

PRADA

HOME

CHAWAN CABINET BY THEASTER GATES

MILAN April 16 – Prada unveils Chawan Cabinet, an exhibition by artist Theaster Gates. At its core unfolds a collection of editioned ceramic vessels and ceremonial forms: objects that aid our gathering, our call to ritual, and to be held, handled, and honored through time, rather than merely witnessed.

The project emerges from a longstanding friendship between American artist Theaster Gates and Prada, grounded in a shared sensibility for the intelligence of craft, cultural depth, the interiority of domestic and ceremonial space, and an enduring commitment to experimentation.

Conceived and curated by Gates, the selection brings together a body of editioned works dissolving the boundary between art and object. His own pieces extend an intimate dialogue with those crafted by a curated group of Japanese potters and friends of his: Taira Kuroki (Kyoto, Japan), Yuichi Hirano (Tokoname, Japan), Shion Tabata (Karuizawa, Japan), and Koichi Ohara (Tokoname, Japan).

These works are complemented by large-scale sculptural forms made in Theaster Gates's studio integrated seamlessly within the installation, contributing to a cohesive spatial narrative. A selection from the Prada Home collection is presented alongside, extending the conversation between function, form, and the rituals of everyday life.

Among the earliest technologies shaped by human hands, ceramics carry within them a serene permanence. They are vessels for eating, drinking, storing, gathering; but above all, they retain the memory of touch and the evidence of the elemental, namely the traces of fire. No two pieces are identical. Each bears the subtle variations of gesture, the imprint of time, the presence of the maker. Here, ceramics are not positioned as luxury, but as essential instruments for living with intention and beauty.

At the heart of the project is the *chawan*, the tea bowl central to Japanese tea culture. More than a functional object, it embodies a gesture: an invitation to engage with its form and surface in a deliberate, attentive and honorific way. The *chawan* is an expression of hospitality, an offering that conveys care, respect, and presence.

Alongside it, the *yunomi*, the everyday tea cup, introduces a different temporality. Less formal, more immediate, it belongs to the rhythm of daily life: repetition, habit, calm comfort. If the *chawan* is ritual, the *yunomi* is continuity. The *guinomi*, the Sake cups, and the *tokkuri*, the Sake bottles, extend this vocabulary into the social realm: passed from hand to hand, they transform drinking into a shared act, reinforcing bonds of trust and connection. Across all these forms, the object becomes a catalyst for gathering, an interface through which relationships are enacted.

Prada's longstanding dialogue between intellectual inquiry and material innovation finds here a new extension into the domestic sphere as a framework for spaces and forms of exchange. The collaboration bridges distinct yet resonant worlds: Italian design, Japanese craft traditions, and Theaster Gates' artistic and social practice.

Shifting the emphasis from possession to experience, from display to use, from object to relationship, Chawan Cabinet ultimately speaks to a broader reflection: on how we live, how we come together, and how through form, repetition, and experimentation, even the most human gestures and simple vessels can acquire depth, meaning, and presence.

INSIDE THE CHAWAN CABINET SPACE

Chawan Cabinet unfolds through an environment that evokes a quiet, domestic Japanese landscape: intimate, tactile, and serene. Objects are not merely presented; they are situated within a continuum of rituals, inviting a slower gaze and a more contemplative encounter. The space encourages pause, close looking, the consideration of material, and the imagination of the histories, labor, skill and mastery, embedded within each piece. This attitude is already declared at the store's threshold, where a single object, displayed in the window, frames a moment of focus and suspension from the surrounding urban flow.

Inside, the atmosphere shifts toward a dense material presence and a sense of quiet introspection. Ceramic floor tiles, developed by Theaster Gates in collaboration with Mizuno Seitoen Lab, a Tokoname-based Japanese ceramics manufacturing company, ground the space, while the walls, finished in a raw, earthen plaster inspired by vernacular Japanese techniques, introduce a tactile, almost primordial quality. Together, these elements define an environment that feels in deliberate contrast with the polished neutrality of conventional retail.

The spatial composition is pared back, articulated through a few precise gestures. At its center, a long table in reclaimed wood, echoing the working surfaces of Gates' Chicago studios, serves as both display and site of exchange. Along one side, a modular metal shelving system hosts a stratified accumulation of objects, evoking memory as a process of layering and sedimentation. At the center of the modular unit, a green niche showcases pieces from the Prada Home collection, made in Japan.

