

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Theaster Gates's *Monument in Waiting* Unveiled in Philadelphia

Installed on Drexel University's campus in University City, Gates's public sculpture prompts viewers to reconsider historical figures and monuments that reinforce systems of oppression.



Theaster Gates, *Monument in Waiting* (detail), 2020, installed at Parrish Art Museum. Credit: Timothy Schenck. © Theaster Gates.

(Philadelphia, PA - June 28, 2022) – Presented by Philadelphia Contemporary, and with the support of the Forman Arts Initiative and Drexel University, GRAY is pleased to announce the unveiling of *Monument in Waiting*, 2020, by Theaster Gates. Courtesy of the artist and GRAY, the sculpture – which was created during the turbulent summer of 2020 and first exhibited at the Parrish Art Museum in Water Mill, New York – will be installed on Drexel University’s campus.

Comprised of reclaimed stone plinths and granite tiles, *Monument in Waiting* evokes a dismantled public forum. The work responds to ongoing socio-political dialogue and public scrutiny of historical figures and monuments, particularly those that reinforce systems of oppression. This tribute, like much of Gates’s work, asks viewers to reckon with and reconsider the materials and narratives which these spaces uphold and celebrate over others.

“My monument work, from *Black Chapel* – my pavilion commissioned for Serpentine Galleries – to this non-monument in Philadelphia and the Stony Island Arts Bank in Chicago, has me grappling with the best indicators of temporal markers,” Gates stated. “Monuments spatially and symbolically mark time and help us conjure meaning. Honoring the truths of a people or a moment is necessary soul work for the nation. I’m glad to be part of that.”

With *Monument in Waiting*, Gates acknowledges the history of injustice and propaganda imposed by Confederate and colonialist monuments. The artist draws viewers through the installation, into a space for confronting these historical truths, and of aspiring collectively toward a future built upon equal justice. An inscription engraved on one of the plinths reads, “Until real heroes bloom, this dusty plinth will wait.”

“With an interest in urban planning and preservation, Gates is known for redeeming spaces that have been left behind, and we are honored to bring his work to this part of Philadelphia,” says Harry Philbrick, Founding Director and CEO of Philadelphia Contemporary. “The sculpture will prompt viewers to reflect upon our city’s past, present, and future while also engaging the next generation of leaders—today’s students.”

“Our democracy was born in Philadelphia on a set of ideals,” adds Drexel University President John Fry. “Having Theaster Gates’ magnificent *Monument in Waiting* installed at a busy pedestrian thoroughfare at the heart of Drexel’s campus will give all passersby the opportunity to pause in contemplation about the

progress we have made toward fulfilling those ideals, and the distance left for us to travel. I am grateful to Philadelphia Contemporary and the Forman Arts Initiative, for choosing the Drexel campus as the installation site for *Monument in Waiting* and supporting this bold initiative in public art. And we are all indebted to the genius of Theaster Gates.”



Theaster Gates, *Monument in Waiting*, 2020, installed at Parrish Art Museum. Credit: Timothy Schenck. © Theaster Gates.

Monument in Waiting is located at Drexel’s Korman Quad, on 33rd Street, between Chestnut and Market Streets. This installation follows the University of Pennsylvania’s 2020 unveiling of Brick House by Simone Leigh—a monumental sculpture depicting a Black woman’s head atop a form that suggests a skirt or building—which sits at the corner of 34th and Walnut Streets, the nearby gateway to Penn.

"Theaster Gates is one of the most exciting artists of our time," remarks Michael Forman, Founder of Forman Arts Initiative. "He has a unique talent to bring people together to reflect on and engage with timely issues and important histories, which is evident in *Monument in Waiting*. The Forman Arts Initiative is pleased to collaborate with Philadelphia Contemporary and Drexel University, where I have the honor of serving as a Board Member, to bring one of Gates' first public sculptures to Philadelphia. We expect the work will generate a rich dialogue over the coming year across campus and beyond."

