



Park Avenue Armory Hosts Theaster Gates' Black Artists Retreat, Bringing Together Over 300 Black Artists and Allies for Conversations, Performances, and Reflections

**Centered on the Theme of Sonic Imagination, Black Artists Retreat 2019 is the
First Time Gates's Black Artists Retreat will be Held Outside of Chicago**

October 11–13, 2019

New York, NY – October 8, 2019 – Artist Theaster Gates brings his renowned Black Artists Retreat to Park Avenue Armory this October, marking the first time that the Retreat has been held outside Gates' hometown of Chicago. The three-day event hosted by Gates, Artist-in-Residence at the Armory, convenes over 300 black artists and allies from Chicago, New York, and beyond for a weekend of communion, celebration, and multidisciplinary exploration on the theme of sonic imagination—the first Black Artists Retreat with a focus beyond the realm of visual art. Through presentations, formal and informal conversations, sidebars, sharings, tributes, screenings, and meditations, Retreat guests will explore the role of sound in the human experience and in art-making. This will be the sixth iteration of the Black Artists Retreat, which since its founding in 2013 has served as a generative space for hundreds of artists including Kehinde Wiley, Amy Sherard, Bradford Young, Arthur Jafa, and former Armory Artist-in-Residence Carrie Mae Weems—many of whom will be in attendance again this year.

“We are honored to provide the first institutional platform for Theaster Gates' Black Artists Retreat and the crucial opportunities that it provides for the black artist community,” said **Rebecca Robertson**, Founding President and Executive Producer of Park Avenue Armory. “This continues the Armory's growing tradition of hosting convenings, from Carrie Mae Weems' ‘The Shape of Things’ in 2017, to last year's Lenape Pow Wow. The Armory is gratified to be a partner and champion of these important projects, and to serve as a meeting ground, connector, and creative epicenter for artists and our communities.”

“I'm honored to host artists from around the world in a weekend of creative exploration, immersive introspective, and proactive reimagination of the future of Black artistic practices with the Park Avenue Armory,” said Gates. “Often, history has overlooked the accomplishments of great artists of color. Through BAR, we have our own platform for Black artists, fostering dialogue between artists, curators, and historians to strengthen the field and artists' collective practices – It's a gift to be a part of a great cohort of folks leading that change. The Sonic imagination marks the first iteration of BAR outside of Chicago. In what feels like a very new way of understanding the collective, we will reflect on ‘the sonic,’ digging deeper into the histories, silences and audio-based territories that speak to our diasporic and field-based experiences; our triumphs and our futures. The Park Avenue Armory's strong support of Black artists and our allies from all disciplines makes this year's partnership that much more resonant.”

Taking place throughout the historic Park Avenue Armory, from the head house period rooms to the cavernous Wade Thompson Drill Hall, Black Artists Retreat 2019 kicks off on Friday, October 11 with a musical tribute to the long lineage of sonic trailblazers led by Gates, Nona Hendryx, Esperanza Spalding, Tamar-kali, Nik West, Ultra Naté, and Toshi Reagon. Presented in partnership with Harlem Stage as part of its *Cosmic Synthesis of Sun Ra and Afrofuturism* series, the opening celebration will also feature readings by Lynn Nottage, Carl Hancock Rux and Judith Casselberry, choreography by Francesca Harper, and a conversation with Hendryx and Gates, followed by a live DJ set spun by Venus X.

The Retreat continues Saturday with a series of musings, meditations, and testimonies on the theme of sonic imagination. **Participants include:** Carrie Mae Weems and DJ Spooky, Gates' experimental musical ensemble, The Black Monks, with Luke Stewart, Savannah Harris, Warren Crudup III, and Samora Pinderhughes; Miriam Parker and Wadada Leo Smith, Eisa Davis, Tyehimba Jess, Dick Griffin, Imani Uzuri with Dawoud Bey, and Tina Campt, screenings of films by Theaster Gates, Kahlil Joseph and Ja'Tovia Gary; and many more.

