

Akim Monet Fine Arts, LLC



Theaster GATES (b 1973)

Asphalt painting for Huguenot House with altar

Wood, tar roofing, shoe polish and nails, in 2 parts

43 1/2 x 20 1/2 x 3 1/2 in (110.5 x 52.1 x 8.9 cm)

21 x 24 x 24 in (53.3 x 60.9 x 60.9 cm)

circa 2013

PROVENANCE

Kavi Gupta Gallery, Chicago
Private collection

EXHIBITED

Theaster Gates: 13th Ballad, May 18 - October 6, 2013, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago
Of Mice and Men, Fall 2020, Popcorn Gallery Akim Monet Fine Arts, Los Angeles
Aktivismus, Summer 2022, The Lone Star Gallery Akim Monet Fine Arts, Dallas

Akim Monet Fine Arts, LLC
2101 Cedar Springs Rd. Ste. 1050
Dallas, TX 75201 - U. S. A.

Telephone +1 (424) 394 8480
info@akimmonetfinearts.com
www.akimmonetfinearts.com

NOTES

13th Ballad, an installation by Chicago-based artist Theaster Gates, is an extension of the artist's *12 Ballads for Huguenot House*, which was coproduced by the MCA and exhibited at Documenta 13, the 2012 iteration of the international art exhibition that takes place every five years in Kassel, Germany.

Gates, whose practice includes performance, installation, and urban interventions, created *12 Ballads for Huguenot House* as part of his ongoing efforts to rejuvenate—both socially and architecturally—his South Chicago neighborhood, a campaign that began in 2006 when he refurbished an abandoned building on South Dorchester Avenue as his studio and home. This effort was later expanded to include abandoned houses nearby, which the artist and a team of local laborers also renovated, reinventing them as alternative cultural spaces while also repurposing their materials to make both functional and purely aesthetic objects. For *12 Ballads*, much of the raw building material from the house at 6901 S. Dorchester Ave. was transported to Germany and used in the partial restoration of the dilapidated historic building in Kassel called the Huguenot House—where the carpenters and students who were involved in this effort lived as part of the project—symbolically mending one neglected cultural history with another. Ultimately, *12 Ballads* resulted in a poetic exchange of material and music. Before the sister house in Chicago was carefully disassembled, Gates and his collaborators from the musical ensemble Black Monks of Mississippi—an improvisational group that combines black spiritual music with the blues and Eastern chanting traditions—recorded a series of 12 songs and performances in the South Side home, which was later screened in Kassel and accompanied there by another set of live performances by the Monks.

For *13th Ballad*, Gates creates a new large-scale installation in the MCA's Marjorie Blum Kovler Atrium that comprises art objects and materials from the Huguenot House, as well as a set of repurposed pews from the University of Chicago's Bond Chapel. The pews, having been removed recently in order to offer Muslim students a place to pray, are a symbolic gesture of religious tolerance. Gates thought broadly about spaces of worship while researching the religious persecution of the Huguenots, members of the Protestant Reformed Church of France, who were forced to flee discrimination by the Catholic Church and relocate in Protestant nations such as Prussia (modern-day Germany) between the 16th and 18th centuries. The installation features a monumental sculpture that showcases the everyday objects left behind by the artists and workers in the Huguenot House. This anchoring work, in combination with the carved wooden pews, creates an ecclesiastical ambiance within the museum, alluding to how art museums, not unlike churches, are sites of pilgrimage and contemplation. Providing context for the project, the MCA Screen presentation in the Turner Family Gallery on the fourth-floor reprises key aspects of *12 Ballads*, including video footage from Kassel and the original Dorchester project as well as functional objects Gates and his team created for Documenta.

