

(OPENING) THEASTER GATES: AFRO-MINGEI

APRIL 24 [WED] - SEPTEMBER 1 [SUN], 2024 MORI ART MUSEUM [53F, ROPPONGI HILLS MORI TOWER]

HIGHLY-ANTICIPATED, MUST-SEE FIRST SOLO EXHIBITION BY AN ENTHRALLING BLACK ARTIST IN JAPAN, WITH EPIC INSTALLATION IMAGINING A NEW HYBRID OF BLACK AND JAPANESE CULTURES THROUGH CERAMICS, ARCHITECTURE, AND MUSIC

The Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, is proud to present the exhibition titled *Theaster Gates: Afro-Mingei* from Wednesday, April 24, to Sunday, September 1, 2024.

Based on the South Side of Chicago, IL, Theaster Gates (b. 1973 in Chicago) has earned international acclaim for a practice that traverses multiple media and genres, primarily focusing on sculpture and ceramics but also encompassing architecture, music, performance, fashion and design. Trained as a sculptor and urban planner, Gates has been influenced by Japanese craft and culture over the past 20 years. He first traveled to Japan in 2004 to study ceramics in Tokoname, Aichi Prefecture. His deep encounters in Japan and across the Asia-Pacific, coupled with his experiences as an African American man with roots in Mississippi and Chicago have been the keystones of his creative process. Gates, who has explored cultural hybridity over the course of his practice, coined the term “*Afro-Mingei*,” his unique conceptual framework fusing the philosophies of the Japanese *Mingei* movement and the aesthetics of the “Black Is Beautiful” cultural movement that played a significant part in the American civil rights movement (1954-1968). *Theaster Gates: Afro-Mingei* is Gates’ first solo exhibition in Japan and largest-ever in Asia, made up of following sections: Shrine; Black Library & Black Space; Blackness; Timelines; and Afro-Mingei. This exhibition showcases major bodies of existing and never-before-seen work that demonstrate the influence of Japanese culture on his practice.

As the world reexamines the historical and contemporary prominence of certain voices and seeks to diversify the perspectives represented, the global art scene has been increasingly interested in the

multiplicity of experiences reflected in the work of leading Black artists. While Black histories remain relatively little known among the Japanese public, this exhibition demonstrates its growing attention to Black art through the multidimensional practice of Theaster Gates. *Afro-Mingei* will convey the importance of contemporary art that honors craft, ask us to consider questions of race and politics, and celebrate the hybrid possibilities of culture.



Doric Temple
2022 High-fired stoneware with glaze
Dimensions variable
Installation view: *Theaster Gates: Young Lords and Their Traces*,
New Museum, New York, 2022-2023
Photo: Chris Strong

PRESS RELEASE Press Inquiries: Mori Art Museum Public Relations Office [within Kyodo PR]
Tel: +81-(0)80-2340-8755 (Ms. Wada) E-mail: mam-pr@kyodo-pr.co.jp

MESSAGE FROM THE ARTIST, THEASTER GATES

For more than 20 years, the Mingei movement has been an important guidepost for me in understanding the mechanics of celebration associated with the beauty that a people make. The Mingei movement, like the Black Power movement of the United States, was attempting to preserve and honor a very specific past as the west quickly encroached. While both had blind spots, biases and detractors, their resolve was to celebrate the local, raise awareness of beauty and honor the power of culture. Afro-Mingei is an attempt to marry the most significant movements of my artistic journey.

BIOGRAPHY

Born 1973 in Chicago, IL, where he continues to live, Theaster Gates studied urban design, ceramics, religion, and visual art at Iowa State University and the University of Cape Town, South Africa. He masterfully translates the intricacies of Blackness through clay, objecthood, music, film, space and materiality. In 2004, Gates began his now twenty-year engagement with the ceramic legacies of the city of Tokoname in Aichi Prefecture, Japan, where he participated in the International Workshop of Ceramic Art in Tokoname [IWCAT] homestay program and continues to honor and artistically invest in local makers and craft histories. In recent years, he has had major solo exhibitions at such institutions as the New Museum (New York, 2022–23), Serpentine Pavilion (London, 2022), Whitechapel Gallery (London, 2021), Walker Art Center (Minneapolis, 2019–20), Martin Gropius Bau (Berlin, 2019), Palais de Tokyo (Paris, 2019), and Fondazione Prada (Milan, 2018). In Japan, Gates exhibited at the Aichi Triennale 2022, and in 2019 was selected for the Obayashi Foundation Research Program, "Visions of the City."