The day concludes in the Wade Thompson Drill Hall with Sonic Soul Session #1, a Chicago-style, James Brown-infused roller skating party featuring DJ Madrid, Soul Summit Music, and DJ Sunny Cheeba, and skaters from the local black skate scene performing amidst an installation of some of Gates' celebrated "housebergs"—seven-foot-tall sculptural disco balls shaped like icebergs. The party also marks the completion of the replacement of the wooden flooring of the Drill Hall, which includes recycled pine planks milled by Gates's workforce and repurposed from his Chicago urban manufacturing renewal project, Dorchester Industries, amongst other sources.

As with all previous Retreats, at the core of Black Artists Retreat 2019 are the private gatherings between invited artists taking place throughout the event and all-day Sunday. These moments provide opportunities for artists to gather and reflect on the role of sound in their lives and practices, form networks, and share ideas and resources which can then be amplified to the broader community of black artists and creatives, and their allies. Private retreat participants include: Carrie Mae Weems, Esperanza Spalding, Corinne Bailey Rae, as well as Xenobia Bailey, Charlotte Brathwaite, Rashida Bumbray, Majora Carter, Renee Cox, Quincy Flowers, Eric N. Mack, Alicia Hall Moran, Tavia Nyong'o, Karyn Olivier, Dee Rees, Sarah Broom, Renée Stout, Imani Uzuri, and Zoe Whitely Richmond, among others.

Black Artists Retreat 2019 follows other recent convenings hosted by the Armory, including a Lenape Pow Wow in 2018, the first gathering of Lenape leaders on Manhattan Island since the 1700s, and "The Shape of Things" (2017), a day-long convening curated by former Armory Artist-in-Residence Carrie Mae Weems that brought together artists, writers, poets, musicians, and scholars—including Francesca Harper, Arthur Jafa, Shirin Neshat, Lynn Nottage, Hank Willis Thomas, and Gates himself—to reflect creatively on the political and social climate in America. The Retreat also aligns with the Armory's ongoing Interrogations of Form conversation series, which features artists, scholars, cultural leaders, and social trailblazers in spoken word and performance to offer new points of view and unique perspectives on Armory productions, explore a range of themes and relevant topics, and encourage audiences to think beyond conventional interpretations and perspectives of art.

SPONSORSHIP

Presented in collaboration with The Rebuild Foundation and The Lunder Institute for American Art at Colby College, *Black Artists Retreat 2019: Sonic Imagination* is made possible by a generous grant from the Ford Foundation. Gagosian has provided major support for the Retreat. Sponsorship is provided by Toyota. The Armory's Artist-in-Residence Program is made possible by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

ABOUT BLACK ARTISTS RETREAT

Black Artists Retreat [B.A.R.] is an annual convening of artists of color that originated in Chicago. In 2019, B.A.R. marks a new chapter as it expands outside of Chicago to create artist gatherings across the globe. Each year, artists are invited to think, learn, exchange and party while also developing new networks and solidifying new opportunities for growth and friendship. B.A.R. was born with the goal of creating time and space for artists to be together. Each year, this artist-led initiative is guided by the tenets of fellowship, rejuvenation, and intellectual rigor.

Gates' clear ambition to gather and strategize en masse, outside of any institution, was matched by Myrie's goal of motivating intergenerational dialogue amongst artists of color. These ideas ultimately led to a larger

discussion, incorporating artists Carrie Mae Weems and Sarah Workneh as advisors, about how contemporary artists of color foster collaboration and generosity.

From this initial seed, The Black Artists Retreat [B.A.R.] was born with the goal of creating time and space for a community to engage. Each year, this artist-led initiative is guided by the tenets of fellowship, rejuvenation, and intellectual rigor. Underwritten by Theaster Gates and Rebuild Foundation, the Retreat is hosted across spaces within the Rebuild ecosystem in Chicago, IL and beyond. Guests are invited to think, learn, and party during this moment of evolution and growth.

