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Asserting Space: Noah Purifoy's Outdoor Desert Art Museum

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Art History

by

Caitlyn Marie Lawler

June 2022

Thesis Committee:
Dr. Elizabeth Kotz, Chairperson
Dr. Aleca Le Blanc
Dr. Judith Rodenbeck

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The Thesis of Caitlyn Marie Lawler is approved:

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Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Asserting Space: Noah Purifoy's Outdoor Desert Art Museum

by

Caitlyn Marie Lawler

Master of Arts, Graduate Program in Art History
University of California, Riverside, June 2022
Dr. Elizabeth Kotz, Chairperson

Between 1989 and 2004, Noah Purifoy constructed over one hundred large-scale sculptures that intersect earth art, assemblage, and architecture spread out across a ten-acre parcel of land in Joshua Tree, California. His works are primarily made from locally discarded and repurposed industrial materials that create a site-specific dialogue with their environment. Across space and time, these constructions have culminated in his Outdoor Desert Art Museum. For several decades, he worked as an artist, educator, and administrator throughout Southern California until the rising cost of living prompted him to relocate to the high desert at 72 years old until his death. In effect, scholars have located Purifoy within the discourses of Black Art, socially engaged art, and the postwar Los Angeles art scene regarding his early bodies of work made in the aftermath of the 1965 Watts Rebellion; however, few have written in-depth about his late works. Perhaps this is because his site is not easily categorizable- his constructions sprawl out across the

vast desert floor, decentered into various pockets of experiences. Some works recall Purifoy's past, while others suggest references to modernist art and design, the African diaspora, and African American identities; other works play with commercial graphics and language, defunct technology, labor, and consumerist surplus. Because of the plurality of meanings that emanate from his works, this project examines how Purifoy's site operates as a re-spatialization of personal and collective narratives through the juxtaposition of material objects to realize potential futures. Furthermore, this project focuses on two particular works: *Bessemer Steel and No Contest (bicycles),* as exemplary case studies to examine the real-life implications of space, place, and perspective through compositional forms. In the wake of the current weaponization of critical race theory and education, oppressive policymaking, and racialized mass and police violence, this project argues that Noah Purifoy's Outdoor Desert Art Museum confronts historical denials of space toward African Americans in the United States while asserting space through memory, movement, and materiality on site.

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Asserting Space: Noah Purifoy's Outdoor Desert Art Museum

INTRODUCTION

In 1989, Noah Purifoy moved over one hundred miles east from the urban sprawl of Los Angeles to the high desert of Joshua Tree, California, at 72 years old. For several decades, he worked as an artist, educator, and administrator throughout Southern California, primarily in Los Angeles; however, the rising cost of living coupled with the yearning for change and more studio space prompted Purifoy's relocation. When his longtime friend, Debby Brewer, invited him to share her lot in Joshua Tree, he agreed and set up a modest mobile home and workshop on her two-and-a-half-acre lot. [1] What began with a few large standalone sculptures made from repurposed industrial materials transformed into over one hundred works that intersect assemblage, architecture, and earth art spread across ten acres, which Purifoy worked on until his death in 2004. It is now known as the Noah Purifoy Outdoor Desert Art Museum.

Recent scholarship has located Purifoy within the discourses of Black art, socially engaged art, and postwar art.[2] Most of this literature focuses on his early body of work,

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[1] Richard Cándida-Smith, "Art Is a Confrontation with a 'Me' That Needs Improving: The Beginnings of the Noah Purifoy Foundation," *VOCA Journal*, (2016), 8- 10: Brewer had worked with Purifoy on his early collaborative series, *66 Signs of Neon* in 1966 while living and working in Watts, Los Angeles.

[2] See recent publications: Richard Cándida-Smith, *The Modern Moves West: California Artists and Democratic Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Daniel Widener, *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles*, Duke University Press, 2010, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1134fs5; Kellie Jones, K., H.V. Carby, K.H.F. Sirmans, et al., *Now Dig This!: Art & Black Los Angeles, 1960-1980*. Hammer Museum, 2011; Yael Lipschutz, "Noah Purifoy: Through the Fire." Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Southern California, 2013; Franklin, Sirmans,

66 Signs of Neon, made from the debris of the aftermath of the 1965 Watts Rebellion, where he served as co-director for the Watts Towers Arts Center at the time. During his lifetime, however, there was little written about him outside the confines of community-based art. This is because African Americans and underrepresented groups of people have been systematically excluded and undermined throughout art history, art institutions, and gallery spaces. While little has been written about Purifoy's later works, this project examines Purifoy's Outdoor Desert Art Museum as a re-spatialization of modern art institutions. In the wake of the current weaponization of critical race theory and education, oppressive policymaking, and racialized mass and police violence, I argue that Purifoy's works draw from lived and collective experience to confront historical denials of space toward African Americans in the United States while asserting space through materiality, memory, and movement.

The following pages exemplify how Purifoy's site offers a re-consideration of space through composition and material construction within the physical site and how people move through it. This project draws upon Black ontologies to critically examine sociological, geographic, and art historical frameworks that are present in Purifoy's work through content and form. According to Kellie Jones in *South of Pico*: *African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s*, an assertion of space refers to "actual sites in the world or positions in the global imagination," taking form culturally and politically

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Yael Lipschutz, Kristine McKenna, Lowery Stokes Sims, Dale B.Davis, Allison Glenn, Judson Powell, et al. *Noah Purifoy: Junk Dada.* Los Angeles, California: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2015; Jones, Kellie. *South of Pico: African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s*. Duke University Press, 2017. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11hpmsq.

through notions and revisions of sovereignty and citizenship, becoming and selfhood, migrations, and movements, as well as through land or property ownership.[3] Conversely, a negation or denial of space takes form through isolation, constriction, and compression on a physical and intellectual level through segregation, historical redlining, racial housing covenants, and measures that seek to deny the rights of others through social and legal obstructions.[4] As an outcome of these social and legal forms of negation, spatial logic is thus asymmetric, unevenly distributed across locations affecting public and private spheres of education, housing, healthcare, and labor.[5] As Purifoy's site spans ten acres of land, sprawling across the desert floor, his sculptures draw from personal and collective lived experience, with each work operating as an index toward both assertions and negations of space.

