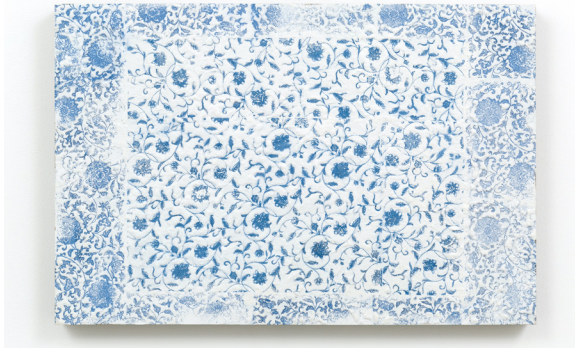


subterranean convergence

Growing up, my mom adorned our home in blue and white. I knew she was Korean, but we rarely spoke about it. I did not grow up around other Koreans, and everyone on my mother's side of the family was Black. Korea existed as a distant reality, one I encountered most intimately through the aesthetics of our home.

The homeplace my mother created developed its own visual language, weaving Black Southern material culture with an Asiatic flair. It was complex and layered, holding the old and the new, the distant and the intimate, hope and loss, what had been inherited and what had been consciously chosen.

The swirling chinoiserie patterns of the blue and white porcelain made their way into my mind's eye, resurfacing as doodles on my math homework and eventually shaping my obsession with fashion and prints. I found myself reflected in these patterns long before I understood the histories they carried, a way of recognizing oneself in something before knowing the full weight of what it holds.



Untitled (skin), 2022. Granulated sugar and ceramic transferware on wood panel, 48" x 36"

As I delved deeper into this pattern and into my mother's origin story, something became apparent: pattern is defined as much by what is unseen as by what is seen. The spaces between forms create the rhythm, repetition, and structure through which the pattern becomes legible.

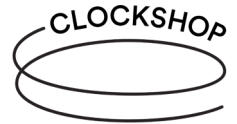
Amy Goldins's "Patterns, Grids and Paintings" states:

It is ordinarily supposed that pattern is the repetition of a motif; it isn't. The crucial determinant of pattern is the constancy of the interval between motifs, a fact easily demonstrated by anyone with access to a typewriter. If you preserve the spacing between sequences of letters, it doesn't matter what letters or marks you use; a pattern will appear. On the other hand, a single motif, like a

ARTIST REFLECTION

LaRissa Rogers

October 24, 2026–March 7, 2027
Los Angeles State Historic Park



rubber stamp, irregularly applied to a sheet of paper does not yield any sort of pattern at all. [...] The link between a perceptual form and its extraformal meaning is normally fragile, and requires support from the context in which it occurs. Mere repetition is dangerous enough—repeat any word ten times in a row, and it becomes pure sound.



Textures of Enfleshment (a silent viewer), 2024. Brown sugar, Acrylic, Porcelain, glaze, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts Gallery.

This extends beyond visual aesthetics and into the patterns that shape ourselves, our families, our communities, our cultures, our histories, and our nations. Patterns create frameworks, systems through which we understand, contextualize, and justify our encounters with one another. Yet those systems often operate beyond our immediate perception.

An encounter with beauty, then, requires an awareness of the systems through which we are seeing. Depending on whether those systems are rooted in truth or deception, an encounter with beauty can illuminate what has been concealed, or seduce us away from it.



Faithful and True (IV), 2025

My mom is a transnational adoptee. She was adopted by a Black soldier stationed in Seoul during the Vietnam War and, before coming to the United States with my grandfather, lived in an orphanage. She does not know who her biological mother or father is. Given the history surrounding her birth and adoption, it is possible that her mother was among the Korean women prostituted to US servicemen and that the orphanage housed mixed-race children who, at the time, were often socially rejected and left without familial support.