The arrangement resists hierarchy and order, dissolving the rigid taxonomies of retail display in favor of something more intuitive, more human, where imperfection and irregularity become part of the composition.

To the right, a sequence of more intimate rooms unfolds. The first is anchored by a cabinet from Gates' personal collection, a symbolic presence that encapsulates his ongoing reflection on storage, memory, and domesticity, and lends its name to the project. With shelves lined with *chawan* from Gates' 1,000 tea bowl project — a project devoted to the replication of form and the chemical experimentation of glaze formulas — expressive gradients on the surfaces of the chawan lend a contemporary reflection on the vessel, whose ritual form has been perfected by artisans across generations. Beyond it, a more restrained shelving system, crafted in Japan, continues the dialogue between artisanal tradition and formal clarity.

Set within the inner courtyard, a tea house introduces a further layer of meaning. Inspired by the principles of Japanese architecture, beginning with the tatami module and extending to the use of authentic, carefully sourced materials, it offers a space of ritual and ceremony. Here, traditional tea ceremonies led by a Japanese tea master take place as offerings and invitations rather than representations. The surrounding garden, composed of gravel, carefully placed vegetation, and sculptural vessels by Gates, extends this atmosphere into an exterior landscape of serene contemplation.

A final, subtle layer is introduced through sound. A vintage turntable, placed within the space, plays throughout the day. This element, too, requires care: staff are invited to engage with it as they would in a home. Gates, deeply attuned to the relationship between sound and spatial perception, privileges the analog warmth of vinyl: its tonal depth, its slight imperfections, its capacity to render atmosphere.

Prada Home

Chawan Cabinet by Theaster Gates
Via Montenapoleone 6
Milan

THEASTER GATES

Theaster Gates is an artist whose practice finds roots in conceptual formalism, sculpture, space theory, land art, and performance. Trained as both a sculptor and an urban planner, through his work, Gates contends with the notion of Black space as a formal exercise, defined by collective desire, artistic agency, and the tactics of a pragmatist.

Gates' relationship with clay has been a focal point of his practice since studying pottery in Tokoname, Japan, in 2004. For Gates, clay is a metaphor for his ability to shape his world, extending the intelligence of the hand to the mind. Recent vessels extend Gates's celebration of clay and craft, linking conceptual practices to physical making. Clay's plasticity offers Gates the ability to move across time periods and cultural influences in his search for nuanced forms and to return to simple forms – to receptacles that he can place within the context of contemporary art – and to a rediscovery of the generational potency of craft.

Gates has exhibited widely, including solo exhibitions at Smart Museum of Art, Chicago (2025); Albuquerque Foundation, Sintra, Portugal (2025); Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2024); Contemporary Art Museum Houston (2024); LUMA Foundation, Arles (2024 and 2023); New Museum, New York (2022); Serpentine Pavilion, London (2022); Frederick Kiesler Foundation, Vienna, (2022); Whitechapel Gallery, London (2021); Victoria & Albert Museum, London (2021); TANK Shanghai (2021); Prada Rhong Zhai, Shanghai (2021); Spelman College Museum of Fine Art, Atlanta (2020); Tate Liverpool, UK (2020); Haus der Kunst, Munich (2019); Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2019); Martin Gropius Bau, Berlin (2019); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2019); Fondazione Prada, Milan (2018); Kunstmuseum Basel (2018); Sprengel Museum, Hannover (2018); National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (2017); Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (2016); Fondazione Prada, Milan (2016); Kunsthaus Bregenz, Austria (2016); Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (2013); Whitechapel Gallery, London (2013); Seattle Art Museum, Washington, DC (2011); Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2011); Milwaukee Art Museum, Wisconsin (2010); and St. Louis Art Museum, Missouri (2010).

Gates is the recipient of numerous awards and honorary degrees including the MOCA Legend Award (2025); Guggenheim Fellowship (2025); 39th World Cultural Council Award (2024); Isamu Noguchi Award (2023); Friedrich Kiesler Prize for Architecture and Art (2021); the Royal Institute of British Architects (2021); the World Economic Forum Crystal Award (2020); J.C. Nichols Prize for Visionaries in Urban Development (2018); Nasher Sculpture Prize (2018); Sprengel Museum Kurt Schwitters Prize (2017); and Artes Mundi 6 prize (2015). He was the visiting artist in residence at the American Academy in Rome (2020); and was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 2021.

