

## THEASTER GATES

KAVI GUPTA GALLERY  
835 West Washington  
April 30–July 2, 2011



View of “An Epitaph for Civil Rights and Other Domesticated Structures,” 2011.

In the past, Theaster Gates has couched his work in historical narratives—a 2010 show at the Milwaukee Art Museum, for example, found the artist reimagining himself as David Drake, the nineteenth-century “slave potter” of Edgefield, South Carolina. Since 2009, in his ongoing *Dorchester Project*, Gates has literally made history a source, specifically the neglected history of Chicago’s predominantly Black South Side. There, the artist, who is trained in both urban planning and fine arts, has been purchasing abandoned homes on a block of Dorchester Avenue, gutting them, and using what he digs out as raw material, while simultaneously transforming the Dorchester complex into an art and archival center.

For this exhibition, Gates has used recuperated cracked moldings, cabinet doors, and subflooring to fashion a series of cases that display decommissioned coiled-up fire hoses—a reference to the violent hosing of civil rights demonstrators in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963. *Socket* and *Loveseat*, both 2011, are each three-foot-square slabs of white concrete, one inlaid with an electrical socket and a strip of wall, the other with a cross section of an embroidered sofa. They shimmer with ground glass and other debris from the Dorchester wreckage—part exhumed archaeological fragment and part modernist white canvas. In a speech at the opening, Gates described this work as both political intervention and “modernist moment,” an intersection most clearly exhibited in his *Civil Tapestry*, 2011, a four-by-eleven-foot rectangular field of vertical bands in pale blue, cream, and crimson. It is only upon closer examination that one realizes the stripes are fire hoses wrapped around a salvaged wooden support, 1960s abstraction by way of 1960s turmoil.

— Julia Langbein