Referencing Katherine McKittrick's *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle,* respatialization relies upon the creative process to transform site, space, and place beyond traditional geographies and cartographies, stimulating potential for new forms of knowledge, selfhood, and spatializations. McKittrick defines geography twofold: first as the porous relationship between human activity and patterns with the physical landscape. Second, as "traditional geography" which refers to the patriarchal and Eurocentric, hierarchical, positivist conception that attempts to organize

[3] Kellie Jones, "Introduction: South of Pico: Migration, Art, and Black Los Angeles." In *South of Pico: African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s*, (Duke University Press, 2017), 7.

[4] Jones, 7.

[5] Jones, 8.

the world from a singular perspective. Traditional geography thus constructs fixed boundaries and cartographies, embedding "uneven (racial, sexual, economic) social relations."[6] McKittrick opens a critique on how people move through space and how spatial boundaries and markers affect underrepresented groups of people. Re-spatialization is thus to rethink space. This project contends that Purifoy's Outdoor Desert Art Museum is a respatialization of "Black as body, as form, as geography, and as a site of contestation and complexity rather than dispossession… it is located within and outside traditional space, elucidates 'Black social particularities and knowledges' and ultimately offers a new and expanded understanding of the normative. "[7] While McKittrick's scholarship encompasses historical to present implications of transatlantic slavery, colonialism, and modernity, this essay traces geospatial movements, histories, and creations that culminated in Purifoy's Outdoor Desert Art Museum.

Purifoy's site and its individual works move through temporal realms of space and place on multiple registers. Place, according to Michel de Certeau, is a fixed, stable, and immobile location, while space is mobile and fluid, something one moves through.[8] Purifoy's Joshua Tree Outdoor Art Museum is a stationary place comprised of site-specific sculptures built from fragments of the desert's particular locale and its inhabitants. It is simultaneously a temporal space that makes Purifoy's personal and

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[6] Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle.*12-13.

[7] See Jones, 16. See also McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds.* McKittrick posits her theory of respatialization at the intersection of Black studies and geography.

[8] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. (Translated by Steven F. Rendall. 3rd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press. 2011), 117-118.

collective life experiences and memories tangible and a physical space that visitors move through.

The geography of Joshua Tree starkly contrasts with Los Angeles; however, one could argue that both areas are expansive to different ends. When Purifoy transitioned from the sprawling metropolis to the high desert, the Los Angeles population hovered around 8.9 million, compared to Joshua Tree's population of just under 4000.[9] The city's gridded urban and suburban landscape gives way to a vast and seemingly sparse panorama of endless sands and ancient geological rock formations.[10] Because Joshua Tree lies at the Mojave and Colorado Deserts intersection, it is considered part of the High Desert, sitting over 2000 feet above sea level. Its arid climate lends itself to scattered Joshua trees, brush, and cacti that dot the horizon under an often sun-washed glaze, accompanied by the pungent smell of creosote.

The works in Purifoy's Outdoor Desert Art Museum do not abide by a grid or pre-plotted formations; instead, they spread out organically across the parcel of land. The decentered schema of his site reflects, in a way, the decentered Los Angeles metropolis. Both seem to sprawl across great swaths of land, replacing a singular focal point for a

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[9] See: "Historical General Population City & County of Los Angeles, 1850 to 2020." (Los Angeles Almanac). Accessed June 3, 2022, http://www.laalmanac.com/population/po02.php. And: "Quick Facts Joshua Tree CDP. U.S. Census Bureau, n.d. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/joshuatreecdpcalifornia.

[10] "Geologic Formations." National Parks Service. (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2017), https://www.nps.gov/jotr/learn/nature/geologicformations.htm. The monzogranite rock formations around Joshua Tree formed approximately one hundred million years ago during a massive tectonic plate shift when the present arid climate was once wet. Over time, quartz and potassium mineral deposits formed into aplite, pegmatite, and andesite.

pluralized nodal network of places and things. At Purifoy's Outdoor Desert Art Museum, visitors begin their experience at the welcome sign but can freely wander through the ten-acre site; there is no set way to navigate the space. Paths from visitors' pedestrian movement over the years subtly imprint upon the irregular sand surface in a web-like formation

At Purifoy's Outdoor Desert Art Museum, the visitor experience comes from grounded-ness, both through the works' direct relation to the ground and through walking on the ground. The ground is infinitely variegated; it is not a featureless level plane but composed of varying topographies, textures, substances, and colorations.[11] It is not inert but active and dynamic, a primary site of photosynthesis of fundamental life-creating processes. Ingold posits that the relationship between knowledge and the body culminates in a type of embodiment; he states that "the ground is perceived kinesthetically, in movement."[12] Walking is often considered pedestrian, where the pedestrian language is topographical and offers a language of alternate social relations outside the panoptic power of the city plan or grid.[13] Ground forms the basis for the terrestrial environment, the "reference surface for all other surfaces," where the living human body is simultaneously rooted to the ground by feet and existing up in the air.[14] Like the ground,

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[11] Tim Ingold, "Footprints through the weather-world: walking, breathing, knowing," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, (2010), 124, 125.

[12] Ingold, 122, 125.

[13] Jones, 5.

[14] Ingold, 124.

knowledge is not fixed but malleable and made from experiences, perception, and sensing, related to the upright, bipedal body and what we build upon it. As Ingold posits, the ground is support for human action, something we as humans (as well as vegetation) are rooted in, but the ground is specifically human as a surface to dwell upon.[15]

A sense of the everyday permeates throughout Purifoy's aesthetic. The idea of an outdoor art museum where "people don't have to dress up to see good art" appealed to Purifoy, where the everyday affects visitors as they enter the site, aligning with notions of the pedestrian and the casual.[16] Because of this, Noah Purifoy's Outdoor Desert Art Museum reconsiders the meaning of the institution itself through space, place, and perspective. It is not necessary to dress up per se but rather gear up for the outdoors. To walk around Joshua Tree, either in the blustering heat or cold, subjects both his works and visitors to the outdoor elements and to chance, unlike conventional museum spaces that seek to control conditions and movement. Chance encounters are welcomed on all fronts, whether the wind alters a work, an animal burrows a nest inside, or the potential for a visitor to touch, step into, and experience Purifoy's architectural assemblages not as a passive spectator but as an active participant, unrestricted and un-surveilled.

Walking and oral narratives imprint and convey knowledge. Marking the distinction between an aerial map, which eliminates the sense of a place, excluding micro information in exchange for the macro, versus an on-the-ground itinerary, where

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[15] Ingold, 126.