Mom and dad, ca. 1993. Charlottesville, VA. Step-grandmother and grandfather, ca. 1971. Seoul,

When my mom came to the United States at age four, she was raised by my grandfather's mother in very poor circumstances. There was no running water. She used an outhouse and shared a room with several cousins. She arrived unable to speak English and was often ostracized because she looked and sounded different from everyone around her.

Her aunt Jenny lived next door, a light-skinned, blue-eyed Black woman with blond hair. She took my mother in as her own, raising and caring for her as a daughter. Every Sunday, my mother was entrusted with setting the dinner table, laying out Jenny's blue and white china for the family meal.

This was the first time my mom saw herself represented within material culture that she could perceive.



Reference photos for *Textures of Enfleshment* (a silent viewer). Left to Right: Mother's baby photo, Grandfather's Army portrait, Mother and Artist, Childhood home, Ruckersville, VA.

She clung to it as a visual identifier of a heritage she no longer had access to.

Growing up, I didn't understand the complicated historical context of chinoiserie. Its connection to the porcelain, silk, and tea trade. Its exotic interpretation of an Asian aesthetic. Its relationship to porcelain and racialized materials used to assert power and domination. Nor did I understand the layers of translation of an Asian aesthetic that had been regurgitated and

sold back to the "Asian American."



Porcelain vase decorated with cobalt blue under transparent glaze, Chinese Ming dynasty (1368–1644), Xuande mark and period (1426–35). 19th-century transferware of classic "willow" pattern, a hodgepodge of European ideas of Chinese imagery.

In my home, chinoiserie did not define my cultural identity, nor was its preciousness rooted in the belief systems, perspectives, or histories imposed upon it. Removed from an emotional attachment to the intentions behind its inception, my mother encountered it through a different framework, one in which its history remained present but did not determine its meaning alone.



Tending to Life, 2023. Imani Works, Orange, VA. Soil from Orange, VA, Red oak, Appalachian ragwort, Willow oak, wild blackberries, Velvet panicum, Caribou lichen, and time in collaboration with Makysa Tolbert, Nikita Lightfoot Simms, and Demitia Hopkins-Greene.

There is a distinction between land and landscape.

Land as what exists on, within, and beneath.

Landscape as what is seen or framed.

It is the difference between root and surface, between what grows and what sustains growth.

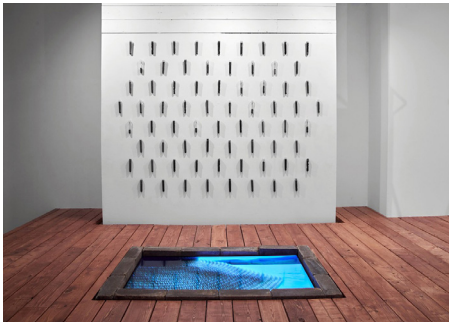
In my practice, soil, ground, and earth take on significance. Not only because of what happens upon and in the earth in the natural, historical, or geological, but also because of its significance beyond the perceivable and in the supernatural—and ultimately its relationship to the human body.

According to the biblical account of humankind, man is a meeting place between heaven and earth, formed from the dust of the ground, adamah, and animated by the Breath of Life, God. God, who is Spirit, breathes into man, imparting his essence—something of His nature, glory, power, and authority to exercise dominion over the earth. Through this divine breath, man becomes a living nephesh, a living soul, expressed through the mind, will, and emotions. Humanity thus emerges as a speaking

spirit, bearing a soul, dwelling within a body formed from the combination of heaven and earth, made by and in the image and likeness of its Creator.
And within the body is blood.

Embedded within adamah is dam, the Hebrew word for blood, where life is held. Blood does more than move through us. It carries oxygen, genetic information, and the biological traces of inheritance and history. It carries a pattern. Life is in the blood, and the soul is also held in and by the blood.

Within the soil, iron, the same element that enables blood to carry oxygen throughout the body and sustain breath, gives the dirt its distinctive hue.



blood's breath, and soil's hue, 2025. Propagation tubes, soil mailed from Open Call for Soil: Going to Ground, addressed to Zipporah Potter Atkins. Detail shot of "I am too, a piece of clay."
Dimensions variable.

