

COLA
'22

CITY OF LOS ANGELES
INDEPENDENT MASTER
ARTIST PROJECT

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CITY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

INDEPENDENT MASTER
ARTIST PROJECT

COLA
2022

This catalog accompanies performance and literary presentations and a virtual exhibition sponsored by the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs featuring its COLA 2022 Independent Master Artist Project grantees.

**VIDEO PRESENTATIONS
BY PERFORMING ARTISTS:**

Najite Agindotan
Suchi Branfman
Jibz Cameron

**VIDEO PRESENTATIONS
BY LITERARY ARTIST:**

Shonda Buchanan

**VIRTUAL EXHIBITION WITH DESIGN
AND VISUAL ARTISTS:**

Nancy Baker Cahill
Sharon Louise Barnes
York Chang
Danny Jauregui
Yoshie Sakai

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CITY OF LOS ANGELES DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

(DCA)

As a leading, progressive arts and cultural agency, DCA empowers Los Angeles' vibrant communities by supporting and providing access to quality visual, literary, musical, performing, and educational arts programming; managing vital cultural centers; preserving historic sites; creating public art; and funding services provided by arts organizations and individual artists.

Formed in 1925, DCA promotes arts and culture as a way to ignite a powerful dialogue, engage Los Angeles' residents and visitors, and ensure Los Angeles' varied cultures are recognized, acknowledged, and experienced. DCA's mission is to strengthen the quality of life in Los Angeles by stimulating and supporting arts and cultural activities, ensuring public access to the arts for residents and visitors alike.

DCA advances the social and economic impact of arts and culture through grantmaking, public art, community arts, performing arts, and strategic marketing, development, design, and digital research. DCA creates and supports arts programming, maximizing relationships with other city agencies, artists, and arts and cultural nonprofit organizations to provide excellent service in neighborhoods throughout Los Angeles.

For more information, please visit culturela.org or follow us on Facebook at facebook.com/culturela, Instagram @culture_la, and Twitter @culture_la.

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Grants Administration Division Director

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INTRODUCTIONS

The City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA) supports, honors, and partners with master literary, performing, and visual artists to premiere new artworks that celebrate Los Angeles as a powerful center of creative genius. The City of Los Angeles Independent Master Artist Project (COLA IMAP) is coordinated by DCA staff and juried by panels of respected curators and artists—including past grantees. This year’s selection of dynamic artists and artworks represents a broad spectrum of approaches and interests.

These artists explore and question some of the greatest challenges that we face; in the process, they create new perspectives that help to shape our conversations. The city’s investment in the COLA IMAP demonstrates its continued support of Los Angeles artists in their role as part of our civic discourse and solidifies the program as a cornerstone initiative of the Department of Cultural Affairs.

Municipal support for original artists is critically important. Living and working among us, these unique and creative individuals symbolize the inextricable link between our city and inspired ideas and skillful innovations. On behalf of the City of Los Angeles, I would like to acknowledge the exemplary COLA IMAP grantees recognized in this catalog. Their work strengthens our claim that Los Angeles is one of the most vibrant creative economies in the world.

DANIEL TARICA

Interim General Manager

City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs

In the United States, a network of federal, state, regional, and municipal arts agencies plays a vital role in fostering curiosity (deep inquiry) and creativity (building talent, character, and innovation). This public support for arts and culture is imperative. At the same time, the well-demonstrated power of the arts to fuel economies by increasing jobs and social spending is a worthwhile collateral goal. It is not humane to live in a society that does not promote storytelling combined with deep inquiry. In fact, our democracy depends on it.

Within the Department of Cultural Affairs and its Grants Administration Division, we are proud of our supportive programs and democratic listening skills. Every year, we gather teams of experts to read and rank hundreds of proposals for the City of Los Angeles Independent Master Artist Project grants. Each new group of peer panelists enlightens us about which avant-garde artists have made deeply conceived, maturely produced, and enduring contributions to our city and region. The teams engage in dialogues that are both intense and collegial; the outcomes of their decision-making process are thus honored and honorable.

This catalog is an archival document of the exemplary literary, performing, and visual/design innovators selected to represent this artist-grant category in its twenty-fifth year. DCA awards these individuals financial support to develop their next creative endeavor(s) and to promote their prior accomplishments. Each year, a new set of avant-garde artists is selected from the many thoughtful creative professionals who demonstrate that Los Angeles is a place of deep reflection.

Some months ago, during one of the many challenging periods of COVID confinement, I listened to a radio program presenting “ordinary” people who found ways to turn disadvantage into pleasure by finding new habits or hobbies that benefitted their daily lives. Even without the extraordinary pressures of a pandemic, avant-garde artists perform this challenge every day. They take their negatives, for example, the dearth of capital for research and

development, lack of strong professional unions or networks, limited access to cutting-edge technologies, and ever-escalating costs of work space and premium materials, and turn them into positives, such as incremental thinking, creative problem solving, social critique, and optimistic (re)invention. Indeed, avant-garde artists share many obstacles with regular working-class people, including the lack of private space for contemplation, financial precarity, and concerns about how to survive in the new/next economy. Those of us who admire independent artists recognize that they are primary examples of blending flexibility and thrift with a passion for designing new consciousness. Their capability to generate wonderment by asking *why* and *why not*—and then dedicating themselves to solution building—is an essential skill possessed by nearly all highly regarded artists, activists, start-up entrepreneurs, and other working-class heroes.

As superb public thinkers, avant-garde artists employ decision-making and planning processes with openness in the interest of pushing a humane agenda. Their aspirations stretch beyond the concept of individual freedom and toward adaptive innovation and collective prosperity. Today, conservative efforts are attempting to censor and slow the growing social and political power of formerly colonized and culturally stigmatized people. Democratic society requires that we manifest and protect adaptive responsibility. DCA accomplishes one vital aspect of this goal by increasing the wit, wisdom, and wellness of bold and authentic artists who seek to overcome limitations and discrimination.

Please enjoy this catalog as a set of imaginative exercises in reaching a better altruism—a more perfect harmony between individual freedom, social responsibility, and collective wisdom—with openness to deep consideration of the expertly researched and deftly crafted expressions of these master artists.

JOE SMOKE

Grants Administration Division Director

City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs

2022 COLA PANELISTS

Taylor Renee Aldridge
Amanda Fletcher
Ana Iwataki
Alec Mapa
Vincent Ramos
Aandrea Stang
Mia Doi Todd
Lisa Diane Wedgeworth

ARTISTS



**NAJITE
AGINDOTAN**

AFROBEAT LA: THE CHANGES OF TIME

JAMIE KIM

My mother is of the ocean and
my father is of the sea.
I am water.
I am drum of goodness.
Our drums will not be silenced.
—Najite Agindotan

Born in Lagos, Nigeria, the master drummer and composer Najite Agindotan grew up learning the traditional arts and ceremony of the Okpe people and Yoruba tradition from the lineage of performers and culture bearers of his family. Agindotan became a master drummer at a very young age and was taken in as a godson by the legendary Afrobeat originator and political activist Fela Anikulapo Kuti in a traditional ceremony

at the African Shrine in Lagos. Aside from learning and mastering the arts of traditional West African/Yoruba drum and dance, Agindotan frequented Kuti's Kalakuta compound. He performed with Kuti as a guest artist, and the legacy of Kuti lives on in Agindotan's life and music.

After traveling to the United States and playing percussion for such jazz legends as Horace Tapscott and Billy Higgins, Agindotan formed his own Afrobeat band, Najite & Olokun Prophecy (N.O.P.), in Los Angeles in 1983. N.O.P. has since helped to keep the pulse of African music beating strongly on the West Coast of the United States.

The album *Afrobeat LA: The Changes of Time* is a tribute to Black lives in Los Angeles. From the crossings of our African ancestors through the Middle Passage to the diaspora kings, queens, and angels in the streets of Los Angeles today, Afrobeat LA is an act of LOVE to defy the systemic practices of erasing and rendering invisible Black lives—our bodies, our lived experiences, and our blood memories.

From Watts, South Central, and Leimert Park to the greater Los Angeles, Agindotan vividly remembers countless lives, events, and stories that unfolded on King Boulevard, Florence Avenue, Crenshaw Boulevard, Central Avenue, and many other historical streets and locales in between. From joyful to horrific, these memories are permanently inscribed on Black bodies and psyches for generations to come. If trauma is left unhealed, it can pass down from generation to generation; from parents to children and grandchildren, all can be affected on a genetic level.

Music is the weapon of the future, as Kuti titled his 1998 album. N.O.P. thus strives to bring consciousness and healing through music toward the Age of Goodness, where no human being could think to do harm to another. Just as trauma can be inherited, so too can healing be passed down through potent music.

Combining highlife, funk, jazz, and soul with complex Yoruba rhythms, Agindotan has been working with his sons on an album to weave new elements and generational experiences with the traditional Afrobeat music. Together, Agindotan and sons present *Afrobeat LA: The Changes of Time*—from Africa to Afrika Na Mama—changes of time *naim we dey*, changes of time *naim we dey*, changes of time *naim we dey*.

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Najite Agindotan, Festival of Masks: Day of the Ancestors, Leimert Park, Los Angeles, CA, 2014.