[16] Yael Lipschutz, *Noah Purifoy: Through the Fire*, (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Southern California, 2013), 181.

storytelling is a spatial practice, crucial to pass on personal and cultural narratives and bodily relationships to spaces and places. As the scholar and archivist for the Noah Purifoy Foundation, Yael Lipschutz recalls that Noah Purifoy drove around Joshua Tree and the surrounding areas like Yucca Valley or 29 Palms in his truck, looking for discarded items set out in front of businesses and yards; he forged relationships with the communities by taking their unwanted junk.[17] In return, people began stopping by his Joshua Tree site to drop off their unwanted items, ranging from broken electronic equipment such as refrigerators, washing machines, and televisions to car parts and construction materials.[18] People who came to his site learned from him and assisted with some of the heavy manual labor needed for Purifoy's growing projects. Purifoy often gave tours of his Joshua Tree site, telling stories to visitors about the works and their association with specific places, events, and memories throughout his life; he was interested in sculpture's ability to record life experiences.[19]

The following chapters examine particular works from Purifoy's Outdoor Desert Art Museum as case studies regarding space, place, and perspective that contribute to the site as a whole. The first chapter looks at the work *Bessemer Steel* through the lens of Christina Sharpe's notions of climate and weather. In doing so, I construct an argument

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[17] Lipschutz, 2.

[18] Cándida-Smith, 8.

[19] Franklin Sirmans, Lipschutz, et al. *Noah Purifoy: Junk Dada,* (Los Angeles, California: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2015), 48-50. Purifoy often spoke of his interest in phenomenology, having read Merleau Ponty, Heidegger, and Husserl, to explore the concept of oneness as it unites the art object, spectator, and surroundings.

around the process of weathering steel as analogous to the political climates Purifoy dwelled within, from his upbringing in Alabama, his time in the military and defense industries which led him to Los Angeles, and how the high desert preserves metals, materials, and memories. The preservation of Purifoy's site is crucial in lieu of political erasures, distortions, and weaponization of underrepresented histories and education, the desert's arid climate has the capacity to embalm matter, thus keeping memories alive.

The second chapter examines Purifoy's work, *No Contest (bicycles),* within the greater history of assemblage on local and global levels. Situating assemblage as a re-spatialization of perspective in composition, the window becomes a framing device for Purifoy, along with Bettye Saar, John Outterbridge, and David Hammons, amongst others, to disrupt traditional notions of perspective. As the improvisational nature of assemblage leads to new possibilities and experimentations, it opens up new ways of conceptualizing social and compositional space. This chapter builds a dialogue between Erwin Panofsky's writings on modern linear perspective, along with Alexander Weheliye on Black subjectivity and Being, and McKittrick's critical geography to understand how the aesthetics of assemblage create pluralized meaning. Purifoy's disruptions of perspective extend to discourses around art spaces, institutions, and architectures that navigate through modernist utopias to re-envision sustainability and empathy. This chapter concludes with the ideation of togetherness as a mechanism to combat various forms of spatial constriction, alienation, and negation.

This project concludes by examining how the Noah Purifoy Foundation preserves Purifoy's legacy and praxis. In lieu of Purifoy's absence, the Foundation maintains his

Outdoor Art Museum, archiving his records and providing outreach programs to educate school districts and visitors alike about Purifoy's life's work, creating an ethic of care. Purifoy's site, along with the Foundation, reconsiders modern institutionalization by open access, accessibility, and sustainable practices in order to assert alternative frameworks as a reality.

Chapter 1. Migration and Memory: Weathering upon Purifoy's *Bessemer Steel*

Made in 1998, *Bessemer Steel* is a multi-story architectural work that resembles a dilapidated factory constructed from piecemeal sheets of steel, piping, and plywood. The structure has two tiers with flat rooves, standing roughly eight feet tall. An American Model 57CR instrument sterilizer atop the first tier sits alongside a rusted gas heater and scattered detritus.[20] A series of narrow, chimney-like spires extend vertically another several feet from the second level, reaching up toward the sky. Cables extend from the leaning second-story walls to the ground, securing the works' stability. The work is composed of scrap materials; it resists clean geometric angles for an uneven, unparallel construction. Some pieces overlap one another, while others fall back, veering toward collapse, creating windows and gaps that reveal the desert's sand floor and cerulean skies. Cool grey steel recedes optically against the warm, deeply-hued rusted planes and flaking white plywood, drawing the eye in, out, and through the composition. On the west side of the structure, there are two Naples yellow and aqua-colored chairs. The work casts an elongated shadow over the chairs when the sun goes down, inviting visitors to sit down and find respite from the sun.

This chapter examines Purifoy's *Bessemer Steel* through what Christina Sharpe maintains as "the weather." In her book *In the Wake: Blackness and Being*, Sharpe constructs a critical methodology in regard to the contemporary afterlives of enslavement

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[20] Bartell, Brian. "Noah Purifoy's Aesthetic for the Racial Capitalocene: Reading *66 Signs of Neon*" *Cultural Critique,* (2021), 26. Instrument sterilizers are often used in medical fields, research, and manufacturing.

through the metaphor of the wake. As the ocean signifies a vast abstracted no-place, the wake represents the path behind a ship in specific regard to the Middle Passage and as a metaphor for awakening, a locatable rupture in a seemingly unlocated space. In her chapter, "The Weather," Sharpe locates "antiblackness and white supremacy as the total climate that produces premature Black death as normative," as exemplified through various forms of negation and containment from enslavement to police violence and the prison industrial complex.[21]

Sharpe further posits: "In what I am calling the weather, antiblackness is pervasive *as* climate. The weather necessitates changeability and improvisation; it is the atmospheric condition of time and place; it produces new ecologies."[22] Here, the weather is a critical geographic concept that demonstrates how environmental conditions such as wind, heat, and humidity within bodies of land and water are indivisible from social, cultural, and political existence, culminating in the "total climate." Sharpe's discourse on the weather is pertinent through the lens of critical geography, examining human activity as it affects and is affected by the physical atmosphere, distributions of resources, space, and power. I construct an argument around the process of weathering steel as analogous to the climates Purifoy dwelled within, from his upbringing in Alabama, his time in the military and defense industries which led him to Los Angeles, and how the high desert preserves metals, materials, and memories. Just as the weather necessitates change and

[21] Sharpe, Christina. "The Weather," *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, (Duke University Press, 2016), 104.

[22] Sharpe, 106.

improvisation, the works on Purifoy's site are exposed to the elements and to chance by wind, rain, and snow, alongside plant and animal life. His works engage in a reciprocal relationship to their environment, transforming the landscape as the landscape transforms them.