There is an inherent relationship between the earth and the body.

Both carry.

Both hold.

Both remember.

In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison writes:

I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still here. [...] Right in the place where it happened.

In this passage, "rememory," described by Toni Morrison, is not only something personally experienced and held solely within the mind, but something embedded in the world itself, attached to place, lingering in space, persisting beyond those who experienced it.

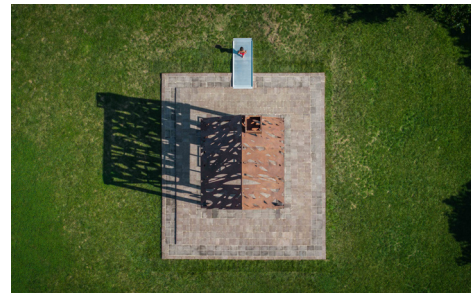
The past, in this sense, does not disappear. It can be held in all three realms of our beingness: spirit, soul, and body. It remains.

Impressed upon the environments we move through, shaping us and those around us.

What happens when the framework of human perception is unstable? When is it shaped, distorted, or reoriented by emotion, trauma, experience, or patterned time?

How does memory function in the pursuit of identity and truth?

Soil carries the memory of people. It carries a record of what has happened upon it: the injustices, bloodshed, and iniquities. But it also responds to goodness, truth, and justice.



Soil from the Open Call for Soil, The Rose Kennedy Greenway, and land of Zipporah Potter Atkins.
Oyster shells, steel, 27' x 23' x 20'3"

Earth becomes a silent witness, holding and responding to what has occurred upon it while continuing to sustain, affect, and produce.

In *subterranean convergence*, the earth becomes the foundation for thinking through movement.

Movement across landscapes externally, but also internally, as one contends with the wounds and consequences of what it means to live in a broken world. Soil becomes the landscape we traverse as we move from one destination to another. But it is also the ground in which our desires take root, shaping our capacity to remain in community with those whose perspectives differ from our own, especially when our anger in the face of injustice is justified.

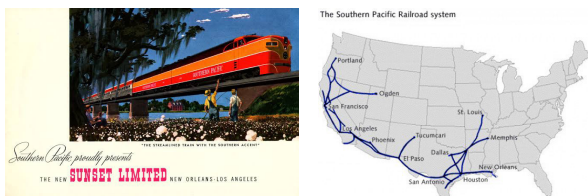
Scholar Angel Adams Parham writes, "With any kind of palimpsest, traces of the original layer continue to be visible beneath what is superimposed on top."¹ Her concept of the racial palimpsest offers a way to understand how histories remain present within the structures that appear to replace them. In *subterranean convergence*, the railroad, tabby, and objects become material sites of this layering. They carry histories of migration, labor, and racial formation, while also opening space for new encounters and meanings. The work asks how we might recognize what remains beneath the surface without allowing inherited systems to determine what we reproduce.¹

What happens when, in the midst of conflict, we turn our attention inward? How do the desires, wounds, and assumptions we carry shape what we see, what we cultivate, and ultimately what we reproduce? What does it mean to understand oneself as part of something beyond the self, situated within a larger story of redemption and life?

¹ Adams Parham, *American Routes: Racial Palimpsests and the Transformation of Race* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 5.

subterranean convergence brings these realities into relation: history, memory, people, place, objects, aesthetics, and movement.

It acknowledges the bad and the ugly while shifting the site of transformation toward the self. Rather than allowing what has been done to determine what takes root within us, the work asks how a transformation in perspective might change what we carry forward and, in turn, what becomes possible between us.



"Southern Pacific Proudly Presents the New Sunset Limited" Brochure, 1950. William R. Hough Timetable Collection. Southern Pacific Railroad system map, retrieved from <https://railfanguides.us/system/southernpacifcrr/index.htm>.