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BIOGRAPHY

Born 1954, Lagos, Nigeria
Lives and works in Los Angeles

EDUCATION AND TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Institute of Continuing Education,
Benin, Bendel State, Nigeria, 1978
Ogodo College at Sapele, Delta State,
Nigeria, 1975
Induction into Fela Kuti's Young African
Pioneers (taken in as godson and
apprenticed under Fela Kuti)
Master drummer and composer trained
in traditional arts, oral stories,
and ceremony of Okpe people and
Yoruba tradition by family lineage
of performers and culture bearers
since birth

SELECTED PERFORMANCES

- 2020–21 Day of the Ancestors: Mask Festival,
virtual performance (co-founder, solo and
group), Los Angeles
- 2019 Ras G Invocation with Dwight Trible,
Los Angeles
- 2018 Ashkenaz Music and Dance Community
Center (group), Oakland CA
- 2017 Leimert Park Juneteenth Festival,
Los Angeles (solo and group)
- 2016 Seahawks Jazz Orchestra, Margaret A.
Webb Theatre, Orange County School of
the Arts, Santa Ana, CA (solo and group)
Arirang Afrobeat Summer of Love,
Korean Cultural Center, Los Angeles, CA
Fela Kuti Day N.O.P. Album Release,
The Del Monte Speakeasy, Venice, CA
- 2015 Blossoming Flowers Korean-African
Dance and Percussion Concert, Korean
Cultural Center, Los Angeles
Commemoration of the LA Riot Street
Procession, Watts, Los Angeles (solo and
group)
- 2014 Fandango-Obon Festival, Los Angeles
(solo and group)
- 2013 Tony Allen California tour, ArtDontSleep
Productions, Los Angeles, San Francisco,
and Fresno, CA
Nicole Mitchell's Sun Dial, Festiwalu,
Poznań, Poland

RAJ Festival, Hummingbird Nest Ranch,
Santa Susana, CA
Levitt Pavilion, MacArthur Park,
Los Angeles
Adunni & Nefretiti, Skirball Cultural
Center, Los Angeles
Tomeka Reid, 18th Street Arts Center,
Santa Monica, CA

- 2013–21 Annual Fela Kuti Day, The Del Monte
Speakeasy, Venice, CA
- 2011–15 Day of the Ancestors: Mask Festival,
Leimert Park, Los Angeles (co-founder,
solo and group)
- 2010 Glow Festival, Santa Monica, CA (solo and
group)

SELECTED AWARDS AND HONORS

- 2021 New Music USA Creator Development
Fund
Alliance for California Traditional Arts
Apprenticeship Grant
- 2004 Diane Watson Congressional Award for
Cultural Excellence
- 2003 *L.A. Weekly* Music Award Nominee

SELECTED RECORDINGS

Africa's Cry (1999)
Africa Before Invasion (2002)
African Leaders (2009)
Afrobeat L'Ayeraye (2016)
Boloya (2018)
Drum Call to the Ancestors (2007)
Live at Ashkenaz, Vol. 1: Africa (2008)

Najite Agindotan (center) with his sons
(from left to right: Olie, Kienute,
Onome, and Metebrafor), Santa Monica,
CA, 2017. Photo: Karol Pabon.





**NANCY
BAKER
CAHILL**

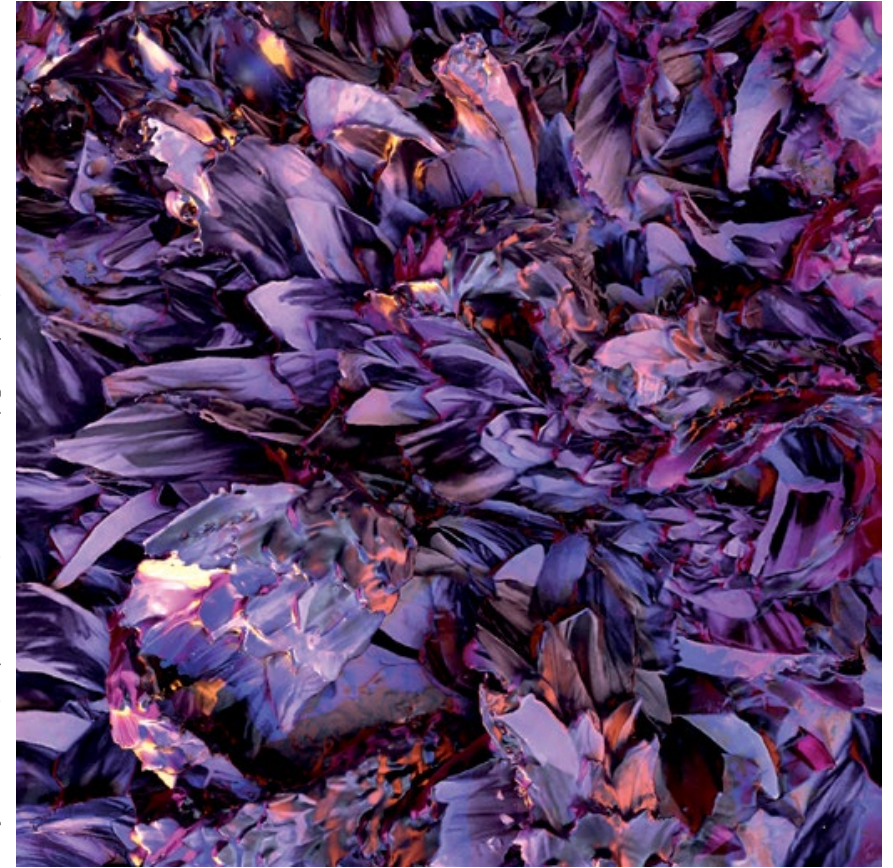
THE MATERIAL TRACE

CHARLOTTE KENT, PHD

Fingers rip pages. Ten years of drawings. Gathered, they hang in space—tangible sculpture, framed print, virtual experience. Across the hybrid relations in Nancy Baker Cahill's art, we find the labor of a curious mind, the thoughtfulness of a contemporary citizen, and the passion for creating a present that can unfurl into a sustainable future for all.

Her drawings spring from imagination as well as a visceral engagement with paper. She draws in digital space, guiding 360-degree gestures through embodied motion in time and space. Even in the arrangement of her studio she has thought about the body's work. The tidy desk is covered in notes, and a nearby stool is perfectly positioned for her to slip off easily on her way to point to something in the work. Nothing hangs on

Nancy Baker Cahill, *Slipstream* 009, 2021. Archival pigment print, 38 x 38 in.



the wall nearest to her work station: a clearing of the visual periphery. Behind her, however, the torn pages of her earlier drawings flow across the wall, poised to come to life in the virtual.

Research, propelled by what the artist describes as her “unbridled curiosity about systemic power, how it is mediated, abused, resisted, metabolized, transformed,” underlies everything. When I visit, I see a stack of books on her desk that includes *The Dawn of*



Nancy Baker Cahill, *Mushroom Cloud*, 2021. Augmented reality land art.
Photo: Nancy Baker Cahill.

Everything, by the anthropologists David Graeber and David Wengrow; *Sculpting in Time*, by the filmmaker Andrey Tarkovsky; and *Entangled Life*, by the biologist Merlin Sheldrake. Despite their disciplinary differences, all these authors are seeking, like Baker Cahill, to express how a clear vision requires revisiting what we thought we knew. Baker Cahill uses abstraction in her artworks to seduce audiences into crucial topics around local, national, and environmental politics, while her writings offer a forceful entry into her research and resources. Similarly, the moving-image artist Hito Steyerl also produces essays about her concerns, further unpacking the issues she presents

in her films. For artists such as Baker Cahill and Steyerl, word and image join to communicate the significance of their chosen topic. It's another sign of the hybridity that marks a truly contemporary practice. Baker Cahill's care and conscientiousness for the present and past imbues her political passion with a sense of personal responsibility.

When Baker Cahill can't find the things that she needs for her artistic practice, she seeks out collaborators with whom she can build them. In early 2018, she developed 4th Wall, an app that invites artists to geolocate their augmented reality (AR) works. She worked for years with the development team at Drive Studios, who launched the app. In

late 2021, she began working with the developers at Shaking Earth Digital. The labor of many enables her work, and she is concerned that everyone involved be recognized. The names of others who have contributed and collaborated continue to unfurl. I met with some of them (Tanya Aguiñiga, Cassils, rafa esparza, Sarah Odenkirk), because how better to understand than with an encounter? In Baker Cahill's practice, I find echoes of the interdisciplinarity so thoughtfully rendered across the works of Mary Miss, a pioneer of site-specific art whose work with architects, scientists, and designers was transformative. Community

augments the focus on the individual artist, and many intriguing relations and engagements weave through Baker Cahill's projects.

Her engagement is mediated by the pulse of people and machinery. She describes in every conversation how working with the computer—on screen and through virtual reality software—changed her analog drawing, and even possibly her neuroanatomy. Her graphite renderings present a different dimensionality and velocity as a result. These works reveal the transformations that we all manage as we move between the speed and space of physical and computer desktops and across the panoply of virtual and tangible demands. The presentation of self in everyday life now stems from offline and online experiences, interactions with humans, bots, and design interfaces. We are excited by, struggling with, and addicted to a new form of engagement whose implications we still don't understand. Baker Cahill talks about Legacy Russell's *Glitch Feminism* and the way things cannot be contained by an Enlightenment category or a digital tag, by bureaucratic labels or media specificity. Digital and analog are now inextricably entangled and interdependent. Some might call Baker Cahill's work post-medium. I find her hybrid approach genre-bending.