GENERAL INFORMATION

Exhibition Title: *Theaster Gates: Afro-Mingei*

Organizer: Mori Art Museum

Corporate Sponsors: OBAYASHI CORPORATION, Bloomberg Philanthropies, Aioi Nissay Dowa Insurance Co., Ltd., WOODFORD RESERVE

Special Support: WHITE CUBE

Support: Gagosian, GRAY

Production Support: SANSUI-SHA, SHOYEIDO INCENSE CO., UJI TEA HORII SHICHIMEIEN, HOSOO

Curated by: Tokuyama Hirokazu (Associate Curator, Mori Art Museum), Kataoka Mami (Director, Mori Art Museum)

Exhibition Period: April 24 [Wed] - September 1 [Sun], 2024

Venue: Mori Art Museum, 53F, Roppongi Hills Mori Tower, 6-10-1 Roppongi, Minato-ku, Tokyo

Hours: 10:00–22:00 | Tue: 10:00–17:00 | * Open until 22:00 on Tuesdays of April 30 and August 13.

* Admission until 30 minutes before closing. | * Open every day.



Admissions:

| | [Weekdays] | | [Sat., Sun. & Holidays] | |
|--|-------------------------|---------|-------------------------|---------|
| | On-Site | Online | On-Site | Online |
| Adults | ¥ 2,000 | ¥ 1,800 | ¥ 2,200 | ¥ 2,000 |
| Students (University/High School) | ¥ 1,400 | ¥ 1,300 | ¥ 1,500 | ¥ 1,400 |
| Children (Jr. High Students and under) | Free (across the board) | | | |
| Seniors (Ages 65 and over) | ¥ 1,700 | ¥ 1,500 | ¥ 1,900 | ¥ 1,700 |

* It is encouraged to make advance booking for a designated date/time slot and purchase the admission ticket on the booking website.

* Admissions without advance bookings will be allowed so far as the time slots have not filled up on the day of your visit.

* All prices include tax.

* Ticket also valid for admission into the following Mori Art Museum small programs that run concurrently: *MAM Collection 018: Nguyen Trinh Thi*; *MAM Screen 019: The Dawn of Taiwanese Video Art in the 1980s-1990s (Screening)*; and *MAM Research 010: The Dawn of Taiwanese Video Art in the 1980s-1990s (Exhibition)*.

General Inquiries: 050-5541-8600 (Hello Dial, within Japan) / +81-(0)47-316-2772 (Hello Dial, from overseas)

www.mori.art.museum/en

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EXHIBITION FEATURES AND HIGHLIGHTS

■ Largest-ever solo exhibition in Japan by a Black artist

Theaster Gates: Afro-Mingei offers the priceless opportunity to experience major past works and never-seen-before new works created for this exhibition from a prominent practitioner of Black art, a domain that has been attracting growing interest from the international art world in recent years. The all-embracing content, including an introduction to the Black histories and cultures that underpin Gates' practice, makes it the largest-ever exhibition of its kind to be staged in Japan. Featured is a substantial body of work, including a large-scale installation utilizing ceramics made in Tokoname and Gates' own ceramic sculptures, collections of historical archival materials, tar paintings, sound installations, and video works.