Its goal is to cultivate a perspective that can look at the wound and still see beyond it. To see from a bird's-eye view. To hold the micro and the macro at once.

To recognize beauty and truth within and beyond histories of movement and belonging.

The train becomes a vessel for this shift in perspective. Before we see it and step aboard, we feel it. We hear it. Sound precedes movement, signaling what is coming before it arrives and carrying our awareness beyond what can be seen.

What new sound, then, is waiting to be produced? One capable not only of carrying us through the wound, but beyond it?

The train is both connector and container. It has stops, different points of entry and departure, while holding multiple temporalities within a single physical experience. Stepping aboard the train becomes the silent agreement to be carried. Once aboard, we begin moving at a different time scale than the world around us.

We enter a tertiary space that alters our relationship to home, movement, and one another. Within it, we confront the intimacy of others while simultaneously gaining a wider view of the landscape, a perspective that extends beyond the boundaries of the self.

The southern transcontinental railroad, traveled by the Sunset Limited between New Orleans and Los Angeles, becomes a physical and historical manifestation of this movement. It carried possibilities of mobility, migration, and new beginnings for Black Southerners and immigrant families moving west during Reconstruction and the Great Migration. Along its route, Chinese laborers helped build the infrastructure that made westward passage possible, while Black Pullman porters sustained its movement through their labor and transformed the railway into a vital network for Black mobility, communication, and opportunity.

Since 1894, the Sunset Limited has connected New Orleans and Los Angeles, carrying Black Southerners and immigrant families west in search of new possibilities. Some passed through the Southern Pacific River Station, now the site of this installation at Los Angeles State Historic Park, where histories of movement converge within the land alongside the stories and objects people carried with them.

The repetition of routing and rooting within and across generations has become a grammar for Black and immigrant life, one that I contend with, using the train as a symbol of where liberation is, and where it might still be.

Over 50 community members and institutions along the historic route were invited to contribute objects of personal or historical significance, some of which were reproduced for the installation. These objects unearth what it means to endure, to reposition what it means to be carried, and to journey through the passage of time toward a new destination.

The recast objects in tabby also resemble keloids.

A keloid begins with a laceration to the body. In response to the wound, the body overproduces collagen, the structural protein that gives skin its strength and form, creating a tenderly healed, raised surface. The wound closes, but it does not disappear. Through repair, the body produces a new structure in response to what has wounded it. The wound takes on another form.



Keloid XV Moon Jar (a new creature), 2025

Scholar Anne Anlin Cheng writes about a moment in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* in which Sethe's whipping scars are perceived through the image of a chokecherry tree. What was inscribed upon her body through violence is encountered through another framework:

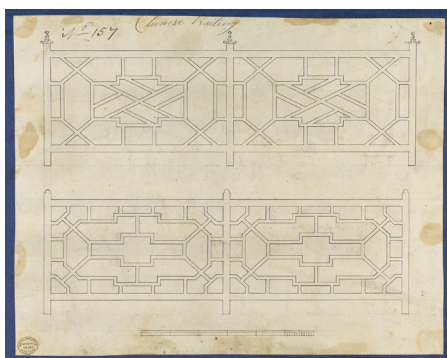
You got a mighty lot of branches. Leaves, too [...]. Tiny little cherry blossoms [...]. Your back got a whole tree on it.

Through the lens of beauty, what was intended to dehumanize becomes a form of adornment. The violence is not erased, but

neither is Sethe reduced to it. The scar exceeds its origin, opening another possibility for how she might be seen and how she might understand herself while holding tension around what was enacted upon her and the power it has to shape the center of her desires and her perspective on the other.

The wound becomes a passage rather than a destination.

The steel form of the railroad traces the route across two dirt medians, while its interior wooden tracks echo the chinoiserie designs found in architecture in the American South and Los Angeles's Chinatown.



