

# WHITE CUBE

Hong Kong

Theaster Gates

*Tarry Skies and Psalms for Now*

21 March – 20 May 2017

Press Preview: Monday 20 March at 2pm

White Cube is pleased to present an exhibition of new work by Theaster Gates. 'Tarry Skies and Psalms for Now' includes a new series of sculptures and paintings that incorporate the processes and materials of roofing. In these works, Gates explores the condition of labour through a physical engagement with materials, interrogating in turn notions of society, class and race.

In Gates' new sculptures, flat, disintegrating sections of roof, collected from a derelict school near to his home and studio in the south side of Chicago, are cast in bronze. Patched-up and highly textured, these geometric ready-made forms are then covered with tar which is poured or brushed on. Following the same method as that of tarring a roof, the result is a highly reflective, unctuous black glaze that can partially cover the sculpture or completely obscure it. Formed by the vicissitudes of weather and wear, the roofs have a mineral-like encrusted presence lent new life through their transformation as sculptures. In this way, the works point to themes of home and community and the possibility of rehabilitation through the values of restoration and beauty. At the edge of each sculpture, small square supports – casts of the gating system used during the sculpting process – are deliberately left intact, reflecting an intrinsic, fluid connection between material, process and artwork that is direct and honest. This trace of labour or making is important for Gates since the activity of roofing is both personally and politically significant: he learnt the skills from his father, a builder and roofer by trade, who used the profession as a form of activism.

Roofing techniques are also adopted in the new series of paintings, which combine tar with coloured plastic sheeting, known as Naugahyde, to create compositions that make a reference to Modernist abstraction. 'I'm reading about abstraction,' Gates has said. 'And now I have these things that are absolutely familiar and absolutely black in my life. My question was, could what my dad taught me trump established artistic practices?' Unlike his previous series of tar paintings which were solely monochromatic, in these new works the inclusion of a material not associated with roofing distances the work from an indexical link to their subject matter.

In revising his approach to their making, by both incorporating new materials and allowing for a greater freedom of production, Gates has opened up new dialogues, evident in the visual and formal links to work by painters such as Mark Rothko, Josef Albers or Ellsworth Kelly. Bold compositions are created in the work through coloured fields of sheeting, adhered to the canvas in overlapping layers and combined with viscous tar, brushed or poured on to the canvas surface. In *Study for halves and halves* (2017), for example, arcs of yellow sheeting appear like a succession of rising suns while in another work, strips of turquoise sheeting are covered with applications of tar to create a dynamic pattern of repeat stripes. Gates works the tar with speed, since it demands a quick response before it cools and solidifies at which point bubbles, bumps and small indentations appear on its skin. This gives a sense of tactility, either through the visible, visceral brushstrokes which emphasise the trace of the artist's hand or, if poured, a feeling of arrested motion, of a halted, dripping viscosity. The process itself of making the paintings reflects not only the effort of the labour but above all what Gates has identified as, 'an index of an archive of time in my body.'

Theaster Gates' solo exhibition 'The Minor Arts' is on view at the National Gallery of Art

(NGA), Washington DC until 4 September 2017. Gates has exhibited and performed at the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Whitechapel Gallery, London; Art Gallery of Ontario; Punta della Dogana, Venice; Documenta 13, Kassel; Kunsthaus Bregenz, Austria and Fondazione Prada, Milan. He has received awards and grants from Artes Mundi 6, Creative Time and the Vera List Center for Art and Politics, United States Artists. Gates' most ambitious project to date is the ongoing real estate development, known as 'The Dorchester Project'. In 2006, Gates purchased an abandoned building on 69th and Dorchester Avenue on Chicago's south side, collaborating with architects and designers to gut and refurbish the buildings using found materials. Gates is the founder of the non-profit Rebuild Foundation and is a Professor in the Department of Visual Art and Director of Arts and Public Life at the University of Chicago.

**Contact:**

For all press enquiries please contact [hongkongpress@whitecube.com](mailto:hongkongpress@whitecube.com) or Louise Oram on +852 6892 1171 and Mona Chu on +852 9276 5601

**Gallery Information:**

White Cube Hong Kong  
50 Connaught Road Central, Hong Kong  
T: +852 2592 2000  
Tuesday – Saturday  
11am – 7pm  
[whitecube.com](http://whitecube.com)

Free Admission

**Follow us:**

Twitter: @\_whitecube  
Instagram: @whitecubeofficial  
Facebook: White Cube  
We Chat: whitecube hk / 白立方

WHITE CUBE