Over the course of the summer, a series of three collaborative performances titled *The Accumulative Affects of Migration 1-3* activate the atrium installation and build on the artist's restoration of the historic Huguenot House. Whereas the majority of the performances that took place in Kassel as part of *12 Ballads* focused on soul and gospel music, *The Accumulative Affects of Migration 1-3* explores connections between the migration narratives of the Huguenots and black Americans through an experimental patchwork of classical opera and Delta blues. For this component of *13th Ballad*, the artist has worked closely with University of Chicago's Germanic studies scholar David Levin and musician and composer Michael Drayton to create a new body of music based on Giacomo Meyerbeer's opera *Les Huguenots* and blues compositions by Muddy Waters. An interdisciplinary group—including Yaw Agyeman, Khari Lemuel, Tomeka Reid, Joshua Abrams, Mikel Avery, Orron Kenyetta, and Kiara Lanier—performs the score, translating and improvising both lyrical content and formal components to musically unite these two seemingly disparate social histories.

Source: <https://mcachicago.org/Exhibitions/2013/Theaster-Gates-13th-Ballad>



Installation view, Theaster Gates, *12 Ballads for the Huguenot House*, 2012. Installation view, Documenta 13, Kassel, Germany. Image courtesy of Kavi Gupta, Chicago, Berlin



Installation view, *Theaster Gates: 13th Ballad*, MCA Chicago, May 18-Oct 6, 2013
Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago



Installation view, *Theaster Gates: 13th Ballad*, MCA Chicago, May 18-Oct 6, 2013
 Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago



Installation view, *Cosmology of Yard*, Whitney Biennial 2010. Courtesy Whitney Museum of American Art, NY

"Boss! I'm gonna shine some shoes," Theaster Gates shouts in a pointedly servile tone.

The audience at Little Black Pearl on January 10 squirms a bit. "Boss!" he repeats, scanning the room for shoes to shine. The athletic Gates assumes the role of an overly-solicitous bootblack circa mid-twentieth century, when African-American men with brushes, rags, and wooden boxes were a common presence at train stations and in busy lobbies. Gates hones in on a pair belonging to a young black man in the front row who is, literally, well-heeled. He kneels over the leather shoes and begins to buff. He sings as he shines. "Sweet Jesus, tell him where I am." The artist's body is now low to the floor. Necks crane in the audience, who sit in a horseshoe around the spare performance space. A low, melodic drone begins as three singers, two guitarists, a bassist, and percussionist add layers of rising and falling sound. Gates starts counting: "One, two, three," to the musicians, as if they were calling and responding in church. This music, Gates explains, is church music, meant to move through the spirit. The voices of the ensemble swell from near silence to fortissimo as Gates continues to work on the shoes. When finished, the piece is met not by applause, but by the quiet of deep breathing in the audience and the remaining musical vibrations that hang in the air.

"The shoe shine is a metaphor for my labor in the art world, labor that can sometimes feel fruitless. It's also about dignity, humility, and poverty. I wanted to talk about those themes without explicitly saying them."

Source: <http://www.chicagoweekly.org/2009/01/22/the-space-between-artist-theaster-gates-bridges-the-gap-between-culture-and-community/>



In addition to honoring his father's profession of roofer, Theaster Gates revisits the recurring theme of the shoe-shine stand in *Asphalt painting for Huguenot House with altar*, this time infusing it with the sacred function of the altar, an expression of utmost respect for dignity, humility, and poverty.



Installation views, *Cosmology of Yard*, Whitney Biennial 2010; Courtesy Whitney Museum of American Art, NY.
Installation view of *Shoe Shine Stands*, 2010; Courtesy of the artist and Kavi Gupta Gallery, Berlin and Chicago.



Theaster Gates, *Asphalt painting for Huguenot House with altar*, circa 2013 - Wood, tar roofing, shoe polish and nails, in 2 parts - $43 \frac{1}{2} \times 20 \frac{1}{2} \times 3 \frac{1}{2}$ in (110.5 x 52.1 x 8.9 cm) - $21 \times 24 \times 24$ in (53.3 x 60.9 x 60.9 cm)

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