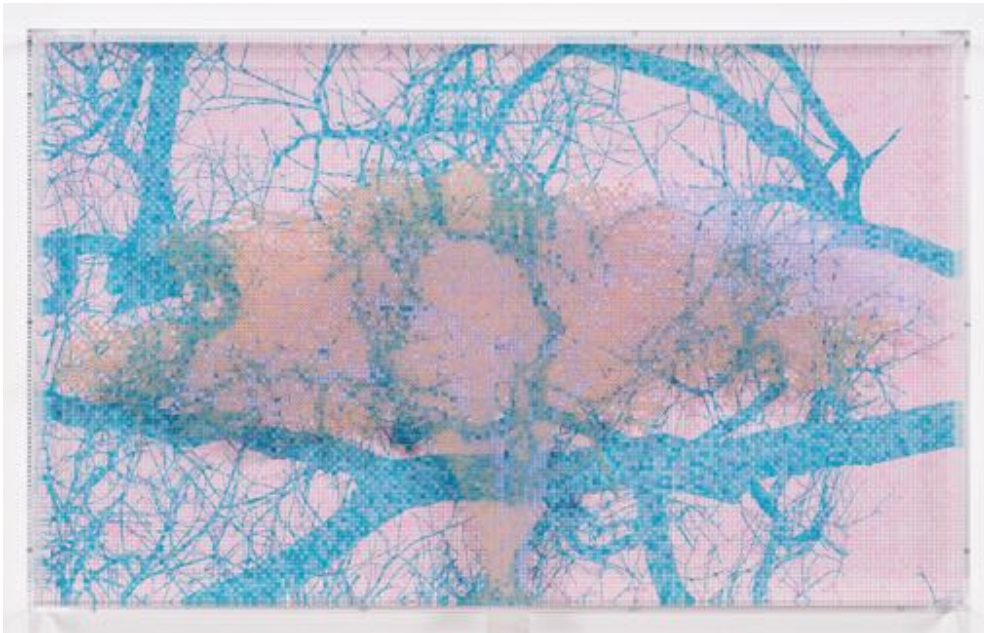


HAUSER & WIRTH

Press Release

Charles Gaines Ciphering African Acacias and Supreme Court Decisions

Hauser & Wirth Paris
10 June – 26 September 2026



For over five decades, pioneering conceptual artist Charles Gaines has used systems to create series of works that mine the complex relationship between perception and meaning. This June, for his first exhibition at Hauser & Wirth's Paris gallery, Gaines will debut a new sequence of Plexiglas works from his celebrated Numbers and Trees series—works of extraordinary intricacy that transform photographs of acacia trees, shot during a trip to Tanzania in 2023, into layered meditations on difference, identity and the limits of interpretation. Alongside these new gridworks, Gaines will present the latest installment of his Manifestos series, developed whilst in residence at the gallery's Somerset location in 2025, in which he subjects two of the most consequential rulings in American legal history to an unexpected and revelatory musical logic.

About the exhibition

At the core of Gaines' practice is a conviction as radical as it is precise: that a work of art need not originate in the artist's intention to carry profound meaning. From his Manifestos compositions to his signature Plexiglas grids, every work that emerges from his studio is the product of a system—rule-based, self-determined and generative—that produces outcomes neither he nor the viewer can fully anticipate.

Trees have been a central motif in Gaines' practice since the 1970s, when he first began plotting their forms on numbered grids in the Walnut Tree Orchard series (1975 – 2014). His methodical examination continues with Numbers and Trees, conceived in 1986. Following a trip to Tanzania in 2023, Gaines began a new chapter within this long-running series, initially engaging the country's ancient baobabs. The works on view in Paris turn to the acacia, with its characteristic flat-topped crown, demonstrating how the artist continues to forge new paths within one of his most acclaimed series.

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Gaines' process begins by photographing each tree from the same distance and under identical conditions, so that when the images are layered their individuality is preserved rather than obscured. He then assigns each tree a distinctive color and breaks down the photographic composition into individual cells. Each successive work in the series is realized by overlaying the forms one at a time. The result is a rigorous system for charting similarity and difference that simultaneously challenges the dominance of subjectivity in artistic expression. These works call attention to our tendency to impose categories and suggest the arbitrary nature of other manufactured systems in our society. Viewed up close, the cohesive effect of the gridded geometry dissolves and the rule-based system is laid bare.

For the acacias on view in Paris, Gaines shifts the perspective dramatically from the preceding Tanzania series, looking up at the canopy from beneath the tree. Alternating between photographic and painted backgrounds, the detail views open onto glimpses of sky through gaps in the branches, creating a sense of airiness and light. Here, paint is applied in gestural swirls that contrast the flatness of the gridded foreground. Though his recent works have taken on an increasingly painterly quality, Gaines' artistic approach remains firmly rooted in a conceptual logic. By formulating a system that governs how a work of art is produced without predetermining its appearance, such as the arbitrary selection of colors at the outset, a sense of genuine surprise emerges for both artist and viewer.