Chinese Railing, from Chippendale Drawings, Vol. II, Thomas Chippendale British, 1754. Preparatory drawing for Thomas Chippendale's Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker's Director.

A decorative style that appropriates East Asian aesthetics, chinoiserie was popularized within American architecture as a visual language through which ideas of culture, nation, and belonging were constructed. In Los Angeles's New Chinatown, chinoiserie appears again through an exoticized, Hollywood-inspired vision of Shanghai, reimagined by the immigrant community itself as a gesture of belonging.



Chinatown Central Plaza, Los Angeles

Anchored within the tracks are cast objects constructed with tabby, an ancient building material made from lime, sand, and oyster shells, with origins on the northern coast of Africa and a later history in the American South.

Through scanning, 3D printing, mold making, and casting, the contributed objects enter the archive's shared visual language of tabby. Their forms are obscured, transformed, and adorned, while the histories and sentiments they carry remain, converging with one another and generating meanings that are both imposed and emergent.

Tabby itself is made through a process of breaking down and returning. Oyster shells are burned to produce lime. Crushed oyster shell, sand, and ash are then added back in.

The material is transformed, yet something remains.



Jude Rogers' submission, "Aunt Jenny's Vase." Original object, mold, tabby cast, and oyster shell detail.

Tabby originated on the North African coast before the construction method traveled to the American Southeast. British colonists later adopted the material extensively along coastal South Carolina and Georgia, where the labor-intensive process of burning shells and mixing the material was largely performed by enslaved people and later shaped by Gullah Geechee communities.

Tabby points to an ancient building technology with African roots that became entangled with the construction and modernization of this country. Its material history finds an echo in the concretized Los Angeles River, where the desire to engineer nature is made visible. Yet through cracks in the concrete, unexpected forms of life have taken root, creating distinct ecologies and new forms of biodiversity.

I am interested in this capacity for life to emerge through altered conditions, and in what the oyster shell itself does.

Recycled oyster shells help restore coastal ecosystems. They provide a surface upon which new oysters can grow, form natural barriers against erosion, and help filter pollutants from the water. Baby oysters, called spat, need a hard surface upon which to settle. Cleaned shells returned to the water give them a place to land and grow.

Together, oyster shells create conditions for ecosystems to converge, restore, and rebuild. In New Orleans, oyster shells were also historically used as a material for building up roads, foundations, and the ground beneath parts of the city.



Tabby, soil from locations of former monuments, plants and vegetables, co-founded by Luis Vasquez La Roche and LaRissa Rogers, Visible Records, Charlottesville, VA.

The material carries a proposition:

What has been broken down, or fractured through its relocation, can become a foundation.

What has been carried can become a place for something else to grow.

subterranean convergence reckons with histories of land, architectural and cultural dispossession, and severance across geography and time. Through the train, the work brings people, objects, materials, and histories into encounter, asking us to hold in tension the complexities of the places we call home.

Rooting and uprooting.

Voluntary and forced migration.

Hope and mourning.

As we come together within the work, I invite you to think and create with me. To move beyond the frameworks of the visible, toward the unseen, and into the subterranean.

How might holding these things in tension allow us to encounter one another differently?

How can we see each other's humanity?

How might attention and presence allow us to respond rather than react?

Like the oyster shell, what has been broken can become sutured to create a new foundation. What has been carried can create the conditions for something else to grow.

We do not have to produce the same sound that came before us.

We can carry, and also let go.

To move beyond the wound.

To shift our awareness toward something beyond the self. Toward a way of seeing founded on beauty that penetrates the land, the body, aesthetics, imagination, and the histories we inherit and reproduce.

An awareness capable of producing a new pattern, a new framework, a new system.

And perhaps, ultimately, this is where true liberation is found.



Rendering of *subterranean convergence* and detail view of Track B, chinoiserie patterning, forthcoming 2026, Los Angeles State Historic Park.

subterranean
convergence

