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Theaster Gates to Gift Work by Dave the Potter to the Artist's Descendants

Opening on March 26 in New York, Exhibition Celebrates the Impact of the Enslaved Ceramicist's Legacy on Gates's Practice

Dave: All My Relations Features Two Historical Vessels by Dave the Potter Alongside Two New Works by Gates



Theaster Gates in his studio, Chicago, 2024. Photo: Wyatt Conlon

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NEW YORK, March 25, 2026—Gagosian is pleased to present *Dave: All My Relations*, an exhibition organized by Theaster Gates that celebrates David Drake (c. 1801–1874), an enslaved ceramicist from Edgefield, South Carolina, known as Dave the Potter. The exhibition traces Dave's impact on Gates's own practice and serves to commemorate the gift of a historic work by Dave from Gates's personal collection to the artist's descendants. That vessel will be shown together with another recently returned to Dave's family and alongside two new works by Gates. *Dave: All My Relations* opens on March 26 at Gagosian's Park & 75 location in New York.

Now recognized as a significant figure in the history of American ceramics, Dave was a skilled potter who made some of the finest examples of the alkali-glazed stoneware for which the Edgefield area is known. Yet, beyond his mastery of craft and scale, Dave left a mark that set him apart for its daring and

beauty: he not only signed his work; in some cases, he incised them with verse. This act was illegal in the antebellum South, where laws prohibited enslaved individuals from being taught to read or write.

Gates first encountered Dave's work in 2008 while studying ceramics under Ingrid Lilligren. Having explored the work of many of the pioneers in the field, he asked her about the great historical Black ceramicists, and she directed him to an obscure catalogue for a 1998 exhibition presented at the McKissick Museum at the University of South Carolina in Columbia: *I made this jar . . . : The Life and Works of the Enslaved African-American Potter, Dave*. This revelation would strike a chord within Gates, and its reverberations continue through his practice today.

Gates's discovery of Dave's life and legacy was foundational to his practice. In his acclaimed 2010 exhibition *To Speculate Darkly: Theaster Gates and Dave the Potter* at the Milwaukee Art Museum, Gates began a dialogue with Dave through both form and performance. The exhibition included a vessel by Dave as its centerpiece and Gates composed a series of hymns that included and responded to select couplets from Dave's pots. These hymns were performed during the exhibition by a gospel choir and later compiled and published in a hymnal, which is included in the current exhibition. Gates's ceramics have also continued to be inspired by Dave's, echoing their use of glazes and unique forms. His early incorporation of the spirit and practice of Dave's work played a role in igniting a renewed interest in the artist that would culminate in numerous recent institutional exhibitions.

For the exhibition at Park & 75, Gates worked with a team to pulverize some forty-five of his own pots into pieces, combining these into a conglomerate to form monolithic sculptures, one of which is included in the exhibition. In a conversation for the *Gagosian Quarterly* with Jessica Bell Brown, executive director of the Institute for Contemporary Art at Richmond's Virginia Commonwealth University, he said: "I will be the plinth, and Dave will be the story." The sacrifice of his works and labor represent for Gates the weight of Dave's legacy upon his own career.

Gates has also made a large stoneware wood ash- and alkali-glazed pot, employing techniques, materials, and finishes similar to those Dave used two centuries ago. Lacking the same direct utility of Dave's storage jars, it instead borrows its shape from the sculptural vernacular that Gates has refined over the course of twenty years. This meeting of minds is reflected in the couplet that Gates has incised on the side of the vessel, a combination of lines from one of Dave's most iconic works and Gates's own direct address to his predecessor: "Where is all my relations? / Shit Dave, where are all our patrons."

Theaster Gates: Unto Thee (2025–26), the artist's first solo exhibition in his hometown, was recently on view at the Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago. Gates is now developing a permanent installation commissioned by the Obama Presidential Center on Chicago's South Side.

For Theaster Gates's biographical information and exhibition history, [please visit gagosian.com](http://gagosian.com).

#TheasterGates

THEASTER GATES

Dave: All My Relations

Opening reception: Thursday, March 26, 6–8pm

March 26–May 2, 2026

Park & 75, 821 Park Avenue, New York

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