While steel is considered a "hard, tough," and "permanent" substance, Purifoy's use of the discarded, weathering material signifies "the often suppressed histories of racialized production and value extraction that industrial capitalism has relied on since the proto-industrial relations of the American slave plantations."[23] In his argument, Bartell positions Purifoy's work within Françoise Vergès's "racial Capitalocene," defined as an alternative to the Anthropocene, as "a history of racialized forms of value extraction and waste production," confronting erasure and distortions of climate change, causes, and who is affected by capitalist exploitation of land, labor, and wellbeing. In *Bessemer Steel,* Purifoy's use of steel creates a dialogue with processes of extraction through resources, labor, and migration, drawing upon improvisational construction to offer a re-spatialization of American historical narratives amid current constrictions (figure 1).

ALABAMA: CLIMATE AND BESSEMER STEEL

[23] Bartell, 26. On the concept of weathering, see Arline Geronimus et al, "'Weathering' and age-patterns of allostatic load scores among Blacks and Whites in the United States," *American Journal of Public Health* 95, no. 5 (May 2016): 826–833; on socio-cultural experiences of Black women in the US to health indicators. See also Astrida Neimanis and Jennifer Mae Hamilton, "Weathering," *Feminist Review* 118 (April 2018): 80–84, on indigeneity, weather making, and the climate of settler colonialism.

Bessemer Steel alludes to process, place, and memory, and it first suggests a reference to the modern development of commercially manufactured steel. In mid-nineteenth-century Britain, Sir Henry Bessemer developed a process (called the Bessemer process) to mass-produce steel from pig iron at a cheap cost during the Second Industrial Revolution. This development spurred production in the United States from the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century for the burgeoning fields of railway, construction, and the military defense industry, where modern steel manufacturing is still based upon the Bessemer Process.

Bessemer Steel further indicates a sense of place. In 1887, Henry F. DeBardeleben established the city of Bessemer, Alabama, around the iron, coal, steel, and railway industries, named after Sir Henry.[24] The city rose to compete with the unparalleled production in nearby Birmingham during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Noah Purifoy was born two hours south of Bessemer, in 1917, in a one-room log cabin in the unincorporated community of Snow Hill, as the second youngest of thirteen children.[25] Snow Hill was a small rural farming town where his father, John Purifoy, worked various jobs in manual labor, while his mother, Georgia Mims, was a

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[24] Marjorie Longenecker White, *The Birmingham District: An Industrial History and Guide.* (Birmingham Historical Society, 1981). DeBardeleben fought for the confederate army in the civil war. He later became president of the Land and Improvement Company in 1886, DeBardeleben bought 4,000 acres of land to establish his new town around his iron and coal businesses.

[25] See Allison Glenn's chronology in *Noah Purifoy: Junk Dada.* (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2015), 78-83.

housekeeper.[26] Because the steel and railway industries proliferated in nearby Bessemer, many of Purifoy's relatives lived and worked there throughout the early twentieth century.[27]

Bessemer Steel evokes memory as a fragmentary, fluid, and changing space. When Purifoy was about three years old, his family moved from Snow Hill to Birmingham. Birmingham was regarded as "the industrial city of the South," notable for its steel production in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in which DeBardeleben had a stake.[28] The physical environment was crucial in shaping Birmingham's economy and labor forces; the city became a leading iron and steel manufacturer due to its unique geological coalescence of iron ore, coal, limestone, and dolomite- all raw materials required for making iron and steel.[29] Birmingham's production increased exponentially, from .07 in 1900 to 3.7 million tons by 1978.[30] The

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[26] Lipschutz, 67.

[27] Lipschutz, 2.

[28] See White: DeBardeleben inherited Pratt Iron and Coal Company, shortly after in 1884 began mining on Red Mountain for iron ore, establishing DeBardeleben Coal and Iron Company 1886, manufacturing pig iron furnaces, also Bessemer Coal, Iron and Land Company, and Alice Furnace Company. By 1887, the company owned 150,000 acres of land for coal and iron mining, and it was worth $13 million.

[29] White, 33-37: the map provides evidence for the presence of iron ore in Red Mountain, located in the heart of Birmingham, with several large volumes of coal, limestone, dolomite, and other natural resource deposits that surround the city in every direction. Iron is a naturally occurring metal element. Pig iron is form of crude iron that is mixed with carbon in order to make steel alloy.

[30] White, 55. For further reading, see: *American Steel and Iron Insititute; The Iron and Steel Industrial of the South* by H.H. Chapman, Birmingham Chamber of Commerce.

abundant natural deposits combined with the Bessemer process for mass production led to some of the lowest material assembly costs in the nation.

Although the shift toward industrialism proved more profitable and offered higher wages than sharecropping, low assembly costs resulted in part from underpaid labor for undocumented and African American workers.[31] As the critical geographer Bobby Wilson notes, plantation owners and tenant farmers monopolized Birmingham's wealth through industrial mining, manufacturing, and management, thereby controlling laborers and the workforce, inextricably linking race, place, and capital.[32] Through control over capital, land, and property ownership, those who ran the agricultural and industrial industries shaped the space of Birmingham, resulting in uneven distributions of wealth and labor in public and private spheres.

In a 2004 interview with Kristine McKenna, Purifoy disclosed: "As a child, I wasn't conscious of racism, but I was aware something was going on. Once, when I was five, my mother was taking me to the store, and there was a parade in the street. People had hoods on, and when I asked my mother what was happening, she said, "that's the Ku

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[31] Bobby Wilson, Alex Moulton, and Brian Williams, "Episode 3. Connecting Race, Place, and Capital with Dr. Bobby M. Wilson." *Antipod,* February 24, 2020. https://thisisantipod.org/2020/02/24/episode-3-connecting-race-place-and-capital- with-dr-bobby-m-Wilson/. Like McKittrick, Wilson is a critical geographer focusing on the construction spatialized race and racialized space in Alabama. This podcast features Wilson to discuss Birmingham and how its unique geological and atmospheric conditions shaped industry and society, and vice versa.

[32] Wilson, Moulton, Williams, "Episode 3. Connecting Race, Place, and Capital with Dr. Bobby M. Wilson."

