

Large Print
Exhibition Guide
**Theaster Gates:
A Clay Sermon**
29 September– 9
January 2022



Galleries 1, 8 & 9

Contents:

Exhibition Information.....	p.3 - p.4
Gallery 1.....	p.4 - p.38
Gallery 9.....	p.38 - P.39
Gallery 8.....	p.40 - p.47

Theaster Gates: A Clay Sermon

29 September 2021 – 9 January 2022

O Lord, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand.

Isaiah 64:8

In Christian scripture, the relationship between God and humanity is compared to the potter working with clay. ‘As a potter’, according to Theaster Gates (b.1973, Chicago), ‘you learn how to shape the world’. Clay and religion are foundational to Gates’s work. The artist has received international acclaim for his sculptural practice and cultural interventions in Black communities, particularly on the South Side of Chicago, where he lives and works. As a youth, Gates joined the New Cedar Grove Missionary Baptist Church choir before studying urban planning, theology and ceramics.

A Clay Sermon examines the significance of clay, especially its material and spiritual legacies. The

exhibition surveys works by Gates across two decades – from early hand-thrown pots to large-scale Afro-Mingei sculptures. It explores craft, labour, performance and racial identity; how clay builds communities of knowledge; clay’s role in colonialism and global trade; and the ceremonial and ritual use of ceramics. Alongside his own work, Gates has made a selection of historic ceramics from private and public collections, including the Victoria and Albert Museum, where he has been Emeritus Fellow at the V&A Research Institute during the past year

On the first floor, the exhibition also includes a new film by Gates, which takes the form of a sermon on clay, and his most recent body of work: large stoneware vessels installed on custom-made plinths of hand-milled wood and stone.

Gallery 1

‘Black Leaning Man’, 2015

Glazed clay and metal

'Leaning Man', 2015

Glazed clay and metal

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

Clay figurines are among the earliest sculptures made by humans nearly 30,000 years ago, but figurative work is rare in Gates's oeuvre. Gates cast a series of ceramic figures, based on a 'primitive' souvenir sculpture in his collection, for his 2015 exhibition 'Freedom of Assembly'. The exhibition's title referred to the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, which protects freedoms of speech, assembly and the exercise of religion. Gates's ceramic figures, glazed in either black or white, can be seen as guardians of basic freedoms and of the exhibition itself.

'Religious Alchemy', 2016–18

Mixed media

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

'Religious Alchemy' comprises a Davenport writing desk, jars containing silica, metal oxides and other glaze materials, pottery tools, books and research material and small bowls and dishes, which were made as part of Gates's 2015 Istanbul Biennial project 'Three or Four Shades of Blue'. Initially developed in the Near East, glazes enhanced the beauty and function of pottery. Firing a glazed pot at high temperatures involves uncertainty and risk; it is an act of faith. The transmutation that takes place in the kiln can be seen as a kind of alchemy.

Section Introduction:

Gates avidly acquires collections of Black cultural history, ceramics, architectural fragments, books and other items. Here, Gates has selected objects from the Victoria and Albert Museum and other public and private collections to display alongside examples of his own

work and objects from his collections. Ranging from handmade wares to industrially-produced ceramics from Staffordshire potteries, these objects have informed the artist's thinking about clay. While some were chosen for their singular form or technique, others show the pervasiveness of racist and colonialist representations in ceramics.

The historical objects in the two vitrines on this side of the gallery reflect the artist's interest in the many ways ceramics are used – from the utilitarian, to the ceremonial, to a global commodity. The objects in the two vitrines on the other side of the gallery are by studio potters from Europe, the United States, Japan and Nigeria, whom Gates considers his artistic ancestors. He acknowledges the beauty of their craft as precedents for his own work.

Display Case 1

Gates selected these objects for their links to global

trade, Gates appreciates ceramics that result from a mix of traditions as well as the chance effects of firing conditions. The jar from Zhejiang, China [1] resembles a bronze ritual wine vessel, but is made of stoneware with an olive-green wood ash glaze, a precursor to celadon. The earthenware brick [2] from a similar period is decorated with a galloping horse. Large horses were introduced to China from Central Asia and celebrated for their strength, speed and military advantage.

