

**Press Release**

**Obayashi Foundation Research Program**

What would an artist-conceived “City” look like?

**That second recipient of the grant is**

## **THEASTER GATES (Artist)**



Photo: Rankin

In 2017 the Obayashi Foundation launched a new grant program, “Visions of the City—Obayashi Foundation Research Program.” Based on the recommendations of our five-member selection committee<sup>1</sup>, every two years this program awards a research grant to an artist from Japan or abroad endowed with an abundance of creative ideas and a strong interest in cities. The selected artist is provided with an opportunity to examine and investigate various problems facing Japanese urban areas from a completely different perspective from that of conventional urban planning, and to make proposals for “a city that the artist would like to live in; an innovative or ideal urban modality.”

The first artist selected was Makoto Aida, who staged the “Ground No Plan ” exhibit. Mr. Aida made use of various media including drawings, architectural renderings, scale models, paintings, installations, film, and texts to depict the future “City-” and “Land-” scape that he envisioned. (<https://www.obayashifoundation.org/urbanvision/>)

We are delighted to announce that second recipient of the “Visions of the City” grant is artist Theaster Gates. Starting in 2006, Gates renovated two buildings in his hometown of Chicago, creating cultural spaces to convene and host programs for diverse audiences. Both located on the South Side, a neighborhood these buildings have now become community spaces where people gather. Dorchester Projects—named after the block on which the buildings are located—continues to address social issues and stage a range of programs such as exhibitions and other activities as it expands into new hubs and contributes to local industries. Taking advantage of this grant, Gates plans to make a research visit to Japan during the Summer.



Theaster Gates, *Dorchester Projects*, 2008-ongoing The Listening House and the Archive House located on Dorchester Street in the neighborhood of Greater Grand Crossing on the South Side of Chicago Photo: Sara Pooley, Courtesy the artist, White Cube, London, and Regen Projects, Los Angeles

## THEASTER GATES

Theaster Gates was born in Chicago, Illinois, in 1973. Drawing from his training as an urban planner and a potter, the artist redeems buildings, urban landscapes and material that have been left aside and, as such, tease out the politics of making as part of his practice. Known for his recirculation of art-world capital, Gates creates work from the focuses on the possibility of the “life within things,” smartly upturning the question of value(s) while also pondering by demonstrating the complexity of Black space as a formal exercise – one defined by collective desire, artistic agency, and the tactics of a pragmatist.

### Major Exhibitions

2019: *The Black Image Corporation*, Gropius Bau (Berlin, Germany), *Amalgam*, Palais de Tokyo (Paris, France)  
 2018: *The Black Image Corporation*, Fondazione Prada (Milan, Italy)  
*Black Madonna*, Sprengel Museum (Hannover, Germany)  
*Black Madonna*, Kunstmuseum (Basel, Switzerland)  
 2017: *In the Tower*, National Gallery of Art (Washington, DC, USA),  
 2016: *How to Build a House Museum*, Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto, Canada),  
*Black Archive*, Kunsthau Bregenz (Bregenz, Austria) *True Value*, Fondazione Prada (Milan, Italy)  
 2013: *Soul Manufacturing Corporation*, Whitechapel Gallery (London, UK),  
*Prima Materia*, Punta della Dogana (Venice, Italy)  
 2012: dOCUMENTA (13) (Kassel, Germany)

### Major Awards

2018: Nasher Prize for Sculpture, Urban Land Institute, J.C. Nichols Prize for Visionaries in Urban Development  
 2017: Kurt Schwitters Prize, French Legion d’Honneur  
 2014: Artes Mundi

### Major Permanent Collections

Kunstmuseum Basel, Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto, Canada), Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Smithsonian American Art Museum (Washington, DC, USA), Tate Modern (London, UK), and the Whitney Museum of American Art (New York, USA), among others.