Klux Klan."[33] Those in positions of power staunchly upheld segregation and garnered support from white supremacist groups, including numerous governors, mayors, and police departments over time.[34]

Although Purifoy had left Alabama for the military in the 1940s, *Bessemer Steel* gestures toward the climate of Birmingham as it became one of the most significant places in the civil rights struggle.[35] By the 1960s, George Wallace, the Alabama governor, fought to uphold segregation while white supremacist groups held a stronghold in Birmingham. The presence of such groups was supported by the mayor of Birmingham, Arthur Hanes, and the head of the Birmingham police and fire departments, Eugene Conner, who consented to Ku Klux Klan violence and remained complicit in a number of related bombings. [36]

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[33] Kristine McKenna, "One from the desert files: Noah Purifoy," *Arthur,* 11, (2004). Interview with Purifoy.

[34] Purifoy's Joshua Tree assemblage, *White/Colored* (2000)*,* points toward his lived experience growing up in the era of Jim Crow in the segregated South. The work features two drinking fountains stationed along a cracked, dust-laden plywood wall. A wooden overhang painted flaky white provides shade from the overhead sun. On the left side of the work is a small wooden, hand-painted sign that says "white" with a standing drinking fountain below it, one often found in an office, school, or other public settings. Under a sign that says "colored," to the right is a toilet resting on a handmade wooden pedestal with drinking hardware attached to the rim. The toilet under the "colored" sign alludes to the substandard facilities delegated to African Americans during segregation alongside the poor quality and treatment that accompanied.

[35] See Wilson podcast.

[36] Wilson podcast, Birmingham earned the nickname "Bombingham" for the prevalent Ku Klux Klan bombings in Black churches such as the 16th Street Baptist Church which killed four young girls, amongst other public sites. Conner supported Klan violence toward the Freedom Riders in 1961, amongst numerous occurrences.

By 1963, Martin Luther King Junior joined the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the local chapter of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR) to conduct a massive direct-action campaign against racial injustice toward African Americans. They staged sit-ins, and marches on city hall, boycotted merchants, and assisted in registering people to vote. Still, Conner was at the oppositional forefront, ordering arrests en masse and police violence against the peaceful protestors and children, where King wrote his letters from Birmingham while put in solitary confinement for eight days. The Civil Rights efforts in Birmingham culminated in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, passed by President Kennedy, which prohibited "discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex or national origin. Provisions of this civil rights act forbade discrimination based on sex and race in hiring, promoting, and firing."[37] One year later, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 passed, making space for Black voters and protecting their legal rights. By the end of the year, a quarter of a million new Black voters were registered.[38]

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[37] "Legal Highlight: The Civil Rights Act of 1964," United States Department of Labor. https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasam/civil-rights-center/statutes/civil-rights-act of1964#:~:text=In%201964%2C%20Congress%20passed%20Public,hiring%2C %20promoting%2C%20and%20firing.

[38] Purifoy gestures toward the history of voting rights and suppression in his work *Voting Booth* (1998) on site. The work is comprised of a painted wood structure made to human proportions. The booth is divided into three compartments or stations. At one point, three corresponding pairs of shoes lined the ground, peeking out from behind closed curtains. Now, however, the curtain and shoes are gone, revealing a row of red, white, and black toilet seats instead. Like a blood pressure monitor, local, state, and federal racial policies constrict and loosen continuously throughout time. As different policies loosen, others form to alternatively constrict, directly or indirectly. Such indirect guises are evidenced through voter suppression laws, as seen in the current controversy over mail-in voting,

To return to Sharpe, "'free air' of a 'free state' is denied to those in the hold who would take their freedom."[39] Racialized violence and the prison industrial complex deny freedom and deprive air as a fundamental human right. When Sharpe speaks of the pervasive climate of antiblackness, it cannot be reduced to an event or series of events, but rather the total cumulative environment through which bodies navigate space, porously absorbent. She states: "it is the atmosphere: slave law transformed into lynch law, into Jim and Jane Crow, and other administrative logics that remember the brutal conditions of enslavement after the event of slavery has supposedly come to an end."[40] Climate is not a passive force; instead, it shapes the human experience as humanity shapes it.

Birmingham's polarized climate exemplifies a totality of racial injustice throughout the United States. As the anthropologist, Michel-Rolph Trouillot states, "Pastness… is a position. Thus, in no way can we identify the past as past."[41] In the midst of current racialized police violence and constrictions on voting rights and education, *Bessemer Steel* stands as a tangible index of localized affect.[42] Although Purifoy is no longer here to tell of his experiences and memories, they live on through his work, asserting space in the face of negation.

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voter identification, felony charges, redistricting, and gerrymandering.

[39] Sharpe, 104.

[40] Sharpe, 106.

[41] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015), 15.

LOS ANGELES: MIGRATION, IMPROVISATION, AND DEINDUSTRIALIZATION

As Purifoy grew up encompassed by the processes of industrialization in Birmingham, his predilection for manufactured materials can further be attributed to his early occupations and service in the military. After graduating from Birmingham Industrial High School in 1935, Purifoy attained his Bachelor of Education from Alabama State Teachers College in Montgomery and taught high school shop classes. [43] By 1945, the same year Smith made *Home of the Welder,* Purifoy enrolled as a Navy Seabee, building temporary and permanent infrastructures across the globe for U.S. military bases. He was stationed both nationally and abroad during his service, in the South Pacific and throughout the United States, including Port Hueneme in Ventura County, California, offering his first glimpse of the West Coast way of life.[44]

After his service in the Navy, Purifoy attained his master's degree in social work from Atlanta University in Georgia. He then moved to Cleveland, Ohio, where his sisters

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[43] See Lipschutz, 67; and Thelma Young,. "1900 a Landmark in Negro Education." *Birmingham News*. February 17, 1970. Birmingham Industrial School was founded in 1899 as the regions first Black high school. It began as a one room school with eighteen students taught by the school's first principle and only teacher for many years, Arthur Harold Parker, who retired in 1939. It was later renamed A.H. Parker High School. At its peak, enrollment grew to 3600 students with one hundred faculty. The school is still in operation with around 700 students enrolled and is currently one of seven high schools in Birmingham. Its music department was notable, headed by jazz teacher and musician Fess Whatley, a musician in the 1920s and 1930s, a legacy of instructing future musicians such as Sun Ra, who graduated from the Institute just three years prior to Purifoy.

