

REGEN PROJECTS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:



Theaster Gates

But To Be A Poor Race

January 14 – February 25, 2017

Opening reception: Saturday, January 14, 6:00 – 8:00 pm

Gallery hours: Tuesday – Saturday, 10:00 am – 6:00 pm

Regen Projects

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‘To be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in a land of dollars is the very bottom of hardships.’
– W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903)

Regen Projects is pleased to present its first exhibition with Theaster Gates. Gates is internationally renowned for his cross-disciplinary practice that spans sculpture, painting, sound, and performance. Featuring all new works, many of which will be created on site, this exhibition marks the artist’s continued investigation into the relationship between visual politics, shamanism, and object making.

The title of the exhibition refers to American sociologist and civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois’ seminal work *The Souls of Black Folk*. Comprised of 14 essays that portray the genius and humanity of the Black race, this publication is considered an important work in sociology and African American literary history. Inspired by Du Bois’ sociological studies on the advancements of Black Americans from the time of Emancipation to 1900, the exhibition will feature a series of response paintings in which the statistical data gathered and made visual by Du Bois has been reduced to abstract color fields and geometric motifs. Both an act of homage to Du Bois’ sophisticated Modernism as well as a reference to the history of art, Gates’ paintings give poetic form to the archival.

“*But To Be A Poor Race* questions a particular kind of poverty, one that is not just about a lack of economic capital but one that is deprived of the basic elements from which one can make a living,” says Gates. For Gates, sculpture – as a derivative of the minor arts, craft, or the

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decorative and plastic arts – has been an important historical invention. Throughout Gates' artistic career and especially during his time at the University of Cape Town in South Africa, the need for divine acts to have material and human vessels has undergirded his investigations. The exhibition begins to demonstrate Gates' thoughtful handling of sometimes imagined African reliquary objects and other historic Black forms, referencing the power that can be honed from 'poor' materials. *But To Be A Poor Race* offers a salute to the possibility of power and beauty.

Gates has held a longtime interest in the conservation, preservation, and archiving of cultural objects, artifacts, publications, films, and music. Part of a larger ongoing project that Gates has overseen is the amassing of *Jet* magazines, a weekly digest that ran in print form from 1951-2014 from the Johnson Publishing House. Featuring profiles and news stories on important African Americans, the publication also covered the civil rights movement and served as a beacon of upward mobility and inspiration for its readers. Representing an interrogation of the archive, the exhibition will include poems written by Gates and printed along the spines of bound volumes of *Jet* magazines, forming a catalog of Black thought. Arranged at eye level on the gallery wall, Gates envisions that when the poems are read aloud by its readers, their voices will create a cacophony of sound, chanting the mantra of Black political thought and street poetry of the late 90s.

Also on view will be the debut of a new video work entitled *My country tis of thee*. Depicting a performance featuring Gates and the experimental music ensemble The Black Monks of Mississippi, the video playfully references the American patriotic song *My Country, 'Tis of Thee* and combines diverse musical traditions ranging from Spirituals to Rock to ask questions about the state of our political environment and the role of artists in our society.

Serving as a marking point of artistic and formal reflection, the sculptures, paintings, and video on view in the exhibition present Gates' recent inquiries into the role of painting, history making, the power of material culture, and the polemics of patriotism.

Event:

Conversation with Theaster Gates and Hamza Walker, executive director of LAXART
Regen Projects
Sunday, January 15 at 2:00 pm

Born in 1973 in Chicago, Illinois, **Theaster Gates** received a master's degree in urban planning, ceramics, and religious studies from the Iowa State University (2006). He lives and works in Chicago.

His work has been included in numerous exhibitions worldwide. Recent solo exhibitions include *Black Archive*, Kunsthaus Bregenz, Bregenz, Austria; *True Value*, Fondazione Prada, Milan, Italy; and *How to Build a House Museum*, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Canada (all 2016); *The Black Monastic*, Museu Serralves, Porto, Portugal (2014); *13th Ballad*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Chicago, IL (2013); *The Listening Room*, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, WA (2011); and *To Speculate Darkly: Theaster Gates and Dave the Potter*, Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, WI (2010). Group shows include the Whitney Biennial, New York, NY (2010); dOCUMENTA (13), Kassel, Germany (2012); *The Spirit of Utopia*, Whitechapel Gallery, London, England (2013); *When Stars Collide*, The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY (2014); *Gone Are the Days of Shelter and Martyr*, as part of *All The World's Future's*, the 56th International Art Exhibition – Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy; and *Three or Four Shades of Blue*, as part of *SALTWATER: A Theory of Thought Forms*, 14th Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul, Turkey (both 2015). In 2017 Gates will have a solo exhibition in the Tower at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (March 5 – September 4, 2017).

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Gates has been the recipient of numerous awards, including the *Kurt Schwitters Prize* (2017); *Smithsonian Ingenuity Award for Social Progress* (2015); the *Artes Mundi 6 Prize* (2015); the inaugural *Vera List Center Prize for Art and Politics* (2013); *United States Artists Fellowship* (2012); *Graham Foundation Architecture Award* (2012, 2009); and *Artadia: The Fund for Art and Dialogue Award* (2008). He is the founder and executive director of the non-profit Rebuild Foundation and Professor in the Department of Visual Art at the University of Chicago.

An opening reception for the artist will be held on Saturday, January 14, from 6:00 – 8:00 pm.

For all press inquiries, please contact Ben Thornborough at +1 310 276 5424 or benthornborough@regenprojects.com.

For all other inquiries, please contact Jennifer Loh, Lindsay Charwood, or Isha Welsh at Regen Projects.

Pictured above: Theaster Gates, *Mountain Aura*, 2016.