Installation view: *Theaster Gates: A Clay Sermon*, Whitechapel Gallery, London, 2021-2022

Photo: Theo Christelis

Photo courtesy: Whitechapel Gallery, London

■ Showcases Black history's influence on contemporary culture, from the "Black Is Beautiful" movement to speculative futures envisaged by Gates

The Black craft practices, art, music, and fashion that have played major roles in past resistance to anti-Black discrimination and oppression including Black Lives Matter (BLM), now have a higher profile than ever before, thanks in part to Gates' artistic interventions elevating histories of the past that others had written off. It indeed reflects a culture that has actively and creatively resisted centuries of racial violence and colonial exploitation. In *Theaster Gates: Afro-Mingei*, Gates' multidisciplinary oeuvre will demonstrate the importance and emergence of Black culture today.

■ Presents Gates' representative projects of spatial practices including architectural projects centered in Chicago

Theaster Gates: Afro-Mingei employs archival materials to introduce Gates' world-renowned architectural interventions through one of his best-known projects: the Rebuild Foundation (2009-). Undertaken on Chicago's South Side, a predominantly Black community that was intentionally isolated and denied equal right to property and city-wide investment, Gates, through Rebuild Foundation, has rescued over 40 buildings from abandonment, transforming them into spaces of public engagement with art and culture. The Foundation's work includes archiving and presenting important collections of objects that chronicle Black history and culture. For example, Gates stewards and invites the community to witness and participate in the preservation of culturally and historically valuable objects from the archives of the Chicago-based Johnson Publishing Company (JPC), publishers of the widely circulated periodicals in the second half of the 20th century on Black life, *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines, and the personal collection of records of the late "Godfather of House Music" Frankie Knuckles (1955-2014), just to name a few.



Stony Island Arts Bank (exterior) [top] / (interior) [bottom] 2015-
Photo: Tom Harris

Photo courtesy: White Cube

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■ New works and projects with a Japanese connection

Theaster Gates: Afro-Mingei features works that imagine, amalgamate and hybridize Black and Japanese historical and cultural elements, including the Black Vessel made in Tokoname, and work inspired by late Edo-period poet and ceramic artist Otagaki Rengetsu. In addition, a variety of projects on which Gates has collaborated with various makers from around Japan, including Nagano-based SANSUI-SHA, company that utilizes second-hand wood; SHOYEIDO INCENSE CO., a Kyoto-based, long-established incense shop; UJI TEA HORII SHICHIMEIEN; and a Nishijin textile company HOSOO will be presented.

■ “Black Library” book lounge right in the gallery

An interactive and participatory library with shelves filling the gallery walls has been created for the exhibition, offering visitors the chance to browse a few thousand publications on Black art, history and culture.

■ Full program of events including music and workshops

A diverse program of events designed to showcase the breadth of Gates’ practice is planned for the duration of the exhibition including on-site sonic activations, events featuring DJs, and an off-site installation at the former Earthenware Pipe Factory (*Maruri-Toukan*) in the city of Tokoname.



The Listening House
2022
Installation view: Aichi Triennale 2022
Photo: ToLoLo studio
* Referential image



A Heavenly Chord
2022
Leslie speakers, Hammond B-3 organ, sound
Dimensions variable
Photo: Jim Prinz Photography

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WHAT IS "AFRO-MINGEI"?

"Afro-Mingei" is the manifestation of a new creative ideology wherein Theaster Gates imagines the artistic possibilities of combining Black aesthetics and Japanese craft philosophies to envision hybrid-culture futures. It traces his long-established and enduring relationship with Japanese, Chinese and Korean ceramic histories, conceiving of an artistic and intellectual invitation that considers Black political movements alongside Japanese craft resistance. In addition, "Afro-Mingei" also is a reflection on two very important movements — the "Black Is Beautiful" movement of the United States and the Mingei movement of Japan — both of which used public spectacle, academic debate, and propaganda as tools of self-empowerment when cultural independence was under threat by external and dominant forces of Modernity and Western assimilation.

For Gates, "Afro-Mingei" is a fiction yet a deep truth. As the culmination of this project to date, staging a show in the country that gave birth to the Mingei movement so influential in Gates' art is an homage and testament to the ways that culture proliferates in a country, in the world, and between cultures.



