



CULTURE

WINTER 2014

DESIGN | ART | ARCHITECTURE

Zoom in

"Fabiola Beracasa and I share an interest in the fantastic. I knew she'd be perfect for some thematic costume and narrative ideas I've been excited to try out."
—Will Cotton

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Winter 2014



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Thomas Houseago's *Moun Room*, 2014, on view at Hauser & Wirth, New York.

PHOTO BY FREDRIK NILSEN

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SOCIAL NETWORK

For its first-ever project, Theaster Gates Studio was commissioned by artist Paula Crown to develop a large-scale public artwork—coming soon to a community near you.

BY BROOK S. MASON

Artists routinely draw on their home-based roots when it comes to inspiration and imagery—think Picasso, for starters. These days, Theaster Gates, the trailblazing Chicago artist, activist, actor and urban planner all rolled into one, leads the pack.

Now, the Windy City's multimedia artist Paula Crown is hitting the marks, too. Her latest sculpture, a temporary 3,200-square-foot outdoor installation in the Miami Design District during Art Basel Miami Beach, is more than a passing nod to her hometown as to materials and more.

Crown, who's represented by Marlborough Gallery, tapped Theaster Gates Studio and the University of Chicago's Design Apprenticeship Program to fabricate and install her innovative work. "This was an incredible opportunity for local artists to work with her to realize a large-scale public artwork," says Gates.

"It's about shared communities and the first-ever project for Theaster Gates Studio," says Crown, who has known Gates for 25 years and has long championed the ways his work speaks of civil rights and how it tackles urban problems in novel ways. Her sculptural installation, *TRANSPOSITION: Over Many Miles*, consists of two distinctly different works: *Fractals*, which is made up of 52 triangular pieces constructed of reclaimed wood, tempered glass, synthetic grass, metal, local plantings and sand, and *PERforations*, a 25-foot-long sculpture with indentations for seating. While those sculptures will be on view in Miami through March, she's then taking that artistic endeavor straight back to Chicago where it will be installed in an underserved community.

Meanwhile, Gates' latest artwork will be at London-based White Cube gallery's stand at Art Basel Miami Beach. They're still under wraps, yet bound to build on his usual themes. "Social, cultural and economic issues are imbued in his art," says White Cube Creative Director Susan May. Take his sculptures and installation art, from shoe-polish stands made up of portions of abandoned buildings and drug dens, to glass-encased decommissioned fire hoses in gilt frames entitled *In Event of a Race Riot*. They are commentaries on the struggle of African-Americans and the civil rights movement.

One of nine children of a roofer and homemaker, Gates, who serves as director of Arts and Public Life at the University of Chicago, takes his art to an entirely new level by building on those concerns to affect change in the hard-hit areas of the city. He's long been revitalizing distressed neighborhoods and providing much-needed cultural projects, programs and housing there. "What I've tried to do is leverage my understanding of art and how people view art to help them reimagine what can happen in poor neighborhoods," says Gates.

"There's a direct correlation to his art reflecting the plight of the poor to his inner-city projects," says Manhattan art consultant Todd Levin, whose clients include major museums. "One doesn't exist without the other."

Examples of Gates' civic efforts are prolific. As founder of the nonprofit Rebuild Foundation, he and his team have revitalized far more than a dozen distressed buildings. His Black Cinema House and Dorchester Artist Housing Collaborative in Chicago are just two. In total, including ones in St. Louis

and Omaha, Gates and his team have created a staggering 50,000 square feet of new residential space and 75,000 square feet of commercial space, including public structures for cultural programs along with affordable live and work spaces for artists.

Those considerable achievements have garnered praise from Chicago's charismatic Mayor Rahm Emanuel. "Through his energy, creativity and vision, Theaster has helped us all realize how structures throughout our city are also works of art," Emanuel says.

Come January, Gates' group is expanding their projects even further. The Stony Island Trust & Savings Bank Building, which Gates purchased from the mayor for a single dollar, will be up and running as an arts center.

Also at the top of the artist's list is leading a new University of Chicago initiative, the \$3.5 million Place Project, which aims to support both arts and culture and, in turn, transforms even more neglected communities. And he is taking that endeavor on the road.

For his latest project, artists, designers, policy experts and urban planners will be trained to aid in expanding the transformation of Detroit and Akron, Ohio, as well as Gary, Indiana, and ultimately a model will be spread nationwide. Clearly, no other artist is doing such work on this scale.

Gates asks, "How do you help the arts and artists to grow in ambitious ways and make a big impact in the world while at the same time bringing with you your brothers and sisters next door?" Well, weaving the arts into the fabric of communities. "You do it over time," he says.



PHOTO BY POWELL BREA

Paula Crown's 3,200-square-foot sculptural installation, *TRANSPOSITION: Over Many Miles*, is temporarily installed in the Miami Design District until March, when it will move to Chicago.