[44] Lipschutz, 8, 9. At this point, the military was still segregated. Black service members were required to lodge in separate arrangements while, as in Purifoy's case, having to construct their white counterparts' housing. It was not until 1948, all military sectors were desegregated through Executive Order 9981, signed by President Harry S. Truman.

had relocated while he was in the military, to work as a social worker at Cuyahoga County hospital.[45] In 1950, he moved west to California to continue his career as a social worker at the Los Angeles County hospital. Increasingly dissatisfied in his field, one year later, he turned to Chouinard to study art, first majoring in industrial design, then switching to interior design, and making a final switch to fine art.[46]

During his time at Chouinard, Purifoy worked nights at the Douglas Aircraft Company plant in Long Beach, operating a shearing machine that cut sheets of metal into templates for aircraft.[47] Industrial labor opportunities had initially been a significant factor in drawing diverse populations from regions across the country, notably in the aircraft and aerospace trades with Executive Order 8802 in 1941, which barred discrimination in the defense industries.[48] During the war, California alone yielded 17% of that nation's total defense production, leading in the aircraft and aerospace fabrication and employing roughly one-third of workers in California by 1957.[49] By the end of the second world war, California was home to 140 military bases; the expansive federal defense spending combined with industrial production contributed significantly to the

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[45] See Allison Glenn's chronology in Sirmans, Lipschutz, et al. *Noah Purifoy: Junk Dada.* Los Angeles, California: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2015, 78-83.

[46] "Noah Purifoy: African American Artists of Los Angeles," Interview by Karen Anne Mason. (University of California Los Angeles Oral History Program; manuscript, 1992), 9, 14.

[47] Glenn, 78-83.

[48] Jones, 11.

[49] Jones, 8-9; see also, Kevin Starr, Golden Dreams: California in an Age of Abundance, Chapter 8 on defense industry in twentieth century California.

state's economic growth, branching into the automobile, petroleum, rubber, and electronic technologies. Through these encounters, Purifoy gained an adeptness for working with industrial materials on an intimate to an architectural scale.

The factory-made materials in *Bessemer Steel* are reminiscent of post-war sculpture practices. Its flaking paint and streaks of rust, decommissioned technologies, and disparately assembled materials suggest a relationship to decommodified use-value of material objects within a consumerist culture. After the Second World War, mid-century America offered an insurgent growth of consumer culture regarding mass production and consumption. In effect, art made after the Second World War shifted from conventional artistic materials toward manufactured materials such as fiberglass and steel in order to investigate to investigate the relations between form, commercialism, and labor.

Artists such as Nancy Holt, Donald Judd, Richard Serra, and Robert Smithson utilized such commercial manufacturing processes to divorce traditional notions of the artists' hand from the material object. On the other hand, Purifoy, like David Smith, John Chamberlain, and Edward Kienholz, turned toward premade objects and cast-off materials in order to re-present them beyond their intended function, foregrounding the artists' hand in their practices. Purifoy's *Bessemer Steel* is reminiscent of works such as *Home of the Welder* (1945) and *Primo Piano III* (1962) by Smith. Smith had worked in the automobile industry on the assembly line prior to welding for the American Locomotive Company during the Second World War. He began making welded

sculptures by hand in the 1930s, proliferating once the war ended.[50] *Home of the Welder* has a base that resembles a low-relief, three-dimensional floorplan. A wall adorned with a painting runs perpendicular, extending vertically from the piece, with a combination of domestic and industrial items- an end table and house plant, chain, nuts, and bolts, rising upward from the base. All elements were forged from steel by hand.

His later work, as exemplified by *Primo Piano III,* is a large outdoor sculpture made from steel composed of intersecting geometric shapes. Whether the former group of artists outsourced their labor, or the latter labored through their own hands, processes of commodification and decommodification are present in their art objects and sculptural tableaus, as someone, somewhere made the very materials both groups of artists handle, whether in a studio or outdoors, on an assembly line or through the push of a lever: commercialized labor and mass production are embedded into the materials.

Unlike Smith, however, Purifoy's craft marks an intentional deskilling that makes space for improvisation. His fragmentary construction elucidates the disparity and imperfections of his materials' histories- found, donated, and salvaged. Improvisation can re-spatialize depictions of labor, race, and creativity through a material form.[51] Purifoy's play between skill and deskilling suggests a relationship to processes of extraction, industrial- and deindustrialization as they are bound within patterns of migrational movement.

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[50] See catalog: David Smith,. *From the Life of the Artist: a Documentary View of David Smith: an Exhibition Drawn from the David Smith Papers*, (Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982).

[51] Sharpe, 106.

Although Purifoy had left Alabama for the military before the height of the Civil Rights Movement, he found himself at the epicenter during the 1965 Watts Rebellion in Los Angeles, part of a rhizomatic insurgence against the pervasive climate of antiblackness, asserting space in multitudinous undulating waves. The rebellion served as the impetus for his improvisational praxis, Junk Art, which, as the following pages demonstrate, permeates throughout the Outdoor Desert Art Museum.

Purifoy's move, first North and then West from the South, is part of a larger narrative known as the Great Migration during the twentieth century to stake claims in agency and modern life in the United States. Between 1910 and 1970, 6.5 million African Americans moved out of the South to the Northern, Midwestern, and West Coast states.[52] The Great Migration stemmed from multiple factors, including the Jim Crow laws in the South in conjunction with greater sovereignty in the northern half of the United States; while industrial labor opportunities opened throughout cities such as Chicago, Detroit, and Philadelphia during the First World War, creating an economic pull with greater pay and better working positions as opposed to sharecropping and agriculture. During the Second World War, a further opportunity opened along the West Coast as California, in particular, became a leading manufacturer in the defense industry.

Jones states, "Black migrations were spatial movements, bodies creating new paths to selfhood and enfranchisement." [53] The Great Migration symbolized the potential

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[52] Joe William Trotter, "The Great Migration." *OAH Magazine of History* 17, no. 1 (2002), 31.

[53] Jones, 3.

for prosperity, increased freedom, and autonomy for many escaping racial violence and oppression.[54] It signaled a geographic, socioeconomic, and political transformation from a rural lifestyle to a metropolitan one. Migrations equate bodies motion and action, reconfigurations, and articulations of something new, moving away from a feudal past to stake claims in agency toward a modern future.

Artists from the Midwest and South were drawn toward Western metropolitan areas such as Los Angeles to explore creativity and openness, and increased freedom.[55] Purifoy lived and worked throughout Southern California until his death in 2004, becoming a key figure in California arts education and council over the years. Charles Burnett, Charles White, Alonzo and Dale Brockman Davis, and John Outterbridge followed similar spatial trajectories to Purifoy's, all of whom moved to Los Angeles from the South or Midwest during the mid to latter half of the twentieth century.[56] Known as the "city without a center," Los Angeles, in particular, held a multifarious allure of Hollywood glamour, temperate climate, and booming innovations across industrial technologies, architecture, and design, along with an open and experimental oeuvre for artists of all types.

