

PHILADELPHIA
CONTEMPORARY

Theaster Gates' *Monument in Waiting* Unveiled in Philadelphia

Installed on Drexel University's campus in University City, Gates' public sculpture is a contemporary ruin that deconstructs the concept of the monument, particularly those that reinforce systems of subjugation.



Theaster Gates, *Monument in Waiting* (detail), 2020. Credit: Timothy Schenck. Courtesy GRAY, Chicago/New York.

(Philadelphia, PA — July 6, 2022) Philadelphia Contemporary, Forman Arts Initiative, and Drexel University are pleased to present ***Monument in Waiting*** (2020) by **Theaster Gates**. Courtesy of the artist and GRAY gallery, the sculpture—which was created during the turbulent summer of 2020 and first exhibited at the Parrish Art Museum in Water Mill, New York—is now installed on Drexel University's campus.

Comprised of reclaimed stone plinths and granite tiles devoid of a figure, *Monument in Waiting* evokes a dismantled public forum. The work responds to ongoing socio-political dialogue about preservation and erasure, collective memory, and public scrutiny of historical figures and monuments, particularly those that reinforce systems of oppression. This tribute, like much of Gates' work, asks viewers to reconsider the ways in which monuments are destroyed, preserved, or adapted to enshrine moments and figures in our history.

PHILADELPHIA CONTEMPORARY

“My monument work, from Black Chapel at Serpentine to the Stony Island Arts Bank and this non-monument in Philadelphia, has me grappling with the best indicators of temporal markers. Monuments spatially and symbolically mark time and help us conjure meaning. Honoring the truths of a people or a moment is necessary soul work for the nation. I’m glad to be part of that,” **Gates remarks.**

With *Monument in Waiting*, Gates responds to the removal of Confederate and colonialist monuments and acknowledges the role of monuments in marking histories of injustice. The artist draws viewers through the installation, into a space for confronting these historical truths, and of aspiring collectively toward a future built upon equal justice. Gates interrogates long-held notions of heroism, fashioning pedestals that allow us to reconsider and expand the possibilities for valiant acts. As an inscription engraved on one of the plinths reads, “Until real heroes bloom, this dusty plinth will wait.”



Previously installed at the Parrish Art Museum, as seen above, the sculpture is now on view at Drexel.
Theaster Gates, *Monument in Waiting*, 2020. Credit: Timothy Schenck. Courtesy GRAY, Chicago/New York.

“With an interest in urban planning and preservation, Gates is known for redeeming spaces that have been left behind, and we are honored to bring his work to this part of Philadelphia. The sculpture will prompt viewers to reflect upon our city’s past, present, and future while also engaging the next generation of leaders—today’s students,” says **Harry Philbrick, Founding Director and CEO of Philadelphia Contemporary.**

“Our democracy was born in Philadelphia on a set of ideals,” adds **Drexel University President John Fry.** “Having Theaster Gates’ magnificent *Monument in Waiting* installed at a busy pedestrian thoroughfare at the heart of Drexel’s campus will give all passersby the opportunity to pause in contemplation about the progress we have made toward fulfilling those ideals, and the distance left for us to travel. I am grateful to Philadelphia Contemporary and Forman Arts Initiative for choosing the Drexel campus as the installation site for *Monument in Waiting* and supporting this bold initiative in public art. And we are all indebted to the genius of Theaster Gates.”

PHILADELPHIA CONTEMPORARY

Monument in Waiting is located at Drexel's Korman Quad, on 33rd Street, between Chestnut and Market Streets. This installation follows the University of Pennsylvania's 2020 unveiling of *Brick House* by Simone Leigh—a monumental sculpture depicting a Black woman's head atop a form that suggests a skirt or building—which sits at the corner of 34th and Walnut Streets, the nearby gateway to Penn.

"Theaster Gates is one of the most exciting artists of our time," remarks **Michael Forman, Founder of Forman Arts Initiative**. "He has a unique talent to bring people together to reflect on and engage with timely issues and important histories, which is evident in *Monument in Waiting*. Forman Arts Initiative is pleased to collaborate with Philadelphia Contemporary and Drexel University, where I have the honor of serving as a Board Member, to bring one of Gates' first public sculptures to Philadelphia. We expect the work will generate a rich dialogue over the coming year across campus and beyond."

Following the unveiling of *Monument in Waiting* this summer, a series of corresponding programs will be announced in the fall. The piece, which will remain installed for one year, is presented by Philadelphia Contemporary, Forman Arts Initiative, and Drexel University, courtesy of the artist and GRAY gallery, Chicago/New York.