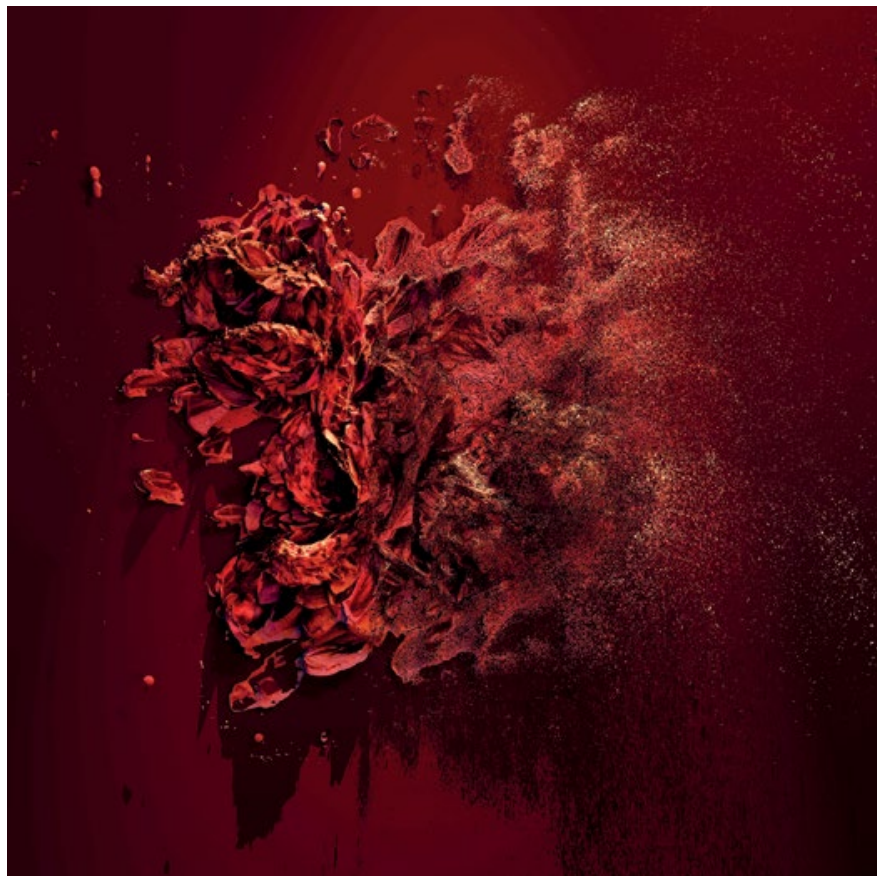
Baker Cahill's attitude to virtual space reminds me of how artists of the recent past, such as Nancy Holt, engaged the environment not to define or manipulate it but rather to help us notice it. Now, with AR, Baker Cahill reveals the spaces in which we find ourselves in the twenty-first century. Through the 4th Wall app,

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which is easy to download, audiences can stand on a site and suddenly see through their mobile device a work that is responsive to the location. Experiencing the presence of the virtual in our tangible context allows us to recognize and appreciate the legacies and histories of our place. Baker Cahill's *Liberty Bell* (2021) and *Contract Killers* (2021) use the semiotics of public contexts to articulate political structures in ways similar to Jenny Holzer's public works. For example, Holzer's *Protect me from what I want* (1986) on a Jumbotron in Times Square addressed the commercial activity of its location, just as Baker Cahill placed *Liberty Bell* in six potent places across the United States, including Selma, Alabama, where civil rights advocates, including Martin Luther King Jr., focused their efforts. In this work and others, such as *Margin of Error* (2019), *Revolutions* (2019), *Legacy* (2021), and *Mushroom Cloud* (2021), Baker Cahill invites us to reflect on the impact and potential that technologies offer while considering our locale and *locatedness*.

Her art emerges from a study of texts and assorted practices, a global array of art and intellectual traditions. She references films and conversations, authors and artists, and delights in the ideas that helped shape her myriad constructions. When I asked about her research and work, she said they are "like the branching hyphae that comprise mycelium—an ever-expanding, responsive arterial network of interests." The language of previous research projects embeds itself, fostering and generating unexpected potentials.

Thoughts materialize. The internal investigation is never in isolation. The body is a site of struggle and resistance but also of contact and connection. The paper and mediated works offer a liminal space, singular and united. Now, then, and across the span of here and there. Amidst the bells and whistles of constant productivity that we all experience, her works invite us to pause. Baker Cahill's work rolls like waves across the mind, the forms undulating notions that excite new horizons.



This page and following spread: Nancy Baker Cahill, *Slipstream 004 (study)*, 2021. Digital still.

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BIOGRAPHY

Born 1970, Cambridge, MA
Lives and works in Los Angeles

EDUCATION

BA with Honors in Art, Williams College,
Williamstown, MA, 1992

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 2022 *Elevation 1049*, Gstaad and St. Moritz,
Switzerland (two-person)
- 2021 *Synthetic Wilderness*, Honor Fraser Gallery,
Los Angeles (group)
- 2020 *Liberty Bell*, Art Production Fund, multiple
locations (solo)

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of the 'Smart Contracts' Behind NFTs
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WEBSITE

www.nancybakercahill.com

Nancy Baker Cahill, *Slipstream 004 Explode*, 2021. Archival pigment print, 38 x 38 in.





**SHARON
LOUISE
BARNES**

SEEDING THE WIND

JILL MONIZ, PHD

How does a Black woman artist survive the whirlwind?
By rooting herself in its eye.

There, inside the chaos, Sharon Louise Barnes sees beauty connected across time to her ancestors who have resiliently trodden through chaos to seed the warp land with legacy, tenacity, sparkle, and shine. Barnes tills the rich loam of these languages, sowing space that translates the collision and coalescence of hard-edge experience and desire and becomes a force and measure of her own design.

Barnes's large-scale pieces do what Black women know how to do: take the hurt and make it sing. But more than that, this radical, fugitive act of survival is accomplished through her masterful relationship with material and space. Barnes puts every inch of the

Sharon Louise Barnes, *Light as a Feather/Heavy as Lead*, 2021. Church fan installation, salvaged chair, plastic chain, found feathers, acrylic on canvases, dimensions variable. Photo: Sharon Louise Barnes.





Sharon Louise Barnes, *Messages from the Underground*, 2021. Acrylic, spray paint, wire, and mixed media on wood, 35 x 35 in. Photo: Gene Ogami. COLA

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canvas to use with fearless and poetic specificity to concentrate the creative urgency necessary to make meaning, to make a path forward and back to survive the whirlwind.

Centering herself through abstraction, Barnes uses layers of found materials and paint to explore the aesthetic tensions between surface and depth, from the nadir to the bird's eye. Her assemblages decode and recode potent, generative narratives in a process and practice cultivated over years and culminating in a cross section of expressive architecture that integrates her history and creativity.

Through material gestures and large negative spaces, Barnes teases out visual metaphors that communicate the arc of stories and emotions that enable her to bloom in chaos. The last few years have brought a sea change in her life—from earning an MFA from Otis College of Art and Design and enduring personal challenges compounded by a global pandemic to mining her rich genealogy as a fifth generation Californian. Throughout, Barnes situates herself in the eye of the storm to buff the gleam of knowing. She employs threads as connective tissue, as a reminder that you have to know where you come from to get where you are going. In praise of remembering, she leaves them dangling for all the forgotten, erased, and devalued stories that still hold promise and the longing to rejoin new, more inclusive futures.

Barnes evokes a phrase commonly used by migration activists, “They tried to bury us, they didn’t know we were seeds,” to express the transformative and aspirational aspects of her personal experience made

dimensional through her COLA IMAP works. Seeding is an act of becoming, and her works are pregnant with emotional literacy. There are silk cocoons, painted wombs, paper trails, fermenting overlapping layers, and environmental features, including bags, cement, and detritus. There is fracturing and restoration, accumulation and disbursement—all elevating the transversion of the vortex's tumult into a portal of storytelling, meaning, and wholeness that is an essential (but not essentializing) element of Black women makers.

This is how a Black woman artist straddles the rootedness of history and the desire for freedom. Barnes leans into her intuition, calls up the knowledges of her ancestors—known and unknown—and marries this magic with her formal art training. The result is a diverse body of work that, like a seed, contains a universe of creation and embodies a dimensionality filled with nuance and noise of the best kind. Poet Gwendolyn Brooks reminds us, “For we are the last of the loud.” Not the white man’s category, but that space of our own making where we lift our voices against the tempest’s whip to shout our bodies, our knowing, our grace and glory.

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Sharon Louise Barnes, *Peter's in the Wind*, 2022. Reclaimed steel alloy fencing, acrylic, ink, spray paint, molded paper, wood, Spanish moss, vintage tambourine, fabric, thread, palm fronds, 98 x 50 x 50 in. Photo: Gene Ogami.



Sharon Louise Barnes, *Where Chilly Winds Don't Blow*, 2022. Acrylic, ink, collaged papers, and mixed media on canvas, 60 x 80 x 2 in. Photo: Gene Ogami.



