

Press Release

The 12th Austrian Frederick Kiesler Prize for Architecture and the Arts goes to Theaster Gates

The Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation is delighted to announce that the US-American artist Theaster Gates has been awarded the Frederick Kiesler Prize for Architecture and the Arts, one of the most highly endowed international prizes in this area. Born in Chicago in 1973, Theaster Gates is one of the most original artists of our time. Among many other disciplines, Theaster Gates is a trained sculptor, ceramicist, and social innovator. His work addresses aspects of the spatial design, restoration, and reactivation of vacant space with a focus on community enrichment through ambitious cultural initiatives and the preservation of Black culture in America. He employs a range of artistic methods, in particular sculpture and painting, as well as spatial interventions, film, and music. His cultural projects, which focus on the long term, are united by an aspiration to create world-class programs and amenities in Black neighborhoods. Theaster Gates became well-known as a result of the Rebuild Foundation in Chicago, Gates' non-profit organization on the city's South Side that transforms abandoned land and buildings into cultural amenities and artistic space for the community. Since then, his work has been exhibited in important international museums and exhibitions including, but not limited to, documenta 13 in Kassel and Haus der Kunst, Munich (D), National Gallery of Art, Washington DC and Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (USA), the Palais de Tokyo, Paris (F), the Kunstmuseum Basel (CH), the Fondazione Prada, Milan (IT) and the Kunsthaus Bregenz (AT).

First Statement of Theaster Gates:

“Spatial platforms that highlight the contributions of Black artists and designers have been long overlooked. Projects that consider people as much as they consider the implications of the built form deserve merit. I’m so grateful to be part of this precedent and honored that the selection committee would acknowledge my practice as part of the amazing work by luminaries who have received this award in the past. I’m thankful to all who have supported my practice both within museums and on the street.”

“I am delighted that we are honoring Theaster Gates, a virtuoso, who operates at the interface between art, performance, activism, and urban planning. When we consider his work in conjunction with the visionary oeuvre of Frederick Kiesler we open up new horizons. His interest in the question of how artistic means can be used to create social spaces is highly relevant for civil society. The creative breadth covered by Theaster Gates – from ceramic art to music – is a fascinating reflection of the heterogeneity of urban life. And as he develops his processes, which can last several years, he never loses sight of the objective of improving the lives of all the inhabitants of a city,” emphasizes Vienna's Executive City Councilor for Cultural Affairs and Science, Veronica Kaup-Hasler.

“Theaster Gates moves masterfully at the interface between architecture, urban planning, and art, which is why he is predestined to receive the Frederick Kiesler Prize,” says Andrea Mayer, Secretary of State for Art and Culture. *“His entire oeuvre, and the Rebuild Foundation in particular, perfectly exemplifies how art and architecture can also have a social impact. Theaster Gates is a worthy winner of the Frederick Kiesler Prize and – on top of this – a role model for all those who are active in this area.”*

The Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation is particularly delighted about the choice: *“In his work, Theaster Gates has a unique ability to combine social commitment with architectural-artistic solutions. He has created places that are not only new centers for the community, but also impress with their poetic and spatial-aesthetic quality. Gates' innovative spatial practice, combined with a social agenda, elevate both the Kiesler Prize and architecture as an artistic discipline to a higher level. He is a concept artist, who addresses the urgent problems of our times and of his immediate environment. His process-oriented and transdisciplinary approach and his aspiration to improve the reality of people's lives connect him with Friedrich Kiesler and his idea of "correlated arts.”* (Elke Delugan-Meissl, President of the Foundation)

JURY DECISION

The high-profile jury of the Frederick Kiesler Prize explains its decision as follows:

“The jury is pleased to award this year’s Kiesler Prize to Theaster Gates, a Chicago-based artist, activist, and cultural impresario. His creative practice spans a range of artistic genres and connects them with a social agenda. Gates’ extraordinary achievements can be easily linked to Frederick Kiesler’s artistic concepts and experimental attitudes towards the unification of the arts with the built environment and the social notion of space.

