

Of Seed, Soil, and Stars

Meditations on Land, Body, Resistance, and Regeneration

“The most creative and necessary work that humans do is to work with the soil as co-producers with nature. Human effort and knowledge based on care for the soil prevents and reverses desertification, the root of the collapse of so many historical civilisations.”

– Vandana Shiva, *Soil Not Oil* (2007)

This project builds on 20 years of friendship, and on being co-conspirators in many Los Angeles activist circles connected to guerilla art, cooperative space, performance, organizing, and creative collaborations. As working class Chicanas growing up in Los Angeles, we have witnessed the constant displacement of green spaces and communities of color in the name of development. We also acknowledge our presence on Tovaangar, the unceded ancestral lands of the Gabrielino-Tongva people and how we benefit from their land and their cultural and ancestral relationship to the natural world. Our political formation comes from many LA-based activist spaces that push back against settler colonialism, white supremacy, and modern day development. Among these spaces are the South Central Farm, Luna Sol Café, the Peace and Justice Center, and many other artist and activist spaces which shaped our commitment to using ancestral and cultural wisdom to challenge oppressive power structures. Much like our life pedagogy, the framework for this exhibition is rooted in care, collectivity, and a radical feminist praxis that centers the body. Our bodies—much like the body of the earth and all its mysteries—continue to endure, remake themselves, resist extractive processes, regenerate, defy borders and dams, turn stone to sand, and grow in defiance. As such, this exhibition explores ways to access invisibilized histories and memories and tell our stories from a more radical and liberatory lens. It is a creative meditation on the possibility of new and generative relationships between land and bodies, soil and stars.

The six interdisciplinary artists in this exhibition center the land as a protagonist. They pull on ancestral wisdom remade for the contemporary moment in their site specific visual and performance pieces. They explore themes of migration, ancestral memory, reciprocity, decay, rebirth, reinvention, cosmology, indigeneity, and rematriation.¹ They create using soil, rain water, natural pigments, decay, corn, copper, clay, and care to create living sculptures, paintings, shadow puppets, and interactive performances.

In her work, *proclamación: gathering 1 and 4* (2020, 2021), Jackie Amézquita collects soil, rainwater, copper along with ancestral foods like corn masa and limestone to create abstract expressions of migration-movements and narratives of bodies across borders. LaRissa Rogers performs subversive actions to gather soil from unmarked graves of historical sites developed as sites of leisure to explore invisibilized forms of labor and memory. Her work references bodies in forced migration from the transatlantic slave trade. In her work, *A Poetic of Living*, (2021) and *Ode to Soil* (2020), she gathers and turns soil into what she calls “[a] living archive, a method of Black resistance and breath.”² For this exhibition, Amézquita and Rogers draw on their previous works, *A Poetic of Living* and *Sueños Fértiles (Fertile Dreams)* (2018) for a new collaboration; *hieroglyphs of metaphysical lacerations* (2023). Both Rogers and Amézquita use soil gathered from locations along the US Mexico border between Tijuana and San Isidro—sites of historical erasure in Virginia and from local North East Los Angeles neighborhoods. Their installation explores the aftermath of trauma on Black and Brown bodies from an anti-capitalist lens. It invokes the idea that historical wounds can become sites of healing, beauty, knowledge and regeneration. They insert ancestral plants, seeds, and their own bodies into the soil to consider memorialization outside of preservation practices set forth by the Enlightenment, that are more generative and promote care.

Sarita Doe and Jess Gudiel work with indigenous stories and cosmologies to highlight contemporary campaigns to protect water and land from corporate development. Both blur the distinction between art and life as their artwork is informed by their devotion to land stewardship and Earth care. Gudiel, who is also a horticulturalist, uses illustration, light, negative space, native plants, and stories to illuminate the shadow side of greed and extraction. In her work for this exhibition, *Pavinokre (Fluidity/We Flow)* (2021), she collaborates with culture bearer Tina Calderon to tell the Tongva story of the seven sisters, the Pleiades star cluster.

Doe uses plant pigments in a ceremonial process that begins far before her brush touches the canvas. She nurtures relationships with habitat and the lands she lives on, paying homage to native people, flora, and fauna through her paintings which hold the visceral language and energy of the environments she engages. Her new work for this exhibition, *Salmon Home: Waterways Repair and Winnemem Wintu Cosmivision of Care* (2023), supports a women-led indigenous movement to restore important waterways in northern California.

JEM works with clay and community to bring sculptures and ceramic instruments to life. Connecting the sound of the flutes used in her film, *Resilience Ensemble* (2021), to her clay sculpture *mycorrhizal: seedling signals* (2023), she explores breath, the earth, tree symbolism, which for her, all act as a representation of collective resilience. She invites viewers to create sound and build relationships between the body, the breath, land, and space.

Maria Maea, who performs on July 9, the last day of the exhibition, explores diaspora and migration, and reflects on how culture and memories are fractured but evolve and are remade over time. Through her performance and sculpture practice, she draws on ancestral stories and techniques to connect with the cycles seen in the plant life she works with; birth, life, and death, rebirth.

Our hope is that combined, these works inspire new reflections on our relationships to our own bodies and the land. We hope that the gaps and fractures in our ancestral memories, like these artworks, ignite action and care to cultivate a more collaborative and caring relationship we have to the natural world.