BIOGRAPHY

Born 1949, Sacramento, CA
Lives and works in Los Angeles

EDUCATION

MFA, Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles,
2021

BA, Broadcast Television-Film, California State
University, Los Angeles, 2002

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

AND PROJECTS

- 2022 *Straddle the Whirlwind*, Band of Vices Gallery,
Los Angeles (solo)
- 2021 *Reimagine Public Art: Songs for a Revolution*,
Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs,
<https://culturela.org/reimagine/reimagine-archive-spring-2021/songs-for-a-revolution/> (group)
- 2020 *Show Me the Signs* (Benefit for African American
Policy Forum), Blum & Poe, Los Angeles (group)
- 2019 *The Magic Within Us*, September Gray Gallery,
Atlanta, GA (solo)
- 2015 *Hard Edged: Geometrical Abstraction*, California
African American Museum, Los Angeles (group)
- 2014 *A 'Woman House' or a Roaming House? A Room
of One's Own Today*, A.I.R. Gallery, Brooklyn, NY,
curated by Mira Schor (group)
- 2005 *Pathways: A Survey of African American Artists in
Los Angeles 1966–1989*, California African American
Museum, Los Angeles, and the Los Angeles
Municipal Art Gallery (group)

SELECTED PERMANENT COLLECTIONS

California African American Museum, Los Angeles
Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American
Studies, University of California, Los Angeles

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abstractions Magazine 1 (Spring 2021). Tessera
Arts Collective.

*Conversations About Abstraction: Six Black
Women Artists*, moderated by jill moniz and
Isabelle Lutterodt, July 28, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJmRnDQeBoM>.

WEBSITE

www.sharonlouisebarnes.com

Sharon Louise Barnes, *Seed Winds*, 2021. Acrylic, oil, ink, cut and collaged painted papers, glitter, and cardboard on canvas, 60 x 48 x 2 in. Photo: Gene Ogami.





**SUCHI
BRANFMAN**

FREEDOM TIME

ASUKA HISA

As a choreographer, dancer, and educator, Suchi Branfman works within two situations—inside and outside. She is an abolitionist advocate for the end of the prison industrial complex, and her project *Undanced Dances Through Prison Walls During a Pandemic* (2021) embodies movement as motion and movement as activism.

In 2016, Branfman turned an invitation to present her practice into a dance program at the California Rehabilitation Center, a medium-security state prison in Norco, California. Through her program, the incarcerated men found “freedom time,” and together they addressed confinement, tactics for survival, and modes of mental liberation. In 2020, access to the prison was closed and all programs and visitations

Suchi Branfman, *Undanced Dances Through Prison Walls During a Pandemic*, Claremont, CA, 2021. Photo: Chant Bockwinkel.



were halted, due to COVID-19. Branfman remotely instructed the men inside to write down their dances. Writing allowed them to move with words and to keep dancing psychologically. Branfman and her collaborators on the outside choreographed dance pieces based on their written texts.

The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world, with individuals of color making up a disproportionate share of the imprisoned population. This growing carceral program does not solve the deeply systemic social and political problems that produce it.



Suchi Branfman, *Angee's Journey*, Garrison Theater, Scripps College, Claremont, CA, 2019. Photo: David Torralva.

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The seemingly intractable conditions are shameful, yet artists can give us hope. Branfman leaves the studio and the traditional parameters of performance to find an audience among the disenfranchised and punished. She leans into a primordial connection between humans in order to generate shared well-being. The abolitionist's cause is to imagine a better model for societal function and to dismantle injustice. In this work, Branfman offers a solution through the act, process, and result of moving.

When Branfman began in 2016, she asked, "How can we sustain ourselves?" As an artist and educator, she maintains a rigorous dance practice alongside a spirit of pedagogical generosity. Her dedication to embodied educational transmission moves the needle toward the sustainability of our humanity. She

recognizes that there is much to be learned from those on the inside. Formerly incarcerated participants in her program are welcomed to continue the work in community outside. In solidarity, the program endures despite the hurdles of politics, economics, racism, and inequity.

At the time of this writing, the COVID-19 pandemic has removed many of us from society's usual activities. The ominous consequences of extended isolation and lockdown are being felt even by those of us in the "free world." As we struggle to deal with a tenacious virus, the plight of the prison population is further removed from our collective consciousness. But, despite mandates for distancing, Branfman did not stop her commitment to the men of the prison's dance program. *Undanced Dances Through Prison Walls During a Pandemic* affirms her perseverance and care while also producing parallel social practice outcomes: transformative connections with a carceral community and powerful concepts in dance. It is an admirable balance that requires stamina, courage, and continued inclusive actions. Through partnerships with artists and organizations and in allyship with movements for social justice, Branfman's project is a model for art and moral action. Inside and outside, the artist continues her movement for compassionate change.



Suchi Branfman, *SUSTAIN NOLA*, Orleans Parish Prison, New Orleans, LA, 2019. Photo: Sophia Germer.



Suchi Branfman, *Freedom Dances*, California Rehabilitation Center, Norco, CA, 2018. Photo: William Short.





BIOGRAPHY

Born Monterey Park, CA
Lives and works in Santa Monica and
Desert Hot Springs, CA

EDUCATION

BA, City University of New York, Empire
State College

MFA, Goddard College, Plainfield, VT

SELECTED PERFORMANCES

- 2021 *Undanced Dances Through Prison Walls During a Pandemic*, Scripps Presents, Claremont, CA
Undanced Dances Through Prison Walls During a Pandemic, 18th Street Arts Complex, Santa Monica, CA
Richie's Disappearing Acts, Printed Matter Art Book Fair, New York
- 2020 *Undanced Dances Through Prison Walls During a Pandemic*, Institute for Contemporary Art Los Angeles
- 2019 *Dancing Through Prison Walls*, Garrison Theater, Claremont, CA
- 2018 *Inside Outside*, Highways Performance Space, Santa Monica, CA
Angola Prison: Embodied Carceral Landscape, Art and Practice, Los Angeles

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Branfman, Suchi. "Undanced Dances During a Pandemic." *The Nation*, April 14, 2021. <https://www.thenation.com/article/society/dance-covid-california/>.
- Branfman, Suchi, editor. *Undanced Dances Through Prison Walls During a Pandemic* (2nd edition). San Francisco: Sming Sming Books, 2021.
- Cooney, Mary Pat. "Dancing Through Prison Walls: A Finely Crafted Work of Art About Social Justice." *LA Dance Chronicle*, November 20, 2019. <https://www.ladancechronicle.com/dancing-through-prison-walls-a-finely-crafted-work-of-art-about-social-justice/>.

Haleemon, Anderson. "The Freedom of Movement: A Radical Dance Program Gives Prisoners a Way Out." *Ampersand*, November 22, 2021. <https://www.ampersandla.com/the-freedom-of-movement-a-radical-dance-program-gives-prisoners-a-way-out/>.

Henderson, Garnet. "Writing Dances, from Inside a Prison." *Dance Magazine*, March 31, 2021. <https://www.dancemagazine.com/dancing-through-prison-walls/>.

Shaffer-Del Valle, Emilia. "Reflections on *Undanced Dances Through Prison Walls*." *The Dancer-Citizen*, January 10, 2022. <http://dancercitizen.org/in-the-moment/emilia-shaffer-del-valle/>.

Slayton, Jeff. "Suchi Branfman's *ROPE*: An Evening of Performance Activism, Hope and Freedom," *LA Dance Chronicle*, February 24, 2020. <https://www.ladancechronicle.com/suchi-branfman-s-rope-an-evening-of-performance-activism-hope-and-freedom/>.

—. "Suchi Branfman Gives Life to Undanced Dances Created Behind Prison Walls." *LA Dance Chronicle*, April 5, 2021. <https://www.ladancechronicle.com/suchi-branfman-gives-life-to-undanced-dances-created-behind-prison-walls/>.

WEBSITE

www.suchibranfman.com

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Suchi Branfman, *Angee's Journey*, Garrison Theater, Scripps College, Claremont, CA, 2019. Photo: David Torralva.



**SHONDA
BUCHANAN**

GIVING VOICE TO LEGACIES UNWRITTEN

JANICE LITTLEJOHN

Born and raised in Kalamazoo, Michigan, as one of seven children of an African American father with Choctaw heritage and a Mixed Race mother with Eastern Band Cherokee, Delaware Cherokee, and Coharie tribal ancestry, Shonda Buchanan arrived in Los Angeles at age eighteen. She was fresh out of high school, with a thick Midwestern drawl, a job as a nanny for a *USA Today* columnist, and a Mary Richards “make-it-after-all” vision of herself in the big city. Upon arriving, she did not like the big city one bit. “I felt like L.A. was too big for me, too sprawled out,” she tells me over pumpkin spice tea and vegan black-eyed peas, as she reflects on her early days in Los Angeles. A few years later, the Anansi Writers Workshop at

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the World Stage Performance Gallery in Leimert Park would become her revolutionary lifeline.

Los Angeles is where Buchanan, once a country mouse, found not only her voice but her identity as a Black and Mixed Race woman in America. That was the early 1990s in South Central, at a time when the predominantly Black community was defined by gangs, drug busts, and police brutality. “In those early days in Leimert Park, people were still licking their wounds from the Watts Rebellion and from the Rodney King Insurrection, and all that sorrow, that pain, anger, and righteous energy went directly into our poetry,” she says.

