Impressive exhibits at Locust Projects
and Vizcaya show how Art Basel
has spurred local venues

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S
ince Art Basel Miami Beach arrived a decade ago, it has come to serve a
dual purpose. Along with its satel-
ellite fairs, it brings the best in con-
temporary artwork to our do-
ers, turning Miami into the
world’s biggest museum for one
week a year. But it also has
forced Miami’s art community
to kick it up a notch. We now ex-
pect local institutions and galler-
ies to deliver high-quality goods.

This year is no exception, and
the proof is already here, begin-
ning with Soul Manufacturing
Corporation by Chicago-based
Theaster Gates, a coup for the
not-for-profit Locust Projects.

Gates has become an “it” art-
ist, with a recent cover on Art in
America magazine, a star turn at
Germany’s acclaimed dOCU-
MENTA exhibition and, just last
week, as the inaugural recipient
of the New School’s Vera List
Center Prize for Art and Politics.

Politics play a major role in
Gates’ world and work, as vis-
tors learned when he was at the
gallery Nov. 10 to set up shop,
quite literally.

A trained ceramicist, with
master’s degrees in fine arts, re-
ligious studies and urban plan-
ning, he has made his Manufactu-
ring Corporation just that: a
living, breathing workshop
where skilled “makers,” as he
calls them, craft pottery and
pound out bricks. As he tells the
audience on this day, he doesn’t
make art.

In fact he does, and here in the

* TURN TO ART REVIEWS, 6E

MADE WITH FOUND
OBJECTS:
Theaster
Gates’
’Soul
Food
Rickshaw
for Soul
Wares’
2012
(wood,
wheels,
ceramic
and
porcelain
wares).

AN ‘IT’ ARTIST: Gates at the potter’s wheel at Locust Projects.
REGEN PROJECTS

Design District he was as much a performance artist as anything. He is witty and well-informed about social dynamics, racial politics and urban redevelopment. He talks about projects he has been involved in from Baltimore to his neighborhood on the south side of Chicago. But it sounds much more like a spoken word performance than a lecture.

While holding an unfinished clay pot (he once had a show called "People of the Mud"), he is funny and self-effacing, but also serious about the merits of production and the importance of rebuilding blighted neighborhoods.

His dedication to the latter won him the Vera List prize, for the Dorchester Projects, in which he bought two abandoned Chicago buildings, determined to turn them into a cultural center and library using salvaged materials. It will happen, he says, "brick by brick."

Then he returns to a bench in the gallery to continue making pottery and bricks. Visitors are free to ask him questions, and he wonders if anyone has free time — they could stop by and read from a book, maybe some poetry, to keep the craftspeople entertained. To that end, he has brought in a yoga instructor and DJ who will occupy the space until the exhibit ends.

Gates does make art pieces, ones that show in his gallery, in museums and at fairs such as the 2012 Armory. Usually they are made from found objects, often from the debris of a decaying structure. One such work, a rickshaw, stands in the front of the Locust space.

Gates himself will return to work at his Soul company for the week of Art Basel, which opens Thursday, sitting at various work stations and inviting dialogue. He'd like you to take part in this production. Gates will also be highlighted in the main convention center fair at the booth of his Chicago gallery, Karl Gage.