— Joy A. Anderson and Robin Garcia, LACE Emerging Curators 2023

ABOUT THE EMERGING CURATOR PROGRAM

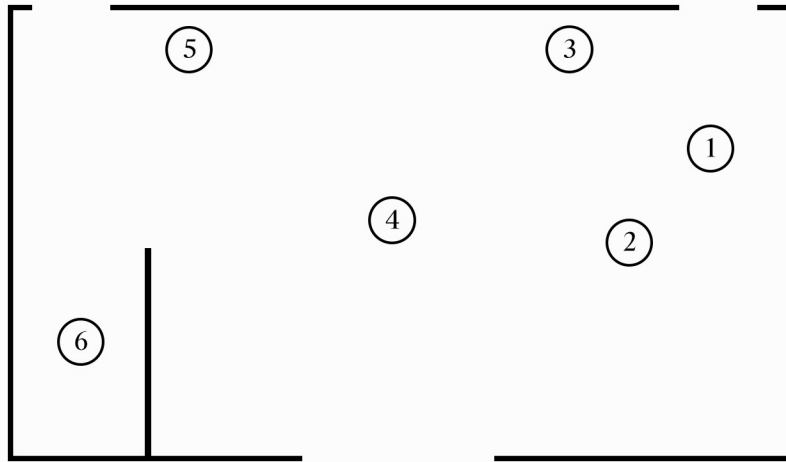
Of Seed, Soil, and Stars is the eighth presentation from the LACE Emerging Curator Program. Designed to discover curatorial talent in Los Angeles, each year's selected Curator/Curatorial Team works with the LACE staff over a year to plan and collaborate on the presentation and public programming.

SUPPORT

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¹ Keene, Adrienne, Small- Rodriguez, Desi, Wilbur, Matika. "Rematriate." All My Relations Podcast. <https://open.spotify.com/episode/5ykF6edIVXKNba4gGMTM4>. April 2023.

² New City Arts, LaRissa Rogers and Jackie Amézquita in conversation, "Soil as a living archive", 1:19:30, February 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AX7Bv32GFEk&t=3319s>



Join us on July 9 for a closing performance by **Maria Maea** and seed exchange led by **Jess Gudiel**.

1. Jackie Amézquita
b. 1985, Quetzaltenango, Guatemala
Lives and works in Los Angeles

proclamación: gathering #1, 2020
 Soil of 36 Los Angeles neighborhoods, cal hidratada (hydrated lime), corn masa, various culinary dishes, food items, copper and walnut wood.
 Courtesy the artist

proclamación: gathering #4, 2021
 Soil of 36 Los Angeles neighborhoods, cal hidratada (hydrated lime), corn masa, various culinary dishes, food items, copper and walnut wood.
 Courtesy the artist

proclamación: gathering #6, 2023
 In collaboration with RED EARTH KITCHEN
 Soil of 36 Los Angeles neighborhoods, cal hidratada (hydrated lime), corn masa, various culinary dishes, food items, copper and walnut wood.
 Courtesy the artist

2. JEM
b. 1986, Monterey Park
Lives and works Los Angeles

mycorrhizal: seedling signals, 2023
 ceramic
 Courtesy the artist

Resilient Ensemble, 2021
 clay, glaze, sound
 Courtesy the artist

3. LaRissa Rogers
b. 1996, Ruckersville, VA
Lives and works in Virginia and Los Angeles

Ode to Soil, 2020
 three-channel video, 9:23 min, 24:36 min, 13:31 min on loop
 Documentation of Performance at Meadowcreek Golf Course at Pen Park and Farmington Country Club, Charlottesville, VA
 Courtesy the artist

4. LaRissa Rogers
In collaboration with Jackie Amézquita

hieroglyphs of metaphysical lacerations, 2023
 Soil sourced from various locations in Los Angeles and Virginia, salt, chia seeds, celosia, cochineal, clothes, grow lights, care
 Courtesy the artists

5. Sarita Doe
b. 1983, Houma lands
Lives and works in Huchiun, Ohlone Lands

Rain Deities and the Front Yard Meadow, 2022
 natural pigment and gouache on archival paper
 Courtesy the artist

Rain Gardens, Chicken Temple (Fennel, Black Sage, Mugwort), 2022
 natural pigment and gouache on board
 Courtesy the artist

Deep Time December, 2021
 natural pigment and gouache on board
 Courtesy the artist

Ecopedagogía, 2023
 in collaboration with the School for the Ecocene Cooperative Stewards: yoli, ink, champoy, mbgenerator, chayo, johanna, y dongyi; natural pigment and gouache on paper, cardboard and wood
 Courtesy the artist

Salmon Home: Waterways Repair and Winnemem Wintu Cosmovision of Care, 2023
 natural pigment and gouache on board
 Courtesy the artist

el corazón de la tierra, 2021
 Digital video with animation, 28:00 min
 Courtesy the artist

6. Jess Gudiel
b. 1981, Pico Union
Lives and works in Los Angeles

Paviinokre (Fluidity /We Flow), 2021
 Digital video, 12:00 min
 Narrated by: Tina Calderon
 Shadow Illustrator: Jess Gudiel
 Videographer: Rosanna Esparza Ahrens
 Courtesy the artist

Chumash Ancestral Beings, 2021
 Paper cutouts on posterboard
 Courtesy the artist

Honored Discipliner, 2021
 Paper cutouts on posterboard
 Courtesy the artist