About Theaster Gates

Theaster Gates (b. 1973) was born and raised in Chicago, where he currently lives and works. Drawing from his earlier vocational pursuits in public service, urban planning, and religious studies, Gates works to redeem spaces that have been left behind, centering his practice on the possibility of the "life within things." Over the past decade, Gates has demonstrated the intricacy of Blackness through space theory and land development, sculpture, and performance. Through the expansiveness of his approach as a thinker, maker, and builder, he expands the role of the artist as an agent of change. His performative practice, and visual works find roots in Black knowledge, history, and archives.

With a celebrated stronghold in Chicago, Gates's career has seen international recognition from his participation in the Whitney Biennial (2010), documenta 13 (2012), and the Venice Biennale (2015), to major museum exhibitions all over the world. Recent solo exhibitions include *The Listening Room*, Seattle Art Museum (2011–12); *13th Ballad*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (2013); *Soul Manufacturing Corporation: To Make the Thing that Makes the Things*, Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia (2013); *Processions*, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC (2016); *True Value*, Fondazione Prada, Milan (2016); *Black Archive*, Kunsthaus Bregenz, Austria (2016); *How to Build a House*, Museum, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (2016); *The Minor Arts*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (2017); *Black Madonna*, Kunstmuseum Basel (2018) and *Sprengel Museum*, Hannover (2018); *The Black Image Corporation*, Fondazione Prada, Milan (2018); *Amalgam*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris and Tate Modern, London (2019); and *Black Chapel*, Haus der Kunst, Munich (2019). Many of Gates's recent exhibitions, including *Black Madonna* and *The Black Image Corporation*, are a part of his ongoing engagement with the archives of Johnson Publishing Company.

Gates has received numerous awards and distinctions, including the twelfth Frederick Kiesler Prize for Architecture and the Arts (2022); an Honorary Fellowship from the Royal Institute of British

PHILADELPHIA CONTEMPORARY

Architects (2021); the World Economic Forum Crystal Award (2020); J.C. Nichols Prize for Visionaries in Urban Development (2018); Nasher Sculpture Prize (2018); Sprengel Museum Kurt Schwitters Prize (2017); and Artes Mundi 6 Prize (2015). Public collections include Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Tate Modern, London; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, among many others.

About Philadelphia Contemporary

Founded in 2016, Philadelphia Contemporary is a contemporary art organization whose mission is to connect the people and places of Philadelphia through art and partnership. Currently nomadic, Philadelphia Contemporary presents visual art, performance art, and spoken word across the city, with ambitions to establish a freestanding, globally oriented, and locally aware non-collecting arts institution.

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About Forman Arts Initiative

Forman Arts Initiative connects and empowers artists and cultural organizations in Philadelphia. FAI brings resources to the arts and art to our communities.

FAI is dedicated to supporting community-based arts and creativity in Philadelphia through programming, convening, and advocacy. FAI's first initiative *ArtWorks*, developed in collaboration with the Philadelphia Foundation, will distribute \$3 million to artists and community organizations over five years. In addition, *FAI Stories*, in partnership with The Philadelphia Citizen, is a bi-weekly interview series featuring artists and creatives in every neighborhood in Philadelphia. This fall, FAI is launching its first Artist-in-Residence program.

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About Drexel University

Founded in 1891, Drexel University is a comprehensive global R1-level research university with a unique model of experiential learning that combines academic rigor with one of the nation's premier cooperative education programs.

Drexel fulfills its founder's vision of preparing each new generation of students for productive professional and civic lives while also focusing the University's collective expertise on solving society's greatest problems. Drexel is a globally engaged urban research university, dedicated to advancing knowledge and society and to providing every student with a valuable, rigorous, experiential, technology-infused education, enriched by its cooperative education program. A focal

PHILADELPHIA CONTEMPORARY

point of Drexel's latest strategic plan is fostering and strengthening an inclusive and equity-driven culture.

About GRAY

GRAY is a globally recognized team of art professionals devoted to fostering the development of historically important artists' careers and to building outstanding art collections. Founded in 1963, GRAY has built its reputation as a resource for Modern, Post-War, and Contemporary art with prominent private and institutional clients worldwide. Known for producing critically acclaimed exhibitions and programming from its galleries in Chicago and New York, GRAY represents a roster of internationally recognized artists such as McArthur Binion, Jim Dine, Torkwase Dyson, Theaster Gates, David Hockney, Rashid Johnson, Alex Katz, Jaume Plensa, Leon Polk Smith, and Evelyn Statsinger, among others.

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