Storefront Sign
2018
Neon
114.9 x 114.9 cm
Courtesy: White Cube
Photo: Theo Christelis

KEYS TO UNDERSTANDING "AFRO-MINGEI"

1. What is "Afro"?

The prefix *Afro-* that more broadly means "African" (as in Afro-Americans, for example), refers to the hairstyle that gained popularity as a symbol of Black identity and empowerment during the years of the civil rights movement in the US.

2. Nameless craftsmen and neglected materials in Mingei

The term Mingei was coined by religious philosopher and art critic Yanagi Soetsu a.k.a. Yanagi Muneyoshi (1889-1961) alongside like-minded associates such as potters Hamada Shoji and Kawai Kanjiro, and refers to folk crafts produced by nameless artisans. Yanagi saw Mingei, born out of the tapestry of art, philosophy and religion that comprises traditional Japanese culture, as harboring "a singular beauty absent from conventional notions of art and aesthetics." Mingei finds true beauty not in the output of individual artists, but in works created in artisans' innocence, or items used by people as part of their day-to-day routines.

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3. Hybridity of “Afro” and “Mingei”

Gates’ works in the exhibition translate ideologies of Blackness that emerged out of a collective consciousness developed by African Americans in resistance to, and as survival from the preexisting, often oppressive, American consciousness. Utilizing his predisposition to what can be called a ‘double consciousness,’* Gates allows these objects to thrive in new cultural contexts where experimental binaries can be reimagined through “Afro-Mingei.” Audaciously combining African craftworks and symbols of a deeply-layered Black American consciousness such as the Hammond B-3 organ - which is an allegory for the spiritual and political refuge sought by the Black community during times of racial tension and often used in Pentecostal and Baptist churches - with Japanese ceramics and ritual objects such as tea, incense and sake wares, Gates attempts to honor these generational crafts and create new cultural value.

* The idea of ‘double consciousness’ was first introduced by W. E. B. Du Bois (1868-1963), an African American intellect and civil rights activist in his book *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903).

4. Multiple origins seen in his ceramic works

Over the years, Gates has presented ceramic works from multiple perspectives. An important early project concerned “Yamaguchi Shoji,” a fictional ceramicist who traveled from Japan to the US state of Mississippi. The pieces by Yamaguchi, who married a Black woman and melded Japanese pottery and African American expression, were all creations of Gates himself. His other works of ceramic art show the influence of the enslaved potter David Drake (c.1801-1874), American ceramic artist Peter Voukos (1924-2002), and the diverse history of Japanese ceramic art. Often products of this hybrid background, Gates’ pottery pieces offer a vital medium for the interpretation of “Afro-Mingei.”

5. Collaboration and community

Gates’ community revitalization projects on Chicago’s South Side are meant to revive old buildings as a demonstration that there is life within forgotten spaces and to create new hubs where people can meet, mingle and collaborate. Yanagi stated that in Mingei, “one may witness a world of true cooperation,” and also wrote that in most cases, this did not come about without the help of local people, and that “one cannot expect proper craft from a social structure in chaos.”* Gates’ projects, which could also be described as social contribution through creativity, echo and resonate with this idea.

* Yanagi, Soetsu. *Kogei no michi* [The Way of Crafts] (Tokyo: Kodansha Gakujutsu Bunko, 2005), pp. 54-55.

The latest exhibition press images are available on our website for downloads:

<https://tayori.com/f/theastergates-en/>

?! EXHIBITION-RELATED LEARNING PROGRAMS

■ ARTIST TALK * Japanese-English simultaneous interpretation available

The artist Theaster Gates talks about the background of his works and the exhibition.