Two porcelain bowls from the Song dynasty (960–1279) feature elegant forms and pale glazes favoured by the imperial court. The Ding ware bowl [5] with peony motif has a classic cream glaze and ‘tear stains’ on its exterior, formed when transparent glaze pools at high-temperatures, a natural phenomenon prized by connoisseurs. The pale blue Qingbai bowl [3] is fused to its saggar, which is used to protect delicate wares during firing and to maximise the kiln load. The fritware bowl from Iran [4] is divided into geometric segments with stylised foliage and calligraphic script in a metallic

pigment. Invented in the Medieval Islamic world, fritware includes ground glass in the clay body to imitate porcelain.

Gates selected the Korean stoneware jar [7] for its uneven shape and free-hand decoration. It dates to the period of the Imjin War (1592–98) when Japan invaded Korea and kidnapped farmers, artisans and scholars. Potters were particularly prized. The simplicity and lack of refinement of their Buncheong ceramics created an appreciation of the rustic *wabi-cha* style of tea ceremony in Japan. Gates has included an Oribe-style plate [6] from his collection and a group of his early pots [8–10], which show the enduring influence of *wabi-cha*.

1

Storage jar, Western Han dynasty, 206 BC–8 AD

Glazed stoneware, Zhejiang Province, China

Victoria & Albert Museum

2

Brick, Six Dynasties period, 265–589

Unglazed earthenware with moulded relief decoration,
China

Victoria and Albert Museum. Eumorfopoulos Collection

3

Bowl and sagger, 960–1127

Glazed porcelain bowl fused into impure earthenware
sagger, Jingdezhen, China

Victoria and Albert Museum. Given by Rose Kerr

4

Bowl, 1180–1220

Fritware bowl with glaze and lustre. Found at Jurjan, Iran,
probably Kashan

Victoria and Albert Museum. Given by Mr C. N. Ades MBE
in memory of his wife Andrée Ades

5

Bowl, Northern Song dynasty, 1050–1150

Glazed porcelain Ding ware bowl, Hubei province, China
Victoria and Albert Museum. Given by Mr Aubrey Le Blond

6

Plate, Edo Period, c. 1800

Oribe earthenware plate in the form of a uchiwa fan,
decorated in Rimpa style

Private collection, courtesy Grace Tsumugi Fine Art

7

Jar, 1400–1600

Stoneware buncheong ware with white slip and iron
decoration, Korea

Victoria and Albert Museum. Given by Mr P. H. D. S.
Wikramaratna, in memory of his wife Nancy

8

Theaster Gates

‘Untitled’, 2004

High-fired stoneware with glaze

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

9

Theaster Gates

'Tokoname Vessel', 2006

Wood-fired stoneware with glaze

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

10

Theaster Gates

'Untitled', 2014

High-fired stoneware with glaze

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

Display Case 2

Gates selected these objects for their links to global trade, colonialism and slavery. Porcelain, prized for its delicacy, strength and white colour, has been made in China for 2,000 years, but Europeans only discovered how to make it in 1708 in Meissen, Germany. The porcelain dish [16], featuring a courtly scene including an attendant with an opium pipe, was made in Jingdezhen, China's

‘porcelain capital’, which produced for the imperial court and for domestic and export markets. The turquoise ornament [11] is a fragment from Yuanmingyuan, the Old Summer palace in Beijing, which was destroyed and looted in 1860 by British and French troops during the Second Opium War.

Other objects reveal links between ceramics, slavery and racism. While Wedgwood was producing medallions [18] to advocate for the abolition of slavery, other Staffordshire potteries were manufacturing racist Black figurines [15,17,21] for middle class consumers. Gates has added a group of racially offensive objects from the United States [12–14, 17, 20]. They are from the Ana J. and Edward J. Williams collection of ‘negrobilia’, which is housed in Gates’s Stony Island Arts Bank, an art space, archive and library, on the South Side of Chicago.

Two objects were made by enslaved Black people who worked on plantation potteries in Edgefield, South Carolina. The stoneware jug [22] may have ties to both the

European tradition of face jugs and the African Kongo *nkisi*, a figure that has spiritual powers. The large storage jar [25] was made by David Drake, who was known as Dave the Potter. He signed and dated his vessels and sometime inscribed them with poems, at a time when literacy among slaves was illegal. The tradition of writing poems on jugs has roots in England as seen in Edmund Fishley's jug [26].