[54] Trotter, 31-33. The Great Migration is part of a more extensive global migrations and the impact of the transatlantic slave trade that began 500 years ago. Trotter states "only with the advent of the Civil War and emancipation did the Black population movement take on a voluntary character." The next major movement was brought about in conjunction with World War I, and then again during World War II.

[55] Jones, 3.

[56] Jones, 2- 3.

The Great Migration stimulated a ripple effect, bringing greater opportunities along with alternative constrictions and denials of space. The West initially held more excellent opportunities in the workplace, such as greater position offerings, higher wages, and financial stability, than the South, where careers in agriculture were in decline. Greater economic opportunity also reflected increased access to education, land, health services, and wealth. Nevertheless, people of color still faced systematic discrimination through separate union membership that offered fewer protections, lower wages than their white counterparts, job position restrictions, and a lack of upward mobility.[57] As cities became more diverse, it resulted in white flight toward the suburbs, concurrent with the rise of single-family homes, racialized restrictions in homeownership, redlining, and widespread consumer culture. [58]

Bessemer Steel's ramshackle quality evinces processes of industrial- and deindustrialization as demonstrated across numerous metropolitan centers in the nation. Beginning around 1963, industrial spaces and workplaces moved out of cities and into the suburbs, leaving urban spaces without work or other necessary infrastructures in housing, health, or education. This resulted in localized high poverty rates within underrepresented populations in metropolitan spaces. Consequentially, the Los Angeles postwar landscape resulted in a widespread social stratification that tied race and economic status to the spatial organization of the growing city.

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[57] Jones, 9.

[58] Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, (New York: Knopf, 2003), 202, 203.

When Purifoy became the cofounder and director of the Watts Towers Art Center in Los Angeles in 1964, alongside Judson Powell, that tension erupted in what became known as the Watts Rebellion in 1965. That August, while Noah Purifoy was teaching at the Watts Towers Arts Center on 107th street, the uprising ensued roughly four blocks away on 103rd street. It stretched out over six days, encompassing several blocks from August 11th to the 16th. The event was provoked by the forceful police arrest of Marquette Frye, an African American resident of Watts and recently discharged military serviceman, for drunk driving by the white officer, Lee Minikus. The incident escalated in scale over growing contentions; various media sources claimed over 35,000 "rioters" and 72,000 passive spectators, while the National Guard sent in 21,000 officers and guardsmen. [59] It resulted in 34 deaths, multiple injuries, and approximately 200 million dollars in property damage. Plumes of smoke filled the air, and the charred remains of buildings, cars, and ephemera piled up on the streets.

The Watts Rebellion represented a widespread civil unrest where residents hit a breaking point regarding larger crises of police violence and discrimination in housing, healthcare, employment, and education, signifying a more significant lack of resources. Not unlike the uprisings in Birmingham, Watts simultaneously demonstrates the multiplicities and pluralized identities that form a community within a specific

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[59] Lisa Uddin, "And Thus Not Glowing Brightly: Noah Purifoy's Junk Modernism." In *Race and Modern Architecture: A Critical History from the Enlightenment to the Present*, edited by Irene Cheng, Charles L. Davis, and Mabel O. Wilson, (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020), 308.

geographic locale, as well as the effects of isolation, segregation, and Othering that residents endured.

The Watts Rebellion spurred Purifoy and Powell to create *66 Signs of Neon* from the wreckage; together, they sought to redefine rather than reinforce events from the uprising. They amassed over "three tons of charred wood and fire-molded debris," storing it at the Watts Towers Arts Center, with the pungent smell of burned wreckage radiating from the center for months, without knowing yet the purpose it would serve.[60] When the Watts Towers Arts Center lost funding later that year, Purifoy and Powell went on unemployment and used their time to sort through the debris. During this time, the governor's commission of the McCone Report was released on the causes of the riots, advocating for things the Watts community lacked, such as health and school infrastructures in place; Purifoy noticed that arts education was not included.[61] They decided to create a body of work from the detritus they had collected and showcase it at the first Watts Summer Arts Festival of the Arts in order to attain funding for the Watts Towers Arts Center. Together, they began with six assemblages "created from the lead drippings of melted neon signs, artifacts of the riots;" working on the series with six other local artists to assemble the "glittering, twisted, grotesquely formed materials, each

[60] Noah Purifoy and Ted Michel, *Junk Art: 66 Signs of Neon*. (Los Angeles, California: 66 Signs of Neon, 1966), 2-4.

[61] Purifoy, Michel, 2.

interpreting in his or her own way the August happening," creating a total of sixty-six sculptural assemblages.[62]

Stemming from collective action, communication, pedagogy, and notions of disposability, *66 Signs of Neon* became the impetus for Purifoy's praxis, Junk Art. As Purifoy has stated: "in junk art, we take two unlike objects and put them together… and you can transfer this to human experience."[63] The term junk has affective connotations that refer to cast-off and discarded objects while navigating through social, political, and economic perceptions of what and who is deemed disposable. According to Purifoy, "Watts finds itself virtually set down in the center of junk piled high on all sides. Its main industry is junk!"[64] Junk art channels disorder, chaos, and deep-seated anxieties of modern existence through its arrangement of unrelated objects. Such juxtapositions are intellectual and effective in their formations to transcend their literal dilapidated materiality into a visual form of communication. *66 Signs of Neon* sought to open a dialogue on how Watts became rendered as a no-place within Los Angeles, communicating the affective denotations of race, space, and capital.

At present, Watts is a residential neighborhood located in the Southeast pocket of Los Angeles.[65] It was originally part of the Rancho La Tajauta Mexican land grant

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[62] Purifoy, Michel, 2-4.

[63] Purifoy, Michel, 9.

[64] Purifoy, Michel, 8.

[65] As Kellie Jones exemplifies in the title of her book, "South of Pico" is a phrase used to denote the South side of Los Angeles where Pico Boulevard serves as both a physical and cultural line or divide in the city that evidence how particular legislation such as

established in 1820 by Spanish-Mexican settlers, where its main industry was agriculture, specifically livestock and beef production.[66] When California became a state in 1850 after the Mexican American War (1846- 1848), the La Tajuata land was partitioned into smaller parcels and sold to white developers for further agricultural and housing developments toward the end of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century.[67]

As railroad construction was underway for the Pacific Electric Railroad from Los Angeles to Long Beach, Watts was named after the owner of the land parcel, Julia A.

