

Dorchester Projects

From sites of neglect to cultural spaces: the transformation of abandoned buildings in Chicago



Dorchester Projects encompasses a cluster of formerly abandoned buildings on Chicago's South Side that Theaster Gates renovated from sites of neglect into a vibrant cultural locus. After making his home in a former storefront on South Dorchester Avenue, Gates purchased the neighboring two-story vacant house and initiated a design project to restore and reactivate the home as a site of community interaction and uplift. The success of this project led to the acquisition of a third building across the street, which with the support of grants will be redesigned as a space for film programming and artist residencies.

Another component is the Listening Room. The display windows on the façade of this one-story building recall its previous use as a neighbourhood candy store. Theaster Gates has redesigned the front room to house 8,000 LPs comprising the final inventory from Dr Wax Records, a former record store in the nearby Hyde Park neighbourhood. The record collection has served both spirited and didactic functions, facilitating listening parties and DJ events in the space while being made available to artists and musicians in residence at Dorchester Projects. From December 2011 to July 2012, the collection travelled to the Seattle Art Museum for installation in the exhibition Theaster Gates: The Listening Room. In the future the residential half of the building will be renovated into a reading room and temporary home for the Johnson Library, a donation of the Johnson Publishing Corporation's in-house editors' library and a comprehensive collection of Ebony and Jet magazines founded by John H. Johnson.

Using repurposed materials from all over Chicago, the aesthetic of Gates' Dorchester Projects is both practical and poetic, bridging the creation of new art with the adaptive reuse of resources. Within this multi-functional and growing space, community-driven initiatives and experiences foster neighborhood revitalization and serve as a model for greater cultural and socioeconomic renewal. Dorchester provides its neighbors and local youth the opportunity to perceive built and living environments as spaces worth constructing, exploring and critiquing. It empowers community members to engage in the movement of radical hospitality by physically transforming their surroundings and filling them with beautiful objects, diverse people and innovative ideas.

Project author or developer:
Theaster Gates

Where:
US / Stati Uniti / Contea di Cook

Website:
theastergates.com/section/117693_Dorchester_Projects.html