Following the unveiling of *Monument in Waiting* this summer, a series of corresponding programs will be announced in the fall. The piece, which will remain installed for one year, is presented by Philadelphia Contemporary, the Forman Arts Initiative, and Drexel University, courtesy of the artist and GRAY gallery, Chicago/New York.

ABOUT THEASTER GATES

Theaster Gates (b. 1973) was born and raised in Chicago, where he currently lives and works. Drawing from his earlier vocational pursuits in public service, urban planning, and religious studies, Gates works to redeem spaces that have been left behind, centering his practice on the possibility of the "life within things." Known for his recirculation of art-world capital, Gates's recent artworks possess an intersectional relationship between space theory and land development, sculpture and performance, smartly upturning art values, land values, and human values. In all aspects of his work, he contends with the notion of Black space as a formal exercise—one defined by collective desire, artistic agency, and the tactics of a pragmatist.

With a celebrated stronghold in Chicago, Gates's career has seen international recognition from his participation in the Whitney Biennial (2010), documenta 13 (2012), and the Venice Biennale (2015), to major museum exhibitions all over the world. Recent solo exhibitions include *The Listening Room*, Seattle Art Museum (2011–12); *13th Ballad*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (2013); *Soul Manufacturing Corporation: To Make the Thing that Makes the Things*, Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia (2013); *Processions*, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC (2016); *True Value*, Fondazione Prada, Milan (2016); *Black Archive*, Kunsthau Bregenz, Austria (2016); *How to Build a House*, Museum, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (2016); *The Minor Arts*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (2017); *Black Madonna*, Kunstmuseum Basel (2018) and *Sprengel Museum*, Hannover (2018); *The Black Image*

Corporation, Fondazione Prada, Milan (2018); Amalgam, Palais de Tokyo, Paris and Tate Modern, London (2019); and Black Chapel, Haus der Kunst, Munich (2019). Many of Gates's recent exhibitions, including Black Madonna and The Black Image Corporation, are a part of his ongoing engagement with the archives of Johnson Publishing Company. Gates has received numerous awards and distinctions, including the Nasher Prize (2018), the Kurt Schwitters Prize (2017), the American Academy of Arts & Sciences Award (2016), the Smithsonian American Ingenuity Award for Social Progress (2015), and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden trusteeship (2015). Public collections include Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Tate Modern, London; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, among many others.

ABOUT PHILADELPHIA CONTEMPORARY

Founded in 2016, Philadelphia Contemporary is a contemporary art organization whose mission is to connect the people and places of Philadelphia through art and partnership. Currently nomadic, Philadelphia Contemporary presents visual art, performance art, and spoken word across the city, with ambitions to establish a freestanding, globally oriented, and locally aware non-collecting arts institution.

ABOUT DREXEL UNIVERSITY

Founded in 1891, Drexel University is a comprehensive global R1-level research university with a unique model of experiential learning that combines academic rigor with one of the nation's premier cooperative education programs.

Drexel fulfills its founder's vision of preparing each new generation of students for productive professional and civic lives while also focusing the University's collective expertise on solving society's greatest problems. Drexel is a globally engaged urban research university, dedicated to advancing knowledge and society and to providing every student with a valuable, rigorous, experiential, technology-infused education, enriched by its cooperative education program. A focal point of Drexel's latest strategic plan is fostering and strengthening an inclusive and equity-driven culture.

ABOUT GRAY

GRAY is a globally recognized team of art professionals devoted to fostering the development of historically important artists' careers and to building outstanding art collections. Founded in 1963, GRAY has built its

reputation as a resource for Modern, Post-War, and Contemporary art with prominent private and institutional clients worldwide. Known for producing critically acclaimed exhibitions and programming from its galleries in Chicago and New York, GRAY represents a roster of internationally recognized artists such as McArthur Binion, Jim Dine, Torkwase Dyson, Theaster Gates, David Hockney, Rashid Johnson, Alex Katz, Jaume Plensa, Leon Polk Smith, and Evelyn Statsinger, among others.

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