On Buchanan’s very first morning in Los Angeles, at the Wiltern Hotel in Beverly Hills, she was awakened at 7:42 a.m. by the 5.9 magnitude Whittier Narrows earthquake. Standing nervously in the shaking doorway, she knew she hated this *big, noisy town*. But moving back home was not an option. Kalamazoo was too small, and Buchanan didn’t see herself in a lot of the artists there. “I didn’t see anyone who was making a living as a writer,” she says. “I didn’t want to get stuck there, having babies like my sisters, cousins, and aunts.”

Her yearning was to be as impressive—and as impactful—as the writers in *I Am the Darker Brother*, her favorite collection of Harlem Renaissance and New Negro Movement poets, including Langston Hughes and Gwendolyn Brooks. But even in Los Angeles, as she wrote fierce and sometimes whimsical poems, journaled heavily, and hesitantly sketched out the first draft of her family memoir, which dripped with poetic

language, not everything panned out the way she'd envisioned it.

A few years in, Buchanan wasn't just a freelance writer for the *L.A. Weekly* and the *Los Angeles Times*; she wasn't simply a community college student and a budding Black activist taking West African dance classes at Centinela Park in Inglewood. She was also a mother—a Midwestern single mamma barely in her twenties with a toddler in tow. “At first, I was devastated; I was the great hope of my family. But giving birth to my daughter changed everything,” she says. “Suddenly, I had to grow up.” Buchanan's work of the period reflected her abrupt maturity. At the World Stage, she worked out her life—her bad relationships and inherited childhood trauma—and learned to be a good mother with a village surrounding her daughter. She performed poetry about parenting, womanhood, Blackness, being *mixed blood*, and love—of course, love.

And then another thing happened like a Great Lakes wind. She was suddenly in a sweltering sweat lodge in a Native American community nestled deep in Los Padres National Forrest about three hours outside of Los Angeles. Another part of herself broke open during Indigenous ceremonies. Not only did she find community among the sprawling landscape, in the desert mountains, and among full-blood and Mixed Race people, her work began to shift to themes of selfhood, indigeneity, heredity, migration, legacy, and loss.

She grew into the role she'd always envisioned as a young girl—making a living as a writer, magazine editor, poet, and educator. Yet, as her daughter turned fourteen, the years, Buchanan says “when women

in my family typically get pregnant,” there was a motherly stirring inside of her to leave the city, which had increasing gang violence and was ever-teetering on civil unrest. Buchanan took a job as a professor at a historically Black college in Virginia, and soon after became a women's traditional dancer and singer at Native American pow wows. But she always yearned to return to her adopted home in California.

She returned twice a year while obtaining an MFA in poetry from Antioch University. Her master's thesis, *Who's Afraid of Black Indians?* (2012) was her first published book of poetry, followed by *Equipoise: Poems from Goddess Country* (2017), which Ron Smith, a Virginia poet laureate, called “a ravenous . . . essence of Woman, these sensual, violent, archetypal poems stretch the marveling mind from Eve to Ethiopia, from Magdala to Medusa, from Hathor to Harlem, from Delphi to a desert in Arizona. These are poems of blood—sacrificial, menstrual, sacerdotal, and, finally, familial.” That same year, Buchanan edited *Voices from Leimert Park Redux* for Harriet Tubman Press, an imprint of Tsehai Publishers, featuring many of the poets and writers with whom she came of age as an artist. She is also literary editor of Harriet Tubman Press.

In between and since, Buchanan has published writing in numerous anthologies and self-published several chapbooks, and she has three books and two screenplays in progress, including two novels and a collection of poetry celebrating Nina Simone. The work she's currently most proud of and that put her in the canon with other books confronting race and raciality

is her award-winning memoir *Black Indian*. It was published in 2019, shortly after she returned home to Los Angeles, where her exploration of the intersectional community began. The memoir has taken on a life of its own. Author Jeffrey Renard Allen called *Black Indian* “an important memoir.” He said, “Buchanan confronts questions of identity and ancestry . . . This book speaks to those determined to heal cycles of violence in their own families.” PBS NewsHour called *Black Indian* one of the top books to read to learn about institutional racism.

Since its publication, Buchanan has received requests nationally and internationally to lecture about Black Indian, aka Afro-Indigenous, heritage and narratives. She traces those intersections that America has hidden for purposes of disempowering Mixed Race stories and invalidating the bonds of unity that African Americans and Indigenous peoples have forged since long before 1492. Her readers in Greece, Malaysia, and Amsterdam wanted to hear these stories of how a Black Indian social identity was and is formed—in the past and present. Buchanan has tapped into a broader connection of shared experiences from readers worldwide who saw in her words their stories, their families’ stories, and their *Indian-ness*. They shared a sense of *that’s exactly what was happening to me in my family* and those questions and secrets kept within families—hidden secrets of racism, relatives passing for white, racism that erased a cultural identity and connectedness.

In crisscrossing communities as she does and as a professor at her alma mater, Loyola Marymount

University, in Los Angeles, Buchanan is focused on our core humanity—what we share as much as what makes us different—with hope that students, colleagues, viewers of her words, and listeners of her songs will learn to respect and listen to each other and find healing in the shared human stories.

As her work for the City of Los Angeles Independent Master Artist Project unfolds over the course of the year, Buchanan aims to bring to light the hidden stories of the first eleven Mixed Race founding families of Los Angeles from Mexico—Africans, Indios (or Indians), Mulattos, and one European who was married to an Indio woman—who settled alongside the Indigenous peoples who lived here long before Spanish-directed settlements. Buchanan’s intention is to bring their stories alive in poems and lectures that explore their lives, their inherent diversity, and their mission in those early days. This history is a rich part of the city’s origin story, a shared *mixed blood* for four million people who call Los Angeles home. Buchanan, a traveler, writer, and educator, once the proverbial country girl with big city dreams, has the ability to do this necessary work—to move through the wounds of history, to uncover hidden stories that can enrich Los Angeles’ cultural milieu, and traverse the defining narratives of our times, using language to testify, to reflect, to learn, and ultimately, to heal.

Shonda Buchanan will present poems from a new body of work entitled *Artificial Earth, Circa Los Angeles, 1771–1848: Poems*.

This collection owes a great debt to the first historians, like William M. Mason of the Southern California Genealogical Society and a handful of others, who unearthed the first knowledge of the mixed race heritage and ethnicities of the original settlers of Los Angeles—Indios/Indians, Africans/Negros, Mulattos, and Spaniards. Those first twenty-two families were paid to trek the one thousand miles from Sonora and Sinaloa, Mexico, by Spain for its own “grand design.” They settled in what is now known as downtown Los Angeles’ Olvera Street District, near the Indigenous nations already in the area, the Chumash and the Kitz Nation, also referred to as Gabrieleño/Tongva tribes, and other Indigenous peoples. On September 4, 1781, the spot where they settled was officially labeled El Pueblo de la Reina de Los Angeles, or The Town (or House or City) of the Queen of the Angels. The exact original title is disputed, and the name was later shortened to Los Angeles.

These poems are a humble attempt to bring these narratives to life, yet until all the documents and oral histories are unearthed, merged, and decolonized, the true story of Los Angeles and its inhabitants—indeed of America—will remain untold.

ARTIFICIAL EARTH, CIRCA LOS ANGELES, 1771–1848: POEMS

BY
SHONDA BUCHANAN

EL PUEBLO DE NUESTRA SEÑORA LA REYNA DE LOS ANGELES

What do any of us hope for
at the beginning of a thing,
of love, of an empty field
of the ingredients before it all
takes its illusive shape?

The turning over of a thought.
Dirt in a shovel.
Lines sketched out on the earth's
body
becoming a plot.
Plot spills into a farm, into
village
then glittering amber teeth of
firelight in a window.
A lane of windows.
A town. A city.

And then a brown baby cries
somewhere far, far off in the
distance.
She is turning too. Bruised by her
exit,
a copper head smelling of smoke
and angel wings
with all her ancestors' bones
in her soft mouth, their Aztec
skulls, their marigolds
their African gris gris, their
deer-tail quiet
hover over her
as yet unsung.

Not yet ready for the language,
to tell of the terrible deeds.
The bloodstones, sunsets that
will bow to her,
orange trees and draught,
the old songs
she is about to inherit.
It, her birth, is the newest thing.
It matters now.

It is all we ever want. A chance
to begin again.
To erect shelter. Scratch out a
place we call home.

Yet some never ask permission
to give the earth a kiss. To build
a fire.

To move a river. To steal the
breath of dolphins.
Didn't the first people leave
signs?
Didn't we teach them how to pray
to the black earth beneath their
feet before opening her body?
They didn't hear us.

Here, we are all tender to the
touch.
Birth is the only memory we share.

POBLADORES "SETTLERS"

It had to be eleven, the number
of fulfillment, of infinite vision.
Not nine. Not ten. Not thirteen.

The 12th, a Filipino family,
were the sacrifice
left behind on the trail.

There had to be balance. This
grand design was already ten
years
in the making. They needed order.
A sign. A congruence.

The number squirreled around in
Junipero's head. Eleven.
Like Constantine, we could
sometimes choose God's will.

Besides, Franciscans respected
Twinings. Duality.

The flesh and the spirit.
The Trinity would come later.

Spain sent the doves with a
note kissed, blessed
rolled and scented by the
Franciscan Cross.

Eleven families. 22 adults and
22 children.
44 Indian, African, Mulatta,
European settlers. Pobladores.

The sun followed them around
like a shadow.
They tread into the valley,
aligning the wheel of time.