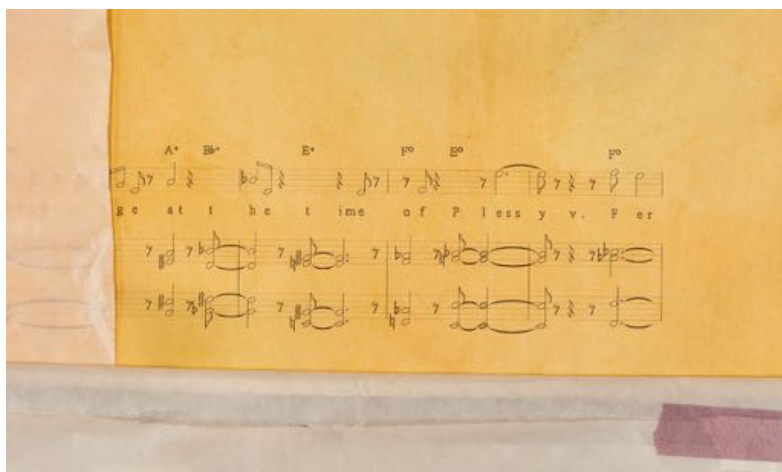
Gaines names each tree after a tribe from the northern portion of Tanzania, where the trees were photographed, anchoring the work in the country's historical and cultural landscape and reflecting on the legacies of the colonial



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enterprise, the slave trade and personal identity. However, a profound ambiguity exists in the relationship between the ancient trees he photographed—these natural witnesses to social and evolutionary epochs—and the deliberate, systematic breakdown of their image. This gap, like the space between the Plexiglas panels of each work, invites the viewer to interpret different layers of possible meaning.

Alongside the new Plexiglas works, Gaines debuts 'Manifestos 7' (2026), the latest chapter in a series begun in 2008 in which the artist draws upon and disarms texts of historical authority. His subject here is the law itself: the rulings from two landmark US Supreme Court cases, *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) and *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). The work takes the form of an immersive audiovisual installation, pairing a new musical composition with a video of the scrolling texts alongside five drawings that illustrate Gaines' score. The artist begins by translating the letters A through G from the texts into their corresponding musical notes, H becomes B-flat and all remaining letters are written out as rests. What emerges is haunting and unexpected—legal language never intended to be heard musically. In subjecting these rulings to his system, Gaines unites the rational, mathematical and lyrical structures of music with the irrationality of racial violence and social injustice, pointing, as all his work does, to the disjunction between the empirical objective and the viewers' subjective response.



About the artist

Charles Gaines lives and works in Los Angeles. He has been the subject of numerous exhibitions in the United States and around the world, most notably a major survey at The Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami, which traveled to the Phoenix Art Museum; a mid-career survey at the Pomona College Museum of Art and the Pitzer College Art Gallery in Claremont CA; a museum survey of early works at The Studio Museum, Harlem NY and the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles CA; and presentations at the 1975 Whitney Biennial and the Venice Biennale in 2007 and 2015.

In 2022, Gaines launched his most ambitious public art project yet, 'The American Manifest,' presented by Creative Time, Governors Island and Times Square Arts. Other recent public commissions include the mural 'Numbers and Trees: Cincinnati Cottonwoods,' organized by Cincinnati nonprofit ArtWorks and 'Hanging Tree' at Equal Justice Initiative's Freedom Monument Sculpture Park in Montgomery AL. Forthcoming public installations for fall 2026 include a new work for the Intuit Dome in Inglewood CA and 'A Frame for a Tree' for the City of Culver City CA.

In addition to his artistic practice, Gaines was on the faculty at CalArts School of Art for over 30 years, establishing a fellowship to provide critical scholarship support for Black students in the M.F.A. Art program. A book of his collected writings will be released by Hauser & Wirth Publishers in early 2027.

Gaines will collaborate on—along with Firelei Báez and Cristina Iglesias—and contribute to '[Directionless](#),' a group exhibition organized by Rashid Johnson at Hauser & Wirth Menorca from 21 June – 25 October 2026.

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Gallery hours:

Tuesday to Saturday
10 am – 6 pm

www.hauserwirth.com

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Charles Gaines
Numbers and Trees: Tanzania Series 3, Acacia,
Tree #2, Kagulu
2025
Acrylic sheet, acrylic paint, photograph
121.9 x 198.1 x 14.6 cm / 48 x 78 x 5 3/4 in
Photo: Fredrik Nilsen

Charles Gaines during his residency at Hauser &
Wirth Somerset, 2025. Photo: Clare Walsh

Charles Gaines
Numbers and Trees: Tanzania Series 3, Acacia,
Tree #3, Shubi
2025
Acrylic sheet, acrylic paint, photograph
121.9 x 198.1 x 14.6 cm / 48 x 78 x 5 3/4 in
Photo: Fredrik Nilsen

Charles Gaines
Numbers and Trees: Tanzania Series 3, Acacia, Tree
#4, Kabwa
2026
Acrylic sheet, acrylic paint, photograph
121.9 x 198.1 x 14.6 cm / 48 x 78 x 5 3/4 in
Photo: Fredrik Nilsen

Charles Gaines
Numbers and Trees: Tanzania Series 3, Acacia, Tree
#4, Kabwa (detail)
2026
Acrylic sheet, acrylic paint, photograph
121.9 x 198.1 x 14.6 cm / 48 x 78 x 5 3/4 in
Photo: Fredrik Nilsen

Charles Gaines' studio, 2026. Photo: Brandon Hicks

Detail of drawing for 'Manifestos 7' (2026). Photo:
Brandon Hicks

Charles Gaines' studio, 2026. Photo: Brandon Hicks

Charles Gaines' studio, 2026. Photo: Brandon Hicks