

RICHARD GRAY GALLERY

frieze

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Critic's Guide: Chicago

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The heart of a thundercloud, the versatility of László Moholy-Nagy and the last scientist on Earth: the city's best current shows



Theaster Gates

Richard Gray Gallery

30 September – 20 November 2016

For 'Heavy Sketches', artist and social activist Theaster Gates has produced a series of bronze sculptures which appropriate masks and reliquary figures from West Africa. To begin, Gates worked with authentic wooden ritual masks and ceremonial forms, using the objects as inspiration for a collection of ceramics that he then cast in bronze – a process that moves



Theaster Gates, Power Figure with Tar, 2016, bronze, tar, upholstery, cotton rag and dirt with reclaimed wood base, 174 x 51 x 51 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Richard Gray Gallery, Chicago

incrementally from a mutable to immutable material. Alluding to the humiliating tar and feather styles of punishment, Gates covered one bronze reliquary in a thick layer of the sticky black substance, buried it in his the yard of his studio and dug it back up in a performative, Lazarus-inspired gesture. Another association can be made to the Tar-Baby character of Uncle Remus's Br'er Rabbit tales of the American South, variations of which originated in West, Central and Southern Africa. The process-based strategies used in 'Heavy Sketches' – mainly copying and casting – allow not only for a deeper consideration of the formal contours of the masks and figures but, more importantly, the historical weight and multiple narratives imbued within each.