ABOUT THEASTER GATES

Theaster Gates (b. 1973, Chicago) creates sculpture, installation, and performance work that focuses on space theory and land development. Drawing on his interest and training in urban planning and preservation, Gates redeems spaces that have been left behind and creates interventions that bridge the gap between art and life. Known for his recirculation of art-world capital, Gates smartly upturns art values, land values, and human values in his work and 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 exhibited and performed at Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France (2019); Gropius Bau, Berlin (2019), Sprengel Museum Hannover (2018); Kunstmuseum Basel (2018); National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., USA (2017); Art Gallery of Ontario, Canada (2016); Fondazione Prada, Milan, Italy (2016); Whitechapel Gallery, London (2013); Punta della Dogana, Venice (2013) and dOCUMENTA (13), Kassel (2012). Public collections include Tate Modern, London; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; and Marciano Art Foundation, Los Angeles. Gates was the winner of the Artes Mundi 6 prize and was a recipient of the Légion d'Honneur in 2017. He was recently awarded the Nasher Prize for Sculpture 2018, as well as the Urban Land Institute, J.C. Nichols Prize for Visionaries in Urban Development.

ABOUT PARK AVENUE ARMORY

Part palace, part industrial shed, Park Avenue Armory fills a critical void in the cultural ecology of New York by enabling artists to create, students to explore, and audiences to experience, unconventional work that cannot be mounted in traditional performance halls and museums. With its soaring 55,000-square-foot Wade Thompson Drill Hall—reminiscent of 19th-century European train stations—and an array of exuberant period rooms, the Armory offers a platform for creativity across all art forms. Together, these and other spaces within the historic building utilized for arts programming comprise the Thompson Arts Center, named in recognition of the Thompson family's ongoing support of the institution.

Since its first production in September 2007, the Armory has organized and commissioned immersive performances, installations, and cross-disciplinary collaborations in its vast Drill Hall that defy traditional categorization and challenge artists to push the boundaries of their practice. In its historic period rooms, the Armory presents small-scale performances and programs, including its acclaimed Recital Series, which showcases musical talent from across the globe within the intimate salon setting of the Board of Officers Room; and the new Artists Studio series in the newly restored Veterans Room, which features innovative artists and artistic pairings that harken back to the imaginative collaboration and improvisation of the original group of designers who conceived the space. The Armory also supports artists across genres in the creation and development of new work through its Artist-in-Residence program, which each year offers several artists space and resources to produce new works and present them as part of the Armory's programming. Theaster Gates is a current Armory Artist-in-Residence. Other current Artists-in-Residence include: Mimi Lien, Reggie (Regg Roc) Gray and the D.R.E.A.M. Ring, Sara Serpa, Christine Jones, Steven Hoggett, Lynn Nottage, Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, and Carmelita Tropicana.

The Armory also offers robust arts education programs at no cost to underserved New York City public school students, engaging them with the institution's artistic programming and the building's history and architecture. These programs, which serve more than 5,000 students per year, include student-only performances and

workshops for every production, commissioned works for family programming, school partnerships, and paid internships.

Programmatic highlights from the Armory include *The Let Go*, a site-specific immersive dance celebration by Nick Cave; a Lenape Pow Wow and Standing Ground Symposium, the first congregation of Lenape Leaders on Manhattan Island since the 1700s; Ernesto Neto's *antropodino*, a large-scale, interactive sculpture and labyrinth comprising a 120 by 180-foot canopy extended across the Drill Hall and 60-foot aromatic fabric stalactites; *FLEXN*, an Armory-commissioned presentation of the Brooklyn-born street dance Flex, created by Reggie "Regg Roc" Gray and Director Peter Sellars; Julian Rosefeldt's *Manifesto*, a multi-channel cinematic installation featuring Cate Blanchett; eight-time Drama Desk-nominated play *The Hairy Ape*, directed by Richard Jones and starring Bobby Cannavale; and Sam Mendes' critically acclaimed production of *The Lehman Trilogy*, starring Adam Godley, Ben Miles, and Simon Russell Beale.

Concurrent with its artistic program, the Armory has undertaken an ongoing \$215-million revitalization of its historic building, designed by architects Herzog & de Meuron.

www.armoryonpark.org

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