Kissed by the sacrament.
They grew their wings.

FIRST, THEIR STORIES

Our bodies are like stars.
Filling up the blackness
with bright, terribly bright
dreams,
floating like seeds into gullies
onto the landscape, dropping
pollen,
praying this is the last stop.

History is a star.
The lattice body of murdered
tribes.
Blood filling their lungs like
ice from space,
like trembling newly named,
fresh water rivers
they once recognized, now
running through them
like a shaft of hot, white light.

History is a river.
Desperately peeled wetness,
black mud
brains of worms
licking underfoot as they
climbed the arroyos.
Up shale ridges that once
were kissed
by more water than you could
imagine.
Dolphins swam over mountain
peaks.

The Chumash spoke their language.
Yet they kept those secrets to
themselves and followed the river.
A river you'd have followed too,
if for no other reason than you
were undone,
thirsty, confused by the sounds of
settlers,
and your children were corn husk
thin, so thin
history could no longer see them.

History is a desert.
Beautifully bleak, an axiom of
scales, pearls of sand,
fire ants sliding into crevasses
that led to the navel of the earth.
Deserts are like rivers too.
Drowning you in its
desert mountain silence. Kisses
you quiet, into submission,
like no sound has ever kissed you.
Still, you stay close to the desert
river for the promise of life
at the end of this unknown,
unnamed journey.

History is a kiss. Licorice tender.

History is a dolphin.
Her slick face pressed to the
democratic wave.

History is a weapon.
Mindless in its fury.

History is a Yucatan forest,
a flower, a fly.
History is the River Niger
flinging golden rocks at the sun.
History is a sacred fire that never
extinguishes.
The flame, precious cool embers,
once a soloist tree, all burning.
Fallen.
Only memory pushing, pulling
the things in the pit
around in the beautiful
blackness.

History is a Mestizo.
A Mulatta.
A half-breed.
A full-blood.

History is a gorgeous beast.

PAGES 78–80:

Shonda Buchanan, "El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reyna de los Angeles," 2022.

Shonda Buchanan, "Pobladores 'Settlers,'" 2022.

Shonda Buchanan, "First, Their Stories," 2022.

All three poems are from the author's forthcoming collection, *Artificial Earth, Circa Los Angeles, 1771–1848: Poems*.

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BIOGRAPHY

Born 1968, Kalamazoo, MI
Lives and works in Los Angeles

EDUCATION

MFA, Creative Writing, Antioch University, Los Angeles, 2010
MA, English, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, 2003
BA, English, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, 1997

SELECTED AWARDS, FELLOWSHIPS, AND VISITING LECTURER POSITIONS

- 2022 President of the Board of Trustees, Beyond Baroque Literary Art Center
Faculty fellow, Office of Research and Professional Development, Loyola Marymount University
- 2021– University of Southern California
present Los Angeles Institute for the Humanities Fellow
- 2021 Pushcart Prize Nominee
Mississippi Review Poetry Contest Finalist
- 2020 Next Generation Indie Book Award for *Black Indian*
Los Angeles Poetry Society Award
- 2019 Reviewer's Choice Book, Midwest Reviewers, for *Black Indian*
- 2017 Writer-in-Residence, Department of English, College of William & Mary
Jentel Artist Residency Fellow
- 2016 PeopleAdmin's Inspired2Educate Award
- 2013 Library of Virginia Literary Award Nominee
Black Caucus of the American Library Association Literary Awards Nominee
- 2010 Poem of the Year Award, *Long Story Short* E-zine, for "Buckroe Beach"
- 2008 Visiting Lecturer, Advanced Studies in England, Bath, England

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Buchanan, Shonda. *Black Indian*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2019.
 - . *Equipoise: Poems from Goddess Country*. San Francisco: San Francisco Bay Press, 2017.
 - , editor. *Voices from Leimert Park*. Los Angeles: Tsehai Publishers, 2006.
 - , editor. *Voices from Leimert Park REDUX*. Los Angeles: Harriet Tubman Press, 2017.
 - . *Who's Afraid of Black Indians?* Poetica Publishing, 2012.
- In addition to writing books, Buchanan has been a journalist for over 25 years, publishing in the *Los Angeles Times*, *L.A. Weekly*, AWP's *The Writer's Chronicle*, *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, *Indian Country Today*, and *The International Review of African American Art*.

WEBSITE

www.shondabuchanan.com



**JIBZ
CAMERON**

CHANNELING CHAOS: THE LO-FI HYSTERIA OF DYNASTY HANDBAG

JEANNE VACCARO

Jibz Cameron seduced me into leaving the house, *and I liked it*. In the blissed-out ignorance of Delta's decline, before Omicron's surge sent us scurrying back inside, I sat front row at Weirdo Night soaking it all in. The return of the monthly series, hosted and curated by Cameron's alter ego Dynasty Handbag, felt like uncanny space travel. It was a familiar scene at Zebulon Café: dykes and gender freaks clamoring not for the normalcy that the never-gonna-happen end of the pandemic keeps teasing but for the transcendent, lyrical nonsense that Handbag delivers onstage. After all this time playing it safe, we, the middle-aged artsy farsty people Los Angeles, want the weird back.

As a performer and visual artist, Cameron's aesthetic presents as lo-fi hysteria. On stage, her nylons

Dynasty Handbag, Los Angeles, 2017. Photo: Emily Berl.



run and words slur; on paper, ink-colored limbs barely contain the volume of a balloon animal about to blow. Channeling this chaos is an act of precision. Onstage, Handbag cajoles the audience into becoming her laugh track. In the club, the usual bummer of wearing a mask actually feels like a relief, shielding my uncontrollable laughter from prying eyes. Why should I be embarrassed to laugh . . . *at jokes*? Maybe it's wrong to cite the daddy of psychoanalysis himself, but Sigmund Freud did say that funny comes from the real, and that means that getting the joke is a reveal of its own. With abject humor, Cameron puts shame on display. The audience can pick it up or put it down, but it isn't going anywhere.

Imagine the love child of Betty Boop and Divine: filthy, absurdist, and deceptively casual. As an artist,

Handbag synthesizes every emotion currently on rotation. If dread is the low-key soundtrack to our apocalypse, she pumps up the volume. Voiceover is integral to the performance. Even as we see the words coming out of her mouth, the audience is made to feel like we're eavesdropping. She lets us in on the internal monologue that we all think we can put into words, much like we think we can sing in the shower, but can't. This is the sublime of performance that is difficult to describe and nearly impossible to achieve. For the duration of the show, Handbag makes anything seem possible.

Offstage, Cameron makes drawings and watercolors that sketch the contours of her performance persona. *Mom and God* (2020), for example, depicts a hairy lipstick lesbian with a pants zipper that is an open cunt taking a piss (literally) on the grave of "Mom and Dad." The word "Dad" is crossed out and replaced with "God." A Cathy-esque "ACK!" meets the feminist rage of Valerie Solanas. It's no wonder that when I gave a print of *Mom and God* to my psychotherapist parents, my mom burst into joyous laughter while my dad claimed not to get it. Whether she's in costume or not, Cameron can't resist flirting with the edge of normal; anyone with good sense should follow wherever she leads.

Dynasty Handbag, Zebulon, Los Angeles, 2018. Photo: Indra Dunis.





Dynasty Handbag, Garbage Castle, 2020. Still from digital video, directed by Casey Rupp and Jibz Cameron, color, sound, 9 min.



Dynasty Handbag. *Vat Do You Vahnt for Bwekfas?*, 2016. Still from digital video, directed by Mariah Garnett, color, sound, 2:40 min.



Dynasty Handbag. *Weirdo Night*, 2020. Still from digital video, directed by Mariah Garnett, color, sound, 46 min.

BIOGRAPHY

Born 1975, Annapolis, CA
Lives and works in Los Angeles

EDUCATION

BFA, San Francisco Art Institute, 1998

SELECTED SCREENINGS AND PERFORMANCES

- 2021 *Weirdo Night*, Sundance Film Festival
- 2016 *I, An Moron*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles
- 2015 *Soggy Glasses*, REDCAT/The Broad, Los Angeles

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009.

Shaw, Helen. "In *Weirdo Night*, the Avant-Garde Fights Dirty." *New York Magazine*, February 5, 2021. <https://www.vulture.com/2021/02/review-of-jibz-cameron-as-dynasty-handbag-in-weirdo-night.html>.

WEBSITE

www.dynastyhandbag.com

Dynasty Handbag, 2019. Photo: Daniel Kirby.