11

Fragment of architectural fitting, 1747–70
Glazed earthenware, Yuanmingyuan, China
Victoria and Albert Museum

12

Ana J. and Edward J. Williams Collection
Black boy eating watermelon figurine, 20th century
Ceramic, paint
Rebuild Foundation

13

Ana J. and Edward J. Williams Collection

Black baby pickaninny sambo figurine, 'Gold Fish Sam from Ozark Land', 20th century

Plaster, wood and paint

Rebuild Foundation

14

Ana J. and Edward J. Williams Collection

Black boy head wall hanging candle holder sambo, 20th century

Ceramic, paint

Rebuild Foundation

15

Tobacco jar in the form of black boy cleaning boots, c. 1840–50

Lead-glazed earthenware with enamel decoration, Staffordshire, England

Victoria and Albert Museum. Collins Baker Gift

16

Dish, Qing dynasty, 1740–50

Porcelain with overglaze enamels and gilt, China

Victoria and Albert Museum. Bequeathed by Mrs Marie

Adeline Dumergue

17

Figure of a freed slave, c. 1833

Moulded lead-glazed earthenware with enamel

decoration, Staffordshire, England

Victoria and Albert Museum. Purchased through the Julie

and Robert Breckman Staffordshire Fund

18

Medallion, 'Am I not a Man and a Brother?', modelled

1787; made c. 2007

Black basalt, Josiah Wedgwood & Sons, Ltd.

V&A Wedgwood Collection. Presented by Art Fund with

major support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund,

private donations and a public appeal.

19

Inkstand, 1751

Soft-paste porcelain with enamel decoration, Bow
Porcelain Factory, London

Victoria and Albert Museum. Transferred from the
Museum of Practical Geology, Jermyn Street

20

Ana J. and Edward J. Williams Collection

Ashtray, 'early bird catches the worm', 20th century

Plaster, paint

Rebuild Foundation

21

Candlestick in the form of a black woman, c. 1770

Soft-paste porcelain with enamel and gilt decoration,
Bow Porcelain Factory, London

Victoria and Albert Museum. Given by Lady Charlotte
Schreiber

22

Face Jug, c. 1850

Stoneware

Collection of C Philip and Corbett Toussaint

23

Ana J. and Edward J. Williams Collection

White mammy cookie jar, 20th century

Porcelain

Rebuild Foundation

24

Theaster Gates

'Sake Bottle', 2004

Wood-fired stoneware with glaze

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

25

David Drake

Storage Jar, 1862

Alkaline-glazed stoneware, inscribed: 'Dave / Jan 13 -
1862 / LM'

Collection of C Philip and Corbett Toussaint

26

Edmund Fishley

'Harvest Jug', 1839

Glazed earthenware

Loaned by the Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art
Gallery, Exeter City Council

Display Case 3

These two display cases contain works by twentieth and twenty-first century ceramic artists that have informed Gates's practice. The earliest is a small stoneware 'yunomi' (teacup) [37] by British potter Bernard Leach (1887–1979). It illustrates the kiln and studio that he set up in the hamlet of Abiko, near Tokyo, in 1917. Three years later, Leach and Shoji Hamada (1894–1978) established a pottery in St Ives in Cornwall. Here, they drew on the

philosophy of ‘mingei’ (folk-craft), advanced by art critic Soetsu Yanagi (1889–1961), reviving traditional techniques in opposition to industrial manufacturing. This off-white glazed bottle [28] by Hamada has faceted sides in common with Korean Choson ceramics. A large dish [29] by ceramicist and restaurateur Kitaoji Rosanjin (1883– 1959) has a grass frond decoration, while two Oribe-style ‘yunomi’ [39] by Mineo Okabe (1919–90) have a simple deep green glaze.

A large pot [38] by Nigerian artist Ladi Kwali (1925–77) is decorated with lizards, crocodiles and fish, set within a stylised geometric design. Kwali combined traditional Gwari coil-building with techniques she developed at a pottery centre set up by British ceramicist Michael Cardew (1901–83) in the city of Abuja (now Seluja), in a deeply colonial context. Cardew had been an apprentice to Leach in St Ives, and made this tobacco jar [35] prior to moving to West Africa.