With his *Rebuild Foundation*, Gates merges cultural history and community building, literally turning ruins into something new. He beautifully composes materials, spaces, and activities with a holistic sensitivity for the greater good as well as for the detail. He uses his position in the artworld and as an academic to unite funding, research, and his connections in a program for constructing change. He correlates art, architecture, and entrepreneurship – but, above all, he is someone who sees a problem in the world, embraces the challenge, and produces social and urban transition.

By awarding the Kiesler Prize to Theaster Gates, the jury is acknowledging a concept artist who does not work inside the established architectural system or art world but who has found agency through his highly unusual and idiosyncratic practice. His artistic approach is characterized by transdisciplinarity, respect, inclusion, and participative processes. The most important objectives of his work are social change, spatial transformation, and empowerment.

By imbuing this work with both an impressive aesthetic value and a social agenda, he has found a meaningful role for contemporary architecture. In this way, Theaster Gates connects Frederick Kiesler’s historic position with the urgent questions of our time.”

About Theaster Gates

Theaster Gates is a Chicago-based artist whose practice leverages his studies in urban planning, ceramics, fine arts, and religion. Theaster's practice is also informed by the time he spent in Cape Town, South Africa studying religion and fine arts and Tokoname, Japan studying pottery and ceramics.

His works have been exhibited in many leading international museums, galleries, and important exhibitions. He has won numerous international prizes, including the Artes Mundi 6 Prize, the Légion d'Honneur, the Kurt Schwitters Prize, the Nasher Prize for Sculpture, the Urban Land Institute, J.C. Nichols Prize for Visionaries in Urban Development, and the 2020 Crystal Award.

Gates is the Founder and Executive Director of the Rebuild Foundation, a non-profit organization in Chicago that leverages the power of space to create ambitious cultural amenities on the South Side. Gates is a professor of visual arts at the University of Chicago, where he is also the Senior Advisor for Cultural Innovation and Advisor to the Dean at the Harris School of Public Policy.

www.theastergates.com

The Austrian Frederick Kiesler Prize for Architecture and the Arts

The *Austrian Frederick Kiesler Prize for Architecture and the Arts*, one of the most highly endowed international prizes in this area, has been presented this year for the 12th time.

The prize for outstanding achievement, which is endowed to the value of 55,000 euros, serves to celebrate the visionary work of the artist, designer, set designer, and architect Frederick Kiesler (1890 – 1965), who was born in Czernowitz in 1890 and emigrated to the USA in 1926. It honors “extraordinary work in architecture and the arts that relates to Frederick Kiesler’s experimental and innovative approach and his theory of ‘*correlated arts*,’” which transcends the boundaries between and unites the disciplines of architecture and the arts. (Extract from the statutes to the *Frederick Kiesler Prize*).

The high-profile jury included Elizabeth Diller (Diller Scofidio + Renfro, New York), the jury chairperson Bettina Götz (ARTEC Architekten, Wien), Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster (Paris), Anab Jain (Superflux, London and the University of Applied Arts Vienna), and Wolfgang Tschapeller (Wolfgang Tschapeller ZT GmbH and the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna).

Since it was established in 1997, the *Frederick Kiesler Prize* has been awarded to Frank O. Gehry (1998), Judith Barry (2000), Cedric Price (2002), Asymptote Architecture / Hani Rashid + Lise Anne Couture (2004), Olafur Eliasson (2006), Toyo Ito (2008), Heimo Zobernig (2010), Andrea Zittel (2012), Bruce Nauman (2014), Andrés Jaque (2016) and Yona Friedman (2018).

The prize is awarded and endowed alternately every two years by the Republic of Austria and the City of Vienna and organized by the Vienna-based Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the selection of the winner of the prize for 2020 was delayed until 2021. The official presentation of the award by Veronica Kaup-Hasler, Vienna’s Executive City Councilor for Cultural Affairs and Science, is scheduled for late autumn 2021.

Press contact:

Press Download Service:

<https://www.kiesler.org/en/press/>

Press contact:

Susanne Haider,

art:phalanx – Culture & Urbanity

Tel: +43 (0)1 524 98 03 – 11 / Mobile: +43 (0)6991 205 1700

E-mail: presse@artphalanx.at