**YORK
CHANG**

UNDER THE NAME YORK CHANG

BENJAMIN WEISSMAN

He used to write screeds on a sleek gray and green Olivetti typewriter and apply a dab of *Wite-out* to intentional typos. Now his errors remain as-is and are part of a broader counter-narrative. He used to poo-poo expensive balsamic vinegars. Now he's gushing over Oracolo Gold Cap. He once donned a platinum Willem de Kooning mop and performed Grand Guignol pastiches for the camera. Now in the guise of an experimental surrealist he lies prone in the living room and paints self-portraits with his feet. He used to fear the caged owl at the back of the sorcery store. Now he's a falconer. It was not uncommon for him to answer the front door in a velvet robe and offer you a Courvoisier. Now he guzzles cold-pressed green drinks. He used to make diagrammatic drawings that

York Chang, *First Eclipse*, 2019. Photocollage and archival inkjet on layered transparent microfiche film, 70 x 38 in. Photo: Juliana Paciulli.



addressed *time*, *history*, and *artist*. Now he pulls on a spikey red wig and yells in a fake British accent, “Time may change me, but I can’t change time.” He did his best to avoid fame, but the gears of the culture gradually modified him into shining star. He used to have a formidable temper, like a lion in heat. Now he’s a purr-meow Buddhist. He used to abhor the drop shot and find it cheap, morally repugnant, a last-ditch effort, a sign of fatigue. Now he serves and volleys regardless of the score. He once had a slight conspiratorial wink that he’d flash at cohorts. Now he’s a provocateur-instigator. He used to be all about second chances, second skins, second lives. Now he’s gaga about time immemorial and the afterlife. He once believed that history was primarily a false account. Now he’s a living breathing Bildungsroman and considers self-esteem an erroneous appraisal. He used to be wickedly secretive, a lip reader for the resistance. Now he’s a dilated oracle. He used to meditate at the intersection of fact and fiction. Now he salutes the blur. He used to snicker at assertions of so-called truth. Now he’s the ringleader of human pleasure. He used to care about canonical facts. Now he pours over Don DeLillo novels and takes copious notes. He used to be interested in objective authoritative histories. Now he’s an object-making, storytelling evangelist. He used to have a go-to pose when photographed. Now his backside will do. He used to agitate for a greater love of all things claiming to be something they’re not. Now he’s noticing how the word *allegedly* is a flirtation. He used to be interested in puppet regimes. Now he’s unionized the marionettes. He used to be indifferent about his

York Chang, *Civilian (Factograph)*, 2019. Archival inkjet on folded Japanese kozo paper, 46 x 32 in. Photo: Juliana Paciulli.



artistic legacy. Now he’s invested in circumventing historical memory. He once considered joining the priesthood. Now he considers the idea that belief without evidence slowly chewed him up and spat him out. He once dried a thousand books on his roof after his basement flooded. Now he writes first drafts with the tip of his tongue on the roof of his mouth. He once



York Chang, *Doppelgänger*, 2014. Ink on paper, 50 x 30 in.

considered Jorge Luis Borges the pinnacle of literature. Now he's a Roberto Bolaño scholar. He used to see the process of documentation as necessary foreplay. Now he's tossing word salads. He used to love putting the toothpaste back in the tube. Now he's amused by the vernacular of gamesmanship. He used to consider authorship and appropriation his bread and butter. Now he's fingerpainting with Flashe. In his youth, he was Head Preparator, a complex job that involved the overseeing of all heads that entered and exited the gallery and storing them in two-gallon mason jars. Now he's lead counsel for the soul of America. He once tore the epaulets off his duster. Now he's undergirded with salvaged rebar. He used to be interested in institutional forms of deception. Now he's recognizing the fertile gaps in the imagination. He used to hold court at Veselka with fellow Ukrainians, slurp borscht, eat pierogi with sour cream and apple sauce. Now he's volunteering with his wife and daughter as the last line of defense.

He used to ride cross country on his chopper and write R. Mutt on truck stop urinals whenever he had to pee. Now he dresses up as Walter Benjamin and travels to the Pyrenees to walk his final steps, ingest a chunk of hash, and read from his essay, "Hashish in Marseilles," in a loud, resounding voice, "The appearance of things touched me with a magic wand, and I sank into a dream of them."

York Chang (in collaboration with Daniel R. Small), *Radio Booth*, 2019. Wood booth/performance platform; broadcast equipment; sound insulation; illuminated on-air signage; research archive on historical conspiracy theories, hoaxes, and numerology; magnetic tape collection of AM talk radio shows; six analog tape recorders; Federal Communications Commission decisions on Fairness Doctrine; meme warfare manuals; weekly live broadcast performances of artists' radio plays; 8 x 10 x 5 ft. Installation view and performance still, Orange County Museum of Art, Costa Mesa, CA.





York Chang, *The Signal and the Noise*, 2019. Multimedia installation, collapsed wood balcony, five thousand factographic collages on newspaper broadsheet, shortwave radio tuned to overlapping transmissions, phenomenological information graphs, dimensions variable. Photo: Monica Orozco, courtesy of Vincent Price Art Museum, Los Angeles.

BIOGRAPHY

Born 1973, St. Louis, MO
Lives and works in Los Angeles

EDUCATION

BA, University of California, Los Angeles,
1996

Juris Doctorate, University of California,
Los Angeles, 2001

Post-Graduate Studies, Urban Planning,
University of California, Los Angeles,
2001

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 2019 Orange County Museum of Art, Costa Mesa,
CA (solo)
Vincent Price Art Museum, Los Angeles (solo)
- 2018 Charlie James Gallery, Los Angeles (group)
- 2017 Edel Assanti, London (solo)
Samuel Freeman Gallery (solo)
- 2015 MAK Center, Los Angeles (group)
- 2014 Greene Exhibitions (solo)
Armory Center for the Arts, Pasadena, CA
(group)
- 2013 Commonwealth and Council (solo)
- 2011 18th Street Art Center (solo)
MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA (group)
Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions
(group)

AWARDS AND FELLOWSHIPS

- 2020 VPAM Thomas Silliman Vanguard Award
- 2014 California Community Foundation Fellowship
- 2011 18th Street Arts Center Fellowship

COLA

2022

York Chang, *Glyph (Cielo)*, 2021. Flashe paint, graphite, and pastel on folded and layered Japanese kozo paper, 46 x 30 in.





**DANNY
JAUREGUI**

A MATTER OF SPECULATION

DIANA TUI TE

How can an image breach the present with the force of past loss and future recovery? Danny Jauregui's speculative artifacts reconstitute queer cultural property. His artwork has always been attentive to desire, particularly the lost spaces designed to satiate it and the mirroring intensity with which we try to revisit them. Fully in agreement with cultural theorist José Esteban Muñoz that "the archive is a fiction," Jauregui exhumes relics from outside of "straight time."¹

Archaeology often underlies Jauregui's practice. A multidisciplinary artist, he has marshaled the architectural metaphors of decay to contend with, among other things, the trauma of HIV/AIDS. A recent series of inkjet prints insinuates a museological or archival frame. Each digital rendering takes cues

Danny Jauregui, *Arena*, 2021. Inkjet print, 40 x 40 in.



from ephemera related to vanished queer spaces in Los Angeles. Jauregui conjures these sites metonymically by using software to render what appear to be three-dimensional objects documented photographically. He borrows from advertisements for bathhouses in Bob Damron's *The Address Book*, a travel guide for gay men first published in 1965, suffusing the objects he fashions with authenticity. Their spectral sensuality entreats our caress, but their insubstantiality refuses

it; this denial restages the suppression of haptic impulses in museum spaces.

This fugitivity underlines the poignancy of queerness as “the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality,” in Muñoz’s words.² Displacement is at work in Jauregui’s cheekily titled *Glory Hallelujah!* (2021), which depicts a gloryhole, an opening in a wall or partition through which one enjoys anonymous stimulation. By extracting it from its architectural context, Jauregui substitutes one kind of sensory pleasure for another; the fossilized threshold becomes an aperture, reifying scopic gratification in/as the work of art. But *Glory Hallelujah!* is bathed in red light, an allusion to “dark rooms” in gay clubs in which participation, not voyeurism, is protocol.

Jauregui draws upon trans-historical rituals to animate his projections. The smoldering neon slab in *Hollywood Y Baños* (2021) winks at the aesthetics of dance clubs and substitutes another temporality for one tracked through natural light. In *Arena* (2021), a jade-like model of a bygone Latinx club levitates in demonstration of its supernatural powers, or *brujería*. As though illuminated from within, the engraved text of *Copper Lantern 1532 Sunset Blvd* (2021) flickers with incantatory potency. These imaginary items evoke so-called “curse” tablets, ancient fragments of metal inscribed with spells either villainous or erotic. In their affect, they reprise the tensions between faith and evidence embodied in Christian reliquaries. These casket-like receptacles evolved until by the late medieval period they offered the faithful an ecstatic peek into their contents.

Jauregui considers himself an exorcist of sorts: “I keep thinking that what I’m doing is trying to release these gay ghosts that are trapped in the archive.”³ He summons populations excluded from the white-centering logic that scaffolds the archives he consults. By incorporating Spanglish into some of the modified language on these tablets, he talks back to the original documents while speaking to and for Latinx queers in their vernacular. His methodology calls to mind Jean Bessette’s call for *retroactivism* and alternative historical evidence: “Queer archives must be composed with contents and in forms that do not look like the official paper records we expect archives to contain.”⁴ An apotropaic energy emanates from Jauregui’s talismanic ruins, as though their manifestation promises protection. Nonetheless, lodged within this reassurance is recognition of the dire risks faced by oppressed populations for the custody of their cultural knowledge.

1. José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 121 and 25.

2. Muñoz, 1.

3. Danny Jauregui, e-mail correspondence with the author, January 16, 2022.

4. Jean Bessette, *Retroactivism in the Lesbian Archives: Composing Pasts and Futures* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2018), 39.

Danny Jauregui, *Hollywood Y Offering Cup*, 2022. Inkjet print, 40 x 40 in.





Danny Jauregui, *Glory Hallelujah!*, 2021. Inkjet print, 40 x 40 in.

