

RICHARD
GRAY
GALLERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Theaster Gates
Heavy Sketches
September 30 – November 20, 2016

Richard Gray Gallery
875 N Michigan Avenue, 38th Floor, Chicago, Illinois 60611



Richard Gray Gallery is pleased to announce *Heavy Sketches*, a solo exhibition of new bronze and mixed material sculptures by **Theaster Gates**. The exhibition begins September 30 and ends November 20, 2016.

Theaster Gates, the Chicago-based artist internationally renowned for his cross-disciplinary blend of social practice, performance, institution building, painting and sculpting, embarks on a new body of work with *Heavy Sketches*. The bronze sculptures here summon their inspiration from ritual masks originating with Ogoni, Dan, Baule, Bamana, and other Western African cultures, transformed through Gates's varyingly expressionistic rendering in clay and subsequent casting in bronze. The source objects, sacred tools for accessing truth and knowledge on a cosmological level, provide Gates an opportunity to continue his practice-spanning interrogation into questions of power and access, cultural heritage and historical burdens, and the intertwining of ascetics with aesthetics.

Forming versions of the wooden masks in ceramic stoneware before casting them in metal, the production of the works tracks an increasing material permanence. Their transition from wood to clay to bronze follows Gates's investigation into the power of materials as containers for cultural knowing. The subject of the works is what the artist calls "practices concerned with the eternal." These masks furthermore evoke a history of cultural appropriation including, significantly, the

important role West African masks played in the development of twentieth century European modernism. By taking up these masks within his own practice and fusing their material and symbolic valences with evocations of Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia and rural Illinois, Gates contextualizes them in what he calls “a slow deciphering of possibilities through heavy materials.”

Theaster Gates: Heavy Sketches is the artist’s first exhibition with Richard Gray Gallery and his first exhibition in Chicago since his 2013 presentation of *13th Ballad* at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. It also follows the 2014 exhibition *Retreat* at Richard Gray Gallery and Valerie Carberry Gallery, an exhibition Gates curated of artists from the Black Artist Retreat. Gates’s work can be seen in museum exhibitions this fall at the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Fondazione Prada and the Hirshhorn Museum. His works are held in public collections internationally, including the Menil Collection, Houston, the Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York, the National Gallery of Canada, Ontario, the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, the Tate Gallery, London, and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. He currently serves as the Chairman and Founder of the Rebuild Foundation and as Director of the Arts and Public Life Initiative at the University of Chicago, where he also teaches. He lives and works in Chicago.

UPCOMING FROM RICHARD GRAY GALLERY

Expo Chicago, September 22 – 25, 2016

Theaster Gates: Heavy Sketches, September 30 – November 20, 2016

Art Basel Miami Beach, December 1 – 4, 2016

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