Appearing: Theaster Gates (artist)

Discussants: Tokuyama Hirokazu (*Theaster Gates: Afro-Mingei* Co-Curator / Associate Curator, Mori Art Museum),
Kataoka Mami (*Theaster Gates: Afro-Mingei* Co-Curator / Director, Mori Art Museum)

Date & Time: 18:30-20:00, Thursday, April 25, 2024

Venue: Auditorium, Mori Art Museum (53F, Roppongi Hills Mori tower)

Capacity: 80 (booking required) **Fee:** free (exhibition ticket valid for the day of issue required)

Booking: Booked out

■ SYMPOSIUM “WHY MINGEI, WHY NOW?” * Japanese-English simultaneous interpretation available

The Mingei movement, based on an idea conceived chiefly by Yanagi Soetsu, Hamada Shoji, and Kawai Kanjiro, began in Japan in 1926. Recent years have seen growing interest in all matters Mingei, including a centennial exhibition *100 Years of Mingei: The Folk Crafts Movement* at the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, in 2021 coinciding with the 60th anniversary of the death of Yanagi Soetsu, and the 2023 touring exhibition *MINGEI: The Beauty of Everyday Things*, launched at the Nakanoshima Museum of Art, Osaka.

Theaster Gates, meanwhile, views Mingei as symbolizing the reconsideration of cultural values, and attempts to hybridize it with Black culture through his “Afro-Mingei” concept.

For the first part of the symposium we will contemplate the meaning that Mingei brings to our daily lives, and to society, from the perspectives of craft, design, and contemporary art, and the second will examine types of expression not previously associated with Mingei, such as African crafts, and discuss the possibilities of interpreting Mingei in contemporary settings.

Date & Time: 17:00-20:00, Saturday, May 11, 2024

Venue: Academyhills (49F, Roppongi Hills Mori Tower)

Capacity: 150 (booking required) **Fee:** ¥ 500 (exhibition ticket not included)

Booking: Mori Art Museum website www.mori.art.museum/en

Part 1 Hanai Hisaho (Chief Researcher, The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo)
Fukasawa Naoto (Director, The Japan Folk Crafts Museum, Tokyo)
Kataoka Mami (Director, Mori Art Museum)

Part 2 Ogawa Hiroshi (President, TOKYO KANKAN CO., LTD.)
Sagi Tamae (Curator, Kawai Kanjiro Memorial Museum, Kyoto)
Nakamura Yuta (Artist)
Tokuyama Hirokazu (Associate Curator, Mori Art Museum)

* Please note that the Programs are subject to change without prior notice.

* A series of Family Programs, School Programs, and Access Programs are currently in planning. Visit the Mori Art Museum website for the program & booking details and updates. www.mori.art.museum/en

Inquiries on the Programs: Learning, Mori Art Museum

E-mail: mam-learning@mori.co.jp

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RELATED INFORMATION

AUDIO GUIDE

The web-app-based audio guide featuring commentary on the works by the artist Theaster Gates himself, as well as highlights of the exhibition by the exhibition curators, Kataoka Mami and Tokuyama Hirokazu, is available for free. Anyone can use it free of charge, and we strongly encourage you to use it.

* Visitors are requested to bring and use their own devices (e.g. smartphones, tablets).

Available in: English / Japanese **Number of Tracks:** 20 **Length:** Approx. 35min.

Fee: free **Produced by:** Stylinx **Supervised by:** Mori Art Museum

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

The exhibition catalogue features text by Theaster Gates himself, an interview with the artist by Kataoka Mami (Director, Mori Art Museum), and essays by Tokuyama Hirokazu (Associate Curator, Mori Art Museum), Chelsea Foxwell (Professor of Art History, University of Chicago) and Coco Fusco (artist and writer).

Size: A4 (29.7 x 21 cm) **Number of Pages:** 264 (TBD)

Languages: Japanese-English bilingual

Price: ¥3,784 (incl. tax) **Date of Issue:** TBD

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MORI ART MUSEUM SHOP (3F, Roppongi Hills West Walk)

MORI ART MUSEUM ONLINE SHOP (<https://shop.mori.art.museum/>)

Inquiries: MORI ART MUSEUM SHOP 53

Tel: +81-(0)3-6406-6118 (Hours subject to those of the Museum)

PERFORMANCES @ THE EXHIBITION

The work *A Heavenly Chord* (2022) presented at this exhibition is an installation composed of a Hammond B-3 organ and seven Leslie speakers. Invented in Chicago in the 1930s, the Hammond B-3 was widely adopted by churches in Black neighborhoods, in combination with Leslie speakers, as a more accessible alternative to the pipe organ.