‘Bowl’ [33] by Ruth Duckworth (1919–2009) dates from 2007 and is part of a group works she initiated in the late 1970s. Duckworth, like twentieth-century sculptor Henry Moore (1898–1986), had a collection of bones, and the delicate forms of this cup and its interlocking blade have the logic of a skeletal structure. This spade-like vase [27] by Hans Coper (1920–81) also owes as much to modernist sculpture as to ceramic tradition.

27

Hans Coper

‘Vase’, 1968

Glazed stoneware

Victoria and Albert Museum

28

Shoji Hamada

‘Vase’, c. 1931

Glazed stoneware

Victoria and Albert Museum. Given by the Contemporary Art Society

29

Kitaoji Rosanjin

'Dish', c. 1955

Shino-type stoneware

Victoria and Albert Museum

30

Lucie Rie

'Vase', 1975

Stoneware with porcelain slip and glaze

Crafts Study Centre, University for the Creative Arts

31

Ruth Duckworth

'Vase', 1966

Glazed stoneware

Victoria and Albert Museum

32

Lucie Rie

'Bowl', 1975

Partially-glazed porcelain

Crafts Study Centre, University for the Creative Arts

33

Ruth Duckworth

Bowl, 2007

Porcelain

Aberystwyth University School of Art Museum and
Galleries

34

Theaster Gates

'Round Vase', 2006

Soda-fired stoneware with glaze

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

35

Michael Cardew

'Tobacco Jar', 1929

Glazed earthenware

Victoria and Albert Museum. Given by the Secretary of the
British Institute of Industrial Art

36

Bernard Leach

'Shallow bowl', 1910s

Slipware

Crafts Study Centre, University for the Creative Arts

37

Bernard Leach

'Yunomi', 1919

Stoneware

Crafts Study Centre, University for the Creative Arts

38

Ladi Kwali

'Pot', 1956

Stoneware

Aberystwyth University School of Art Museum and
Galleries

39

Mineo Okabe

'Two Yunomi', c. 1958–62

Oribe glaze ceramic

Robin Vousden

Display Case 4

The large 'Sculptural Form' [40] in the final display case is by American ceramicist Paul Soldner (1921–2011).

Soldner pioneered experiments with the sixteenth-century Japanese technique of raku. Raku involves removing ceramic items from the kiln when they are still hot and allowing them to cool rapidly. The process can achieve spectacular and spontaneous surface effects, such as the varied rust-colours that interact with the embossed design on this work.

Alongside is a relief panel work titled 'Staircase' [41] by Iowa-based ceramicist Nystrom (b. 1949). A work by Gates titled 'Door' [44] incorporates a wasps' nest and

dates from 2005, when Gates spent time working and studying with Nystrom. Other items relate to Gates's work in the early 2000s involving stylised house forms [42–43] and ceremonial vessels [48]. Ingrid Lilligren (b. 1949), professor of Art and Visual Culture at Iowa State University and another of Gates's former instructors, is represented here by two of her works from the late 1990s, 'Louise' [45] and 'Three Graces' [46].

Gates's final intervention in this display is an untitled sculptural work from 2019 [47]. Recently, Gates has been experimenting with firing bricks with a high manganese content, along with other ceramic objects, at temperatures above 1200 °C. Under this excessive heat, the materials begin to melt and fuse together. In this case, a lidded jar has been engulfed by a mass of molten material.

40

Paul Soldner

'Sculptural Form', 1987

Slab-built raku

Aberystwyth University School of Art Museum and
Galleries

41

Marck Nystrom

'Staircase', 2005

Glazed stoneware

Collection of Marck Nystrom

42

Theaster Gates

'House Structure from Tokoname Japan', 2004

Wood-fired stoneware, wood ash

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

43

Theaster Gates

Test fragment for slip, 2006

Soda-fired stoneware with glaze

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

44

Theaster Gates

'Door', 2005

Clay and wasps' nest

Collection of Marck Nystrom

45

Ingrid Lilligren

'Louise', 1999

Wood-fired porcelain

Collection of the artist

46

Ingrid Lilligren

'Three Graces', 1999

Wood-fired earthenware

Collection of the artist

47

Theaster Gates

'Untitled', 2018

High fired stoneware with glaze

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

48

Theaster Gates

‘Ceremonial Jar’, 2006

Soda-fired stoneware with glaze

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

On Plinth

Peter Voulkos

‘Pinatubo’, 1994

Wood-fired stoneware

Victoria and Albert Museum.