Danny Jauregui, *Hollywood Y Baños*, 2021. Inkjet print, 40 x 40 in.



BIOGRAPHY

Born 1979, East Los Angeles
Lives and works in Los Angeles

EDUCATION

MFA, University of California, San Diego,
2006
BFA, Maryland Institute College of Art,
Baltimore, 2002

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 2020 *Archive Machines*, Los Angeles Municipal Art
Gallery (group)
2016 *Piss Elegant/Some Motorcycle*, Samuel
Freeman Gallery, Venice, CA (solo)
2011 *Coming After*, The Power Plant Contemporary
Art Gallery, Toronto (group)
2010 *Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano
Movement*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art
(group)
There Goes The Neighborhood, Leslie
Tonkonow Artworks + Projects (solo)

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Body Politics to Volta NY." *Hyperallergic*,
March 3, 2017.
Gurba, Myriam. "A Guide to Gay Los Angeles,
1965." *Lost L.A.*, KCET, November 4, 2017.
Nichols, Mathew. "Danny Jauregui." *Art in
America*, January 5, 2011.

WEBSITE

www.dannyjauregui.com



Danny Jauregui, *Copper Lantern 1532 Sunset Blvd*, 2021. Inkjet print, 40 x 40 in.



**YOSHIE
SAKAI**

FAMILY TIDES

ANDREW CHOATE

Let's start with emotions. Instead of diagnosing or analyzing them, just feel them. This act of calmly accepting and bravely inhabiting our emotions has become the basis for countless permutations of mindfulness and meditation in the twenty-first century. As awareness of our emotions has risen in popularity and been lauded by the therapeutic industries as the ultimate act of courage and strength, the same awareness has been equally denigrated and belittled as a valid foundation for the act of making art by the professional tastemakers of the cultural ecosystem. Yoshie Sakai's work begins from the principle that her emotions are not only valid but also valuable.

Sakai's emotions are valuable not only to herself but to others as well. Her emotions accrue public value

through her creative process, which takes root feelings of worthlessness, self-loathing, and inadequacy and alchemically aestheticizes them into celebrations of both self and otherness. Vitality emerges victorious.

Sakai's videos, sculptures, and installations are elaborate constructions involving myriad forms, but they stem from precisely pinpointed, intuitively immediate sensations: fear, shame, disgust, lust, disappointment, joy, anger, anxiety, and serenity. An undercurrent of humor throughout her work makes the discomfort affably accessible. In her ongoing soap opera/video series *KOKO's Love* (2014–ongoing), Sakai recreates her own family dynamic between a practicality-obsessed father, a resignedly subservient mother, and their only child, a daughter. Using a multiplicity of costumes and speech patterns, Sakai plays every character. The dialogue is lifted directly from the artist's regular conversations with her parents and interviews she conducted with them regarding their assessments of her.

The judgements are harsh, tragic, and borderline abusive. But the deft hand of Sakai's artistry transforms traumatic statements and events into a parade of self-affirmation and genuine delight. It's funny because it's true. But it's also funny in a more profound way, because it satirizes the myopic view of life as simply survival and accomplishment. "If this is all you think life is," she implies, "then I'll show you a thing or two." By "a thing or two," I mean the mountain of sculptures, props, videos, and objects that Sakai has imbued with meaning. When she pairs her simple acts of recontextualization with the convoluted mechanism

of video production, she fabricates synergy between sadness and satisfaction, disappointment and discovery, attitudes and plenitude.

In the twentieth century, Lynn Hershman wrote, “Audiences seem to be uncomfortable when television trespasses into realms of truth, because the format of television confuses fact and fiction.”¹ Sakai’s work in the twenty-first century, however, uses video and installation to empower audiences to evaluate the validity of exterior and interior judgements. Instead of confusing us, she invites us to become pleasantly complicit protagonists in her dramas and to use what we learn from those dramas as tools within our own lives.

Sakai is turning to her *obaa-chan* (grandmother) as the impetus for her newest series, *Grandma Entertainment Franchise (GEF)* (2022–ongoing). Appealing to grandmothers as one’s target audience is a bold display of priorities that demonstrates not only indifference to our culture’s fawning over increasingly exclusive desired demographics but also direct antagonism to such utilitarian-based perspectives on human beings.

In progress are *Grandma Nightclub* and *Grandma Day Spa*, as

well as videos to enrich the experience of audience members’ positions in relation to grandparents. As in the rest of her oeuvre, the work begins from a place of addressing, redesigning, and transcending the cruel voices that diminish our own and others’ roles in the tapestry of vitality that should be lived existence.

1. Lynn Hershman, “Video 1980–Present: Videotape as Alternative Space,” *Chimaera Monographie: Lynn Hershman* (1992), 88. Reprinted in Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, eds., *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists’ Writing* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2012).



Yoshie Sakai, *KOKO's House*, 2019. Still from digital video, color, sound, 17:54 min.







Yoshie Sakai, *Grandma Nightclub*, 2022. Still from digital video, color, sound, 03:29 min.

Previous spread: Yoshie Sakai, *KOKO's Love: The Technicolor Unfairytale Ball*, 2018. Sixteen-channel mixed-media video installation (found furniture and other objects, paint, marquee lights, fabric, Styrofoam, paper, colored tinsel, carpet), 85 x 42 x 22 ft. Photo: Makoto Hawkins.

BIOGRAPHY

Born 1970, Torrance, CA
Lives and works in Gardena, CA

EDUCATION

MFA, Claremont Graduate University, Claremont,
CA, 2009
BFA, California State University, Long Beach, 2004
BA, University of California, Los Angeles, 1994

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 2019 *KOKO's Neighborhood*, University Art Gallery,
California State University, Dominguez Hills, Carson,
CA (solo)
- 2019 *The Autotopographers*, John Michael Kohler Arts
Center, Sheboygan, WI (group)
- 2018 *KOKO's Love: The Technicolor Unfairytale Ball*,
Verge Center for the Arts, Sacramento, CA (solo)
- 2016 *KOKO's Love: A Soap Opera Tale of One Family*,
Antenna, New Orleans (solo)

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Surreal Soap Opera, *Koko's Love*." *Art and
Cake*, February 6, 2017. [https://artandcakela.
com/2017/02/06/to-sojourn-inside-yoshie-
sakais-surreal-soap-opera-kokos-love/](https://artandcakela.com/2017/02/06/to-sojourn-inside-yoshie-sakais-surreal-soap-opera-kokos-love/).

WEBSITE

www.yoshiesakai.com

Yoshie Sakai, *KOKO's Love: About Yuki Daydream Reality*, 2019. Six-channel mixed-media video installation (found furniture and objects, paint, fabric, paper, birdcages, wood), 14 x 10 x 16 ft. Photo courtesy of John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, WI.

COLA



COLA Artists

2021

Neel Agrawal
Noel Alumi
Edgar Arceneaux
Maura Brewer
Nao Bustamante
Jedediah Caesar
Neha Choksi
Michael Datcher
Sarah Elgart
Lia Halloran
Phung Huynh
Farrah Karapetian
Ruben Ochoa
Umar Rashid

2020

Tanya Aguiñiga
Amir H. Fallah
YoungEun Kim
Elana Mann
Hillary Mushkin
Alison O'Daniel
Vincent Ramos
Steven Reigns
Shizu Saldamando
Roxanne Steinberg
Holly J. Tempo
Mia Doi Todd
Jeffrey Vallance
Lis Diane Wedgeworth

2019

Juan Capistrán
Enrique Castrejon
Kim Fisher
Katie Grinnan
Sabrina Gschwandtner
Alice Könitz
Olga Koumoundouros
Suzanne Lummis
Aleida Rodríguez
Sandy Rodriguez
Stephanie Taylor
Dwight Trible
Peter Wu
Jenny Yurshansky

2018

Dave Hullfish Bailey
Guillermo Bert
Terry Braunstein
Cassils
Sandra de la Loza
Michelle Dizon
Tim Durfee
June Edmonds
d. Sabela grimes
Peter J. Harris
Michele O'Marah
Julie Shafer
Doris Sung
Kristina Wong

COLA Panelists

2021

Betty Avila
Leanna Bremond
Cassandra Coblenz
Sabrina Gschwandtner
Suzanne Lummis
Diana Nawi
Kamran V

2020

Sandra de la Loza
Daniela Lieja
Edgar Miramontes
Kelsey Nolan
Doris Sung
Kristina Wong
Steven Wong

2019

Bryan Barcena
Meryl Friedman
Joel Garcia
Mar Hollingsworth
Ciara Moloney
Jesus A. Reyes
Andreen Soley
Whitney Weston

2018

Gloria Enedina Alvarez
Edward Hayes
Marcella Guerrero
Ben Johnson
Isabelle Lutterodt
Paul Outlaw
Sally Shore
Emily Zaiden

RECENT COLA HISTORY

2018
2021

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Will Caperton y Montoya

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Louise Sandhaus and Becca Lofchie

COPY EDITOR

Elizabeth Pulsinelli

**PHOTOGRAPHER FOR ARTISTS'
PORTRAITS AND COVERS**

Ilona Szwarc

PRINTER

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City of Los Angeles

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NANCY BAKER CAHILL

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BARNES***

SUCHI BRANFMAN

SHONDA BUCHANAN

JIBZ CAMERON

YORK CHANG

***DANNY
JAUREGUI***

YOSHIE SAKAI



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