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Gagosian to Present *Theaster Gates: Surrogate* in Hong Kong



Theaster Gates at his anagama kiln in Chicago, 2020. Photo: Chris Strong, courtesy Theaster Gates Studio

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HONG KONG, November 13, 2026—Gagosian is pleased to present *Surrogate*, an exhibition of new works by Theaster Gates opening at the gallery in Hong Kong on November 19.

The surrogate has been ever present in Gates's practice. Using the bones of an abandoned Chicago building to restore the functions of Huguenot House in Kassel, Germany, for Documenta 13, presenting fire hoses as a proxy for a conversation on civil rights, deploying the charged medium of tar to stand in for the complex relationship between father and son, or repurposing historic archives as a way of countering the invisibility of Black people, art as surrogate makes rich the abundance of meaning available through the materials and processes of his studio. Seemingly ordinary objects reveal a depth of emotion and the strength of ontological connection, creating significance when others see the quotidian only.

For his exhibition at Gagosian Hong Kong, Gates looks to his earlier work, drawing on elements from his own visual vocabulary and reconfiguring them in new compositional arrangements or introducing them to alternative mediums. Through these strategic acts of transposition, Gates underscores the ways representation, and art more generally, often performs a kind of surrogacy, functioning on behalf of that which is absent.

Several different bodies of work on view enact this notion of the surrogate. Gates imprints the decommissioned fire hoses found in his *Civil Tapestries*, a series begun in 2011, into clay slabs, introducing the striated patterns of the paintings to a new medium. Other pieces reflect an evolution of the artist's "gym floor" works that he initiated in 2014, composed of varnished wood

planks reclaimed from school gymnasium floors. In the latest iteration, Gates has rearranged the athletic markings into graphic lines that are reminiscent of another body of paintings that the artist made in the late 2010s, based on statistical infographics mapping Black life created by famed sociologist W. E. B. DuBois and his students in 1900. The clay "handbag" in the exhibition also unlocks a constellation of affective references. Referring to a sartorial object that is both functional and aesthetically coded, this work recalls Gates's ongoing exploration of the vessel—whether clay pots or architectural structures—as means of carrying and protecting their contents, as well as ritual processes, like ikebana, where the object is central to the performance.

The exhibition also features a trio of *Tar Paintings*, a series begun in 2011, made of overlapping panels of industrial roofing sheets similar to those used in his 2022 installation at London's Serpentine Galleries. The compositions suggest the art historical legacy of geometric abstraction and Minimalist painting, using the evolved materials of his father's labor as professional roofer as a surrogate for the intangible inheritance between father and son. Each of these new *Tar Paintings* introduces representational or symbolic elements, such as the Chinese character for "vista," which evokes an expansive view onto a physical or mental landscape.

In *Surrogate*, Gates demonstrates his striking ability to transmute common materials into sacred objects, reanimating the world with a vitality, agency, and power that reveals the extraordinary within the ordinary.

Gates is also presenting *African Still Life* at White Cube Seoul, from November 4 to December 18, 2026.

For Theaster Gates's biographical information and exhibition history, please visit gagosian.com.

#TheasterGates

THEASTER GATES
Surrogate
Press preview: Thursday, November 19, 5–6pm
Opening reception: Thursday, November 19, 6–8pm
November 19, 2026–February 27, 2027
7/F Pedder Building, 12 Pedder Street, Central, Hong Kong

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