Given by the American Friends of the V&A through the generosity of Lisa Shaffer Anderson and Dudley Buist Anderson

Peter Voulkos is known for his large-scale clay sculptures, drawing on the Asian ceramics tradition and

Abstract Expressionist painting. Combining wheel-thrown and slab-built elements, he had a transgressive and performative approach to assembling his sculptures, subjecting his forms to very physical processes and extreme kiln temperatures. 'Pinatubo', one of Voulkos's Stack sculptures, is built up of parts that have collapsed and fused together like its namesake, the cataclysmic volcano that erupted in the Philippines in 1991.

'Voulkos #2', 2021

High-fired stoneware with enamel

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

During his residency at the Archie Bray Foundation for Ceramic Art in Montana, which Peter Voulkos helped establish, Gates made a large sculpture using some of the improvised techniques of his predecessor. Gates's white enamel surface resembles a sleek industrial finish in contrast with Voulkos's rustic ash glaze.

Section Introduction:

The brick, for Gates, is the most humble object made from clay. As the son of a roofer, Gates identifies with skilled manual labour and seeks to elevate everyday materials not typically associated with fine art. He embraces brick, one of the oldest construction materials, as a sculptural medium and as the building block for physical structures and social spaces. Gates established the Rebuild Foundation in 2009 to revitalise his Chicago neighbourhood. He rehabilitates and repurposes vacant buildings with the aim of preserve Black cultural history, while providing opportunities for local residents and artists.

In summer 2013, Gates set up a pottery and brick-making workshop in this gallery as part of his Soul Manufacturing Corporation. This project has taken different forms, including training apprentice potters and the production of a group of mobile sculptures housing his Soul Wares –

bowls, plates and cups, which might be used for sharing a meal and conversation with friends.

‘Lady On Senufo Stool’, 2020

Wood-fired brick and clay oxide

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

This sculpture is based on a Senufo female ancestor figure from West Africa. Gates has used brick, a building material rather than an art medium, in an unusual way to create this figure, which traditionally would be carved from wood. Brick is typically fired at low temperatures, but Gates increased the heat by almost 400 degrees Celsius beyond its normal firing range. As a result, the figure warped, cracked and assumed a stone like texture.

‘Future Walls’, 2015–16

Bricks and metal

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

Brick Press, 1934

Iron, manufactured by G. W. Raymond & Co., Ohio

Collection of Theaster Gates. Courtesy the artist and

White Cube

Brick Moulds, 2020

Wood

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

Both the brick press and moulds on the wall are tools from Gates's collection. They have been used by the artist to make works, but also appear as props in his films. The 1930s brick press is operated by Gates in the film 'A Clay Sermon', on view in the gallery upstairs.

'The Promise of Modularity', 2016

Ceramic, bricks and wood

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

Section Introduction

:When Gates first began working as a potter in the

late 1990s, he lacked Black role models working in ceramics. He initially looked to the Japanese tradition of mingei, the concept of valuing folk art or craft. This idea was developed by philosopher Yanagi Soetsu, in dialogue with craftspeople including the potter Shoji Hamada, in the 1920s – a time when Japanese society was undergoing rapid modernisation which resulted in the loss of cultural identity.

In his search for artistic antecedents, Gates developed two projects – ‘Plate Convergence’ (2009) and ‘To Speculate Darkly’ (2010). These projects told the stories of Shoji Yamaguchi, a fictional Japanese potter who settled in Mississippi after the Second World War and married a local Black woman and civil rights activist, and Dave the Potter, the enslaved Black potter who lived in South Carolina. Gates coined the term Afro-Mingei to bring together elements of Japanese mingei with Black aesthetics.