Every Sunday during the exhibition, an organist will play the organ in this work for the public. Don't miss this splendid opportunity to experience the authentic sounds of Black music.

Date & Time: 14:00-17:00 (including breaks for performers), every Sunday during the exhibition period

* Please note that the dates & times are subject to change without prior notice.

See the Mori Art Museum website for the latest updates. www.mori.art.museum/en

* The performances may end before 17:00 without prior notice.

Venue: Gallery I, Mori Art Museum (53F, Roppongi Hills Mori Tower)

Performers: Tsuchida "Hal" Harunobu or Nishikawa Naoto

Fee: free (exhibition ticket valid for the day of issue required)

Booking: NOT required (please come to Gallery I directly)

* From April 24 to 28, two members of The Black Monks, Gates' musical ensemble, are scheduled to perform.

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[ALSO ON VIEW] MORI ART MUSEUM SMALL PROGRAMS TO RUN CONCURRENTLY WITH *THEASTER GATES: AFRO-MINGEI* EXHIBITION

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MAM COLLECTION IS A SERIES OF DIVERSE, THEME-BASED EXHIBITIONS SHOWCASING THE MORI ART MUSEUM'S PERMANENT COLLECTION.

MAM COLLECTION 018: NGUYEN TRINH THI

Organizer: Mori Art Museum

<https://www.mori.art.museum/en/exhibitions/mamcollection018/>

* *47 Days, Sound-less* is commissioned by the Han Nefkens Foundation, Mori Art Museum, M+ Hong Kong and Singapore Art Museum.



Nguyen Trinh Thi *47 Days, Sound-less* 2024
3-channel video, black and white and color, sound, mirrors 30 min.
Installation view: *Shanshui: Echoes and Signals*, M+, Hong Kong, 2024
Photo: Dan Leung
Photo courtesy: M+, Hong Kong



MAM SCREEN FEATURES OUTSTANDING SINGLE-CHANNEL VIDEO WORKS FROM AROUND THE WORLD.

MAM SCREEN 019: THE DAWN OF TAIWANESE VIDEO ART IN THE 1980S-1990S (SCREENING)

Organizer: Mori Art Museum

Grant from: Ministry of Culture, Taiwan

In Association with: Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in Japan, Taiwan Cultural Center

Curated by: Sing Song-Yong (Professor, Taipei National University of the Arts), Kondo Kenichi (Senior Curator, Mori Art Museum)

<https://www.mori.art.museum/en/exhibitions/mamscreen019/>



Lin Chun-Chi *Das Glas II (The Glass II)* 1997
Video, color, sound
9 min. 14 sec.
Photo: Sandra Liessmann



MAM RESEARCH, FOCUSING ON SPECIFIC ARTISTS AND TRENDS PREDOMINANTLY IN ASIAN CONTEMPORARY ART, DISPLAYS MATERIAL TO CONTEMPLATE ALONGSIDE THEIR HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXTS.

MAM RESEARCH 010: THE DAWN OF TAIWANESE VIDEO ART IN THE 1980S-1990S (EXHIBITION)

Organizer: Mori Art Museum

Grant from: Ministry of Culture, Taiwan

In Association with: Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in Japan, Taiwan Cultural Center

Curated by: Sing Song-Yong (Professor, Taipei National University of the Arts), Kondo Kenichi (Senior Curator, Mori Art Museum)

<https://www.mori.art.museum/en/exhibitions/mamresearch010/>



Kuo I-Fen, Lu Ming-Te *Silent Body* 1987
Performance, 5-channel video (black and white, silent), CRT monitor, branch, and white cloth
Dimensions variable
Installation view: *Experimental Art: Action Space*, Taipei Fine Arts Museum, 1987

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