rebirth."

"*The Gift and The Renege* is my attempt at demonstrating the ways that industrial landscapes, displacement, and the historical fight for land rights push the boundaries of modernist and formalist architectural approaches in my practice," said Theaster Gates. "I'm grateful for the opportunity to work closely with CAMH, Houston Freedmen's Town Conservancy, conservationists, and residents of the Fourth Ward to honor these historic bricks and to complicate and deepen our understanding of race, land use, and land rights through sculpture and sanctuary."

Gates, whose practice demonstrates a deep commitment to the philosophies of Shintoism - namely the belief in the power and life within things - has been celebrated for his radical acknowledgement, reclamation and elevation of both important and ordinary Black objects, spaces, collections, and craft. In 2010, Gates created the Rebuild Foundation, a nonprofit platform for art, cultural development, and neighborhood transformation on the South Side of Chicago. Rescuing over 40 buildings from abandonment and converting them into spaces of artistic inquiry and cultural production, Gates draws a magnifying glass to the legacies of racially restrictive covenants and policies, such as redlining. His practice offers both speculative and pragmatic creative solutions to complex municipal problems. Through his work, Gates powerfully highlights the true value that Black spaces and objects hold as sites of resilience, cultural value, and redemption.

"We are honored to work with Theaster on *The Gift and The Renege*, and a long-term project that allows for deep community engagement that aids in finding new strategies to ceremoniously return the bricks to their home," says Senior Curator and Director of Public Initiatives,

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Headshot of Theaster Gates. Photo: Rankin.

Ryan N. Dennis. “Theaster is an artist who understands complex city challenges and uniquely situates art, Black life, and history at the center of the conversation. To see the way this initiative has taken shape, in dialogue with Theaster on how to pivot to accommodate changes we can’t control and respond to various scenarios, has been a grounding point for the exhibition and project as a whole. We are looking forward to seeing how our work continues to evolve and the conversations we are able to have through this process.”

Gates has previously exhibited at CAMH in *Hand+Made: The Performative Impulse in Art and Craft* in 2010, *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art* in 2013, and *The Dirty South: Contemporary Art, Material Culture, and the Sonic Impulse* in 2021. *The Gift and The Renege* marks the artist’s first solo exhibition at the Museum. Gates will return in Fall 2024 to lead his annual Black Artists Retreat (B.A.R.) held in Houston for the first time. More information about this event will be forthcoming.

*Theaster Gates: The Gift and The Renege* was developed throughout the planning and engagement process of Rebirth in Action, and is organized by Contemporary Arts Museum Houston and co-curated by Ryan N. Dennis, Senior Curator and Director of Public Initiatives, and Hesse McGraw, Executive Director.

### **About the Artist**

Theaster Gates (b. 1973) is an artist and social innovator who lives and works in Chicago. Over the past decade, Gates has translated the intricacies of Blackness through space theory and land development, sculpture, and performance. Through the expansiveness of his approach as a thinker, maker, and builder, he extends the role of the artist as an agent of change. His performance practice and visual work find roots in Black knowledge, objects, history, and archives.

Gates has exhibited and performed at The LUMA Foundation, Arles, France (2023); The New Museum, New York, (2022); The Aichi Triennial, Tokoname (2022); The Serpentine Pavilion, London (2022); The Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK (2021); Whitechapel Gallery, London, UK (2013 and 2021); Tate Liverpool, UK (2020). In 2010, Gates created the Rebuild Foundation, a nonprofit platform for art, cultural development, and neighborhood transformation that supports artists and strengthens communities through free arts programming and innovative cultural amenities in the Grand Crossing neighborhood of the South Side of Chicago.

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Gates is the recipient of numerous awards and honorary degrees including the Isamu Noguchi Award (2023); National Buildings Museum Vincent Scully Prize (2023); and many more. In April 2018, Gates was appointed as the inaugural Distinguished Visiting Artist and Director of Artist Initiatives at the Lunder Institute for American Art, Colby College, Waterville Maine. He was the Visiting Artist in Residence at the American Academy in Rome (2020); and was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 2021. Gates is a professor at the University of Chicago in the Department of Visual Arts.

## About Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (CAMH)

Established in 1948, CAMH is one of the oldest non-collecting contemporary art museums in the country, and is internationally known for presenting pivotal and landmark work by artists recognized as the most important of the 20th and 21st centuries. CAMH's mandate is to be present, to connect artists and audiences through the urgent issues of our time, and to adventurously promote the catalytic possibilities of contemporary art. CAMH's programming, both in and beyond the Museum, is presented free to the public, and advocates for artists' essential role in society.

## CAMH Mission

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston presents extraordinary, thought-provoking arts programming and exhibitions to educate and inspire audiences nationally and internationally.

## General Information

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston is located at 5216 Montrose Boulevard, in the heart of Houston's Museum District.

## Hours

Wed 11AM-6PM  
Thu 11AM-9PM  
Fri 11AM-6PM  
Sat 11AM-6PM  
Sun 11AM-6PM

Admission is always free. For more information, visit CAMH.ORG or call 713.284.8250.

## Support

Presenting sponsorship for *Theaster Gates: The Gift and The Renege* is provided by Mellon Foundation. Additional support is provided by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.



CAMH exhibitions are made possible by the patrons, benefactors, and donors to CAMH's Major Exhibition Fund: Chinhui Juhn and Eddie Allen, Louise Jamail, Sissy and Denny Kempner, Dillon Kyle and Sam Lasseter, Cabrina and Steven Owsley, Elisa and Cris Pye, Beverly and Howard Robinson, Louisa Stude Sarofim, and Mary Ann and F. Carrington Weems Foundation.

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