'Chorus', 2016

Ceramic and bronze glaze, metal

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

'Afro-Ikebana', 2019

Cast bronze clay and tatami mats

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

'Afro Ikebana' brings together elements from African and Japanese cultures. Six tatami mats, the standard for a traditional room in a Japanese house, are propped against the wall and stacked on the floor. A bronze sculpture cast from a stylised Kota reliquary figure hangs on the wall. Traditionally made of metal and wood, Kota figures were originally used to protect family ancestors and played a role in communal rites and ritual performances. Placed above a large hand-coiled vessel containing a floral arrangement, it serves as a guardian of Japanese hand-craft traditions.

‘Song for Masons’, 2016

Mixed media

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

Gates has made a number of vitrines filled with a mix of ceramic objects, audio recordings, books and other documents. His participation in the 2015 Istanbul Biennial was the impetus for ‘Song for Masons’. In Istanbul, he set up a studio, making bowls, dishes and bricks using local clay bodies and glazes. Gates played records while working alongside artisans, often jazz recordings on Atlantic Records, the label founded by the Turkish-American entrepreneur Ahmet Ertegun which he ran with his brother Nesuhi. This vitrine includes bricks and bowls made while Gates was working in Istanbul and a selection of records from Atlantic, including by Aretha Franklin, Nina Simone, The Modern Jazz Quartet and others.

‘Rickshaw for Fossilized Soul Wares’, 2012

Wood, black cast concrete, clay and plastic

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

As part of his project 'Soul Manufacturing Corporation', Gates has made a number of rickshaw sculptures, hand-drawn carts loaded with ceramics, bedding, bricks and other items. The word rickshaw derives from a Japanese word meaning 'human powered vehicle'. For Gates, it evokes not only labour and migration but also human ingenuity in the face of difficult conditions.

'Tall Stack (Single)', 2011

White cement and plate

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

'China Cabinet', 2021

Wood, glass, shibori fabrics, ceramic objects, and other items from artist's studio

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

This cabinet contains items from Gates's studio on South Kimbark Avenue, Chicago. On the top shelf are vessels,

cups and teapots that Gates has accumulated – some are antiques from Japan and West Africa, some were made by Gates himself and one is by a former teacher Marck Nystrom. Also on view are books and ephemera from the archive of the Johnson Publishing Company, once the largest African-American publisher, which operated magazines *Jet* and *Ebony*. Among other curiosities are judge's gavel, a shoe stand, three egg-like sculptures and rolls of Japanese shibori fabrics, used for upholstery and dress-making. Gates explains, 'the studio binds me to making, and when adjacent to a great problem of space or ideology or impulse, I can feel the spaces ...become warm in anticipation of the new thing.'

GALLERY 9

Section Introduction:

In this new film 'A Clay Sermon', Theaster Gates delivers a musical sermon that blends elements of gospel song with jazz music improvisation. Having learned to sing in a

Baptist church choir as a child, Gates began to give performances featuring pottery. An early performance from the late 1990s involved Gates throwing vessels on a potter's wheel while singing with the accompaniment of a jazz band.

In 'A Clay Sermon', Gates gives a solo performance – in which he sermonises about a pilgrimage to Mino, Japan and the beauty of glazing in Japanese pottery – and improvises with members of his vocal ensemble The Black Monks. The film was shot in the abandoned brick factory of the Western Clay Manufacturing Company, now part of the Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts in Montana. Archival footage from across Gates' career in pottery and performance is also incorporated, making connections between the community and solidarity of Black American church music and the collaborative ethos of ceramic-making.

GALLERY 8

Section Introduction:

This gallery contains recent vessels, sculptures and other ceramic objects. Gates made a number of these works at the Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts, where he undertook a residency in early 2021. Founded by brick manufacturer Bray, the foundation has hosted many ceramic artists since potters Rudy Autio (1926–2007) and Peter Voulkos (1924–2002) opened its residency programme in 1951. Gates revisited many of the materials and processes used by Voulkos and others to create large-scale vessels.

