

# THEASTER GATES

GRAY CHICAGO

OCT 16-DEC 20, 2025



OH,  
YOU'VE  
GOT TO  
COME BACK  
TO THE  
CITY

GRAY

# GRAY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Theaster Gates** ***Oh, You've Got to Come Back to the City***

October 16 - December 20, 2025

GRAY Chicago

Oh, you've got to come back to the city, the place where you belong

Oh, you've got to come back to the city, the place where you were born

Oh, you've got to come back to the city, the city of dreams

—Marvin Tate, "City Promenade"

(CHICAGO/NEW YORK – September 30, 2025) - GRAY is pleased to announce *OH, YOU'VE GOT TO COME BACK TO THE CITY*, a solo exhibition by Theaster Gates. The exhibition opens at GRAY Chicago with a public reception for the artist on October 16, and remains on view through December 20, 2025. This is Gates's fourth solo exhibition with GRAY.

In *OH, YOU'VE GOT TO COME BACK TO THE CITY*, Gates brings together a new series of tar paintings, sculpture, and installation to tell an allegory of the city in decay and the potential contained within its ruins. The exhibition's title comes from a song by Chicago musician and poet Marvin Tate, in which the City, personified as a character, has cleaned up its act and attempts to lure its residents back from the suburbs.

Gates's artistic practice has engaged and reframed the cultural and material history of Chicago as material for the studio. His new installation explores the possibilities that lie within the city's unattended corners. From his stone repository, Gates has selected a family of marble, granite, scholars' rocks, and concrete forms that anchor a grid-like installation evoking both the planning logic of cities and the quiet order of memorials. Ceramic works and everyday artifacts rest atop each stone, suggesting the remnants left behind by former inhabitants. Surrounding the sculptural installation is a new series of tar paintings that extend Gates's patching and bonding strategies. Both sculptural and painterly, these works represent a new direction in the series.

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In this body of work, Gates wrestles with the burden brought on by aging infrastructure to create new narratives that build on the rich metaphors embedded in his materials—as tools of resistance, signs of excess, and evidence of decline. Developed in conjunction with his exhibition *Unto Thee*, on view at the Smart Museum of Art through February 22, 2026, *OH, YOU'VE GOT TO COME BACK TO THE CITY* offers a profound reflection on Gate's life as a craftsman, urban planner, and pedagogue.

Theaster Gates: *OH, YOU'VE GOT TO COME BACK TO THE CITY* opens at GRAY Chicago (2044 West Carroll Avenue) with a public reception on Thursday, October 16, from 5-7 PM, and will be on view through December 20, 2025.

## ABOUT THEASTER GATES

Theaster Gates (b. 1973) currently lives and works in Chicago. Gates creates works that engage with space theory and land development, sculpture and performance. Drawing on his interest and training in urban planning and preservation, Gates redeems spaces that have been left behind. Known for his recirculation of art world capital, Gates's practice focuses on the possibility of the "life within things." His work contends with the notion of Black space as a formal exercise—one defined by collective desire, artistic agency, and the tactics of a pragmatist.

Gates has received numerous awards, including the Guggenheim Fellowship (2025), Crystal Award (2020), Nasher Prize (2018), the Kurt Schwitters Prize (2017), the American Academy of Arts & Sciences Award (2016), and the Smithsonian American Ingenuity Award for Social Progress (2015). His work can be found in public collections worldwide, including the Menil Collection, Houston; the Brooklyn Museum, New York; the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; the Tate Gallery, London; and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Gates is a professor at The University of Chicago in the Department of Visual Arts and the Harris School of Public Policy.