### ※ 1 ) Selection Committees

Chairperson	Fumihiko Sumitomo	Director, Arts Maebashi Associate Professor, Tokyo University of the Arts, Graduate School of Global Arts
Vice Chairperson	Shihoko Iida	Curator
Committee	Shino Nomura	Curator, Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery
	Kenjiro Hosaka	Curator, The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo
	Tomoko Yabumae	Curator, Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo

### Comment:

It is difficult to forget my first experience of a work by Theaster Gates. I had climbed the stairs of a run-down block of flats and entered a room where old building materials, wallpaper, and other salvage had been carefully rearranged in the previously empty space. While I was taking my time looking at the patterns and shapes, I was offered a cup of herbal tea as a friendly gesture. I was tired from walking all over the city of Kassel, Germany, and the tea soothed me. Entering another room, I heard someone singing. The sound of blues and jazz floated toward me, emotionally charged, yet played at a volume that blended with the atmosphere in the space. The experience felt both intimate and very comfortable.

Soon after, I looked into the Dorchester Projects that Gates initiated in Chicago. A signature work, the project restores buildings and operates community programs that attract people of all ages from the local neighborhoods, but above all I was astonished to discover that Gates visits Japan nearly every year to make pottery. What in the world is the connection between pottery-making in the Tokoname region and the creation of spaces and works that embrace the identity of an African-American living in Chicago? In today’s society where powerful capital can devastate the soul of an individual, Gates’ work encourages people to be productive and revives the ties in the community. Perhaps this is how he is able to easily overcome the differences between people.

The members of the selection committee anticipate seeing proposals and projects for Japan that go beyond pottery. These days, Gates travels all over the world, but what kind of vision of the city will he present in a country he surely knows quite well? We know it will be different from the work presented by Makoto Aida, the previous recipient of the grant, and we very much look forward to finding out how Theaster Gates will expand the potential of the Obayashi Foundation Research Program.

Fumihiko Sumitomo

### About the Grant Program “Visions of the City – Obayashi Foundation Research Program”

The Foundation was established in September 1998 as the Obayashi Foundation to Promote Urban Studies. As the name implies, we have endeavored to advance the development of urban studies in Japan by supporting those engaged in research activities leading to urban development that would enable people living in cities to have richer, more fulfilling lives. In September 2010, we received official accreditation from the Cabinet Office as a public interest incorporated foundation; the following September we changed our name to the Obayashi Foundation, but continue to maintain our original philosophy.

After the period of postwar reconstruction, Japan achieved high economic growth and became wealthy in a material sense; the urban environment also became more efficient and convenient. Although cities in Japan could be said to have become richer, if asked whether the inner lives of people had truly become more fulfilling, one would be hard pressed how to answer. If we recall how for some time after the war Japan was desperate to revitalize its war-scorched land and that ours is a country with an unprecedented level of natural disasters, it is understandable that the building of durable infrastructure to protect people’s lives has long been the government’s top priority.

On the other hand, when we look around the world, there are many poverty-stricken regions, and for the people in them whatever facilities there may be are merely a means of carrying on their lives. Although this can be said of urban areas throughout the world, cities have given rise to numerous problems such as excessive concentration of populations, air pollution from industrial clusters and the widespread use of automobiles, the loss of the natural environment, and the occurrence of extreme weather conditions as a result of greenhouse gases. In Japan today, as an aging population and a low birthrate lead to a population decline, social problems are also rising, such as abandoned houses and solitary deaths left unnoticed for long periods of time.

Wouldn’t it be possible to contribute somehow to the study of cities with a focus on interaction among people by rethinking urban development as a way to make people’s lives richer and more fulfilling? Cities exist, as do people, and our idea was to support studies on the many relationships between the two in a wide-range of fields including the arts, the economy, the environment, and history.

Now, our foundation is asking not experts on cities or urban engineering but artists from Japan or abroad who are endowed with an abundance of creative ideas and a strong interest in cities to consider various problems facing cities and conduct research on a city that the artist would like to live in; an innovative or ideal urban modality.

When I think about it, never before has there been an organization that provides support to an artist to think about or study the topic of the city. The grant program “Visions of the City—Obayashi Research Program” meets that need.

Takeo Obayashi  
Chairman of the Board  
The Obayashi Foundation

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