Other pots and sculptural forms were made by Gates over the past three years and draw on affinities between Eastern, Western and African ceramic traditions. These works also make connections between forms of ancient art and the modernist aesthetics of twentieth-century sculptors such as Constantin Brancusi (1876–1957) and

Isamu Noguchi (1904–1988). The plinths and other supporting structures are constructed from natural materials such as roughly-sawn pine and ash and limestone

‘Brick Reliquary – Fringed Rectangle’, 2020

Wood-fired brick, wood ash, magnesium dioxide and black stain

Courtesy the artist and Gagosian

‘Brick Reliquary – Square with Marks’, 2020

Wood-fired brick, wood ash, magnesium dioxide and black stain

Courtesy the artist and Gagosian

‘Brick Reliquary – Circle’, 2020

Wood-fired brick, wood ash, magnesium dioxide and black stain

Courtesy the artist and Gagosian

‘Brick Reliquary – Above and Below’, 2020

Wood-fired brick, wood ash, magnesium dioxide, black stain and alumina carbide shelf

Courtesy the artist and Gagosian

‘Brick Reliquary – Tea Compression of Rectangle with Melted Bowl’, 2020

Stoneware tea bowl, kiln post, refractory clay, wood-fired brick, wood ash, magnesium dioxide, black stain and alumina carbide shelf

Courtesy the artist and Gagosian

‘Brick Reliquary – Bad Tea’, 2020

Wood-fired brick, wood ash, magnesium dioxide, black stain and alumina carbide shelf

Courtesy the artist and Gagosian

Gates made this set of six ‘Brick Reliquaries’ during the course of 2020. They are the result of his experiments firing bricks with a high manganese content to temperatures above 1200°C. Under this excessive heat, the materials inside the kiln begin to melt and fuse

together. In some cases, Gates has even incorporated the alumina carbide kiln shelves into his sculptural compositions. In one work, a stoneware tea bowl is engulfed by partially melted bricks. Together, the 'Brick Reliquaries' demonstrate Gates's interest in the chance and alchemy of transforming materials through heat.

'Twins', 2021

Glazed ceramic, azobe wood

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

'Tarred Vessel #5', 2021

Earthenware, tar on pine and limestone plinth

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

'Vessel #29', 2020

Reduction-fired clay body with manganese base glaze

Courtesy the artist and Gagosian

'Vessel #8', 2020

High-fired stoneware with glaze

Courtesy the artist and Gagosian

'Tarred Vessel #1', 2021

Earthenware, tar on stone and
redwood plinth

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

'Tarred Vessel #3', 2021

Earthenware, tar on sandstone
plinth

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

'Low Vessel', 2021

Stoneware and bronze glaze

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

'Clay Chair', 2021

Stoneware and glazes

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

'Spike Study', 2021

High-fired stoneware, engobe pigments

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

‘Vessel #24’, 2020

High-fired stoneware with glaze, custom-made plinth

Courtesy the artist and Gagosian

‘Vessel #18’, 2020

High-fired stoneware with glaze

Courtesy the artist and Gagosian

‘Vessel #4’, 2020

High-fired stoneware with glaze, custom-made plinth

Courtesy the artist and Gagosian

‘Clay Chair’, 2021

Stoneware and glazes

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

‘Post’, 2021

Stoneware and bronze glaze

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

‘Drinking Cube’, 2019

Azobe, limestone and clay

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

Gates describes this work as a meeting place – both somewhere for people to assemble and a metaphor for the coming together of Japanese and African spiritual cultures. The large cube structure is made out of reclaimed azobe wood. On top of the limestone rock is a hand-made clay sake cup and a stack of glazed ceramic African masks. Gates explains ‘this work relates to the history of Chinese immigrants in Mississippi, who were brought in as cheap labour by American business owners after the abolition of slavery, and who later became shop owners and small business owners in the state. These immigrants brought a lot of their culture and ritual with them to the US, and this hybrid state of African history –

the masks – with Asian traditions – the drinking cups – comes together in this work.’

‘They believe, you breathe, they quake, you dance, they wet, you pray’, 2020

Johnson Publishing Company carpet, high-fired stoneware with glaze, and wood

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

A large stoneware vessel by Gates and an African style chair sit on a rug that was from the Johnson Publishing Company’s penthouse. The bold geometric rug, in colours associated with African American style during the 1970s, is marked by wear and stains, attesting to the hundreds of parties that took place in the penthouse. The title references both the Black celebration at secular parties and the religious frenzy that is part of the Black church, which mixes Christian forms of worship with African spiritual traditions.

End of document.