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'Clay made me': Theaster Gates to receive series of major London shows around his love of ceramics *The Chicago-based artist will design the 2022 Serpentine Pavillion*

Gareth Harris



Theaster Gates will design the 2022 Serpentine Pavilion Courtesy of HBO

The Chicago-based artist and activist Theaster Gates will present shows and projects in London at the Victoria & Albert Museum, the Whitechapel Gallery and the Serpentine Galleries over the next year.

As part of an ambitious initiative entitled *The Question of Clay*, Gates will design the Serpentine Pavilion located in Kensington Gardens in 2022, one of London's most important annual architecture commissions. Previous recipients include Zaha Hadid, Frida Escobedo and the South African practice Counterspace, which has designed this year's pavilion.

Meanwhile, the artist will show ceramic objects, sculptures, installations, film and studio materials from the past two decades, including his recent *Afro-Mingei* works, in an exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery entitled *Theaster Gates: A Clay Sermon* (29 September-9 January 2022). Works by other potters, including the enslaved African American David Drake, will also be included.

“Working in partnership with the V&A and drawing from other public and private collections, Gates has selected a number of historic objects for his Whitechapel Gallery exhibition that speak to the significance of ceramics in global trade, colonial expansion, slavery and abolitionism in the UK,” says a statement.

The multi-part presentation is informed by Gates' recent experience as a V&A Research Institute/V&A East Emeritus Fellow. The artist recently worked on the *Brickfield Newham*

community project at V&A East — the South Kensington museum’s planned outpost in Stratford — which gave residents around Newham in East London the chance to make and fire their own bricks in a recreated kiln at The Factory Project in the Royal Docks.

During his V&A Fellowship, Gates researched the museum’s ceramics collection with the “response being exhibited as part of the Whitechapel Gallery exhibition, and in the ceramics galleries at V&A South Kensington [this autumn]”, adds the project statement. His research at the V&A has focused on the melding of Eastern and Western practices and “political histories within craft”.

Earlier this year, Gates told *Ceramics Monthly* magazine: “Clay made me and is forever the root of my artistic interest, but I don’t feel limited by any origin story to work solely within the confines of my origins. Blackness, clay, immateriality, and space are all launching pads that encourage advanced practice, reflection, trial, and iteration. I am practising acts of creation.”

In 2006, Gates made his home in a former confectionery store on South Dorchester Avenue in the heart of Greater Grand Crossing, one of Chicago’s most deprived areas. In 2009 he purchased the neighbouring building, which became known as the Archive House, home to 14,000 books from the former Prairie Avenue Bookshop. Reconstructed using discarded resources from across the city, it fulfils his Rebuild Foundation’s remit of regeneration via “individual empowerment and community engagement”.