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restrictive housing covenants, freeway systems and resources shaped the space. Pico Boulevard is named after Pio Pico, (1801-1894) who was of African and Mexican descent and served as the last governor of California under Mexican rule. Neighborhoods that are South of Pico include Baldwin Hills, Compton, Inglewood, Leimert Park and Watts.

[66] Little has been written about the history of Watts pre-1965 when the Watts Riots put the neighborhood under national and international attention. However, most early narratives can be attributed to land grant and parcel receipts and records, along with landmark construction dates, and a series of oral history interviews conducted by historian MaryEllen Bell Ray published in 1985, focusing on the years 1907-1926. In a 1993 interview with Connie Martinson from the Drucker Institute, Ray discusses her interviews with early residents of Watts, some who had been there as early as 1900, or whose families had been there across generations, as railroad laborers or drawn to the appeal of the California Gold Rush, while others had sought cheap land to settle down. See: Connie Martinson and MaryEllen Bell Ray, interview on "The City of Watts 1907 1926," The Claremont Colleges Library published by the Drucker Institute; and Robert J. Lopez, "Watts: It Has Been a Battleground for Gutter Politics, an Easy Source for Exploitable Labor and Ground Zero for a Racial Explosion. Today, Watts Remains in the Grip of Its Troubled Past, the Place That Has 'Always Been Left behind,'" *Los Angeles Times*, 1994, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1994-07-17-ci-16690story.html.

[67] The United States' westward colonial expansion coincided with the California Gold Rush which peaked between the years 1848 and 1855. Just as the city of Birmingham was mined for its natural resources to prop up the steel and iron industries, California's landscape had been mined for gold, engaging in further acts of extraction from land and labor.

Watts, upon which the first station (Watts Station) there was built on what is now 103rd and Grandee Steet in 1904. By 1907, Watts was incorporated as a city into the county of Los Angeles, although for tax purposes and access to public sewage and water rights, it was later annexed by the city of Los Angeles in 1926. As the railway industry relied upon Mexican immigrant labor there in the early 1900s, the Great Migration also brought an influx of Black residents into Watts for various industries ranging from meatpacking, aerospace, and automobile, where it became a predominantly Black middle and working-class locality between the 1920s and 1950s.[68]

However, as Watts became a primarily Black neighborhood, increasing restrictions were put into place affecting residents' access to homeownership and affordable housing, transportation, education, health, and labor resources. Such constrictions are evidenced through 1939 redlining maps prepared by the Division of Research and Statistics and Federal Home Loan Bank Board with the cooperation of the Appraisal Department of Homeowners Loan Corporation. Different locales within cities were given a color-coded grade, A through D, with A corresponding to green as the "ideal" choice of living (i.e., White, upper-income regions often away from city centers), through D corresponding with the color red. Red zones indicated areas with high diversity and constructed negative connotations of those areas and residents, which resulted in real-time consequences. According to the Federal Home Loan Bank Board's

[68] Lopez, "Watts: It Has Been a Battleground for Gutter Politics, an Easy Source for Exploitable Labor and Ground Zero for a Racial Explosion. Today, Watts Remains in the Grip of Its Troubled Past, the Place That Has 'Always Been Left behind.'"

1939 map of Los Angeles, the district of Watts was designated Red and described as follows:

> Level with some low swampy land. Some construction hazards. There are no deed restrictions, and zoning is mixed, ranging from single-family residential to heavy industrial; and also being partly County and partly City controlled. Schools, churches, and trading centers are reasonably available, but transportation is inadequate and expensive. Many streets are unimproved, and many have dead ends. Sewers are largely lacking. This area, which is located in both County and City territory, is known as the Watts district. It contains one of the largest concentrations of Negroes in Los Angeles County. There are also many Mexicans and Japanese residents, the latter usually occupying garden tracts, largely located in the southern portion. Construction is preponderantly substandard, and much of it is of the shack variety. Maintenance is of poor character. Population and improvements are highly heterogeneous, and while slum conditions do not as yet prevail, the trend is definitely in that direction. The area is thoroughly blighted and is accorded a "low red" grade.[69]

The language used in these descriptions perpetuated spatial inequalities not only in Watts but throughout the nation. Black citizens faced multiple forms of housing insecurity due to redlining, loans, and house ownership discrimination. Racially restrictive covenants determined who could buy, sell, and live in certain parts of the city beginning in the late 19th century, becoming mainstream by the early-mid twentieth century. Covenants, or redlining, are legal prescriptions that control space, topography, and homeownership.[70] Even after racially restrictive covenants were deemed illegal, banks were (and still are) less likely to offer or approve loans for Black individuals or

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[69] See "Mapping Inequality." Digital Scholarship Lab. Accessed April 21, 2022. https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=10/34.005/118.507&city=losangelesca&area=D61&adview=full&adimage=1/85.021/-144.141.Redlining in New Deal America, interactive map visualizes the critical geography of Los Angeles.

[70] Jones, 13.

families when looking to buy homes.[71] The role of the nuclear family dwelling was out of reach, resulting in high rents, and little to no maintenance from landlords equaled unsafe and substandard living conditions; many rental homes, apartments, or makeshift shelters lacked running water, bathrooms, and windows.[72] In the mid-1950s, city officials demolished substandard housing such as garages and sheds, leaving even fewer options for Watts residents.[73]

Spatial logic in Los Angeles was (and still is) not evenly distributed in terms of labor, education, health, or housing, consequently generating overlapping spheres of tension. The mass freeway infrastructure of Los Angeles began in 1939, with most of the construction underway in the postwar years.[74] It is a system that partitions neighborhoods throughout the county, converging with many redlined districts, disproportionately

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[71] Cohen, 200.

[72] Uddin, 314.

[73] Uddin, 315.

[74] Reyner Banham*, Four Ecologies of Los Angeles*; see "The Transportation Palimpsest," 75-94 on history of freeway construction in Los Angeles. Banham notes how the freeway system is based upon the railway network throughout the city and California at large. When the Automobile Club proposed a freeway system in 1937-38, the State of California legislation embarked on a development plan and policies in support by 1939. Arroyo Seco Parkway was the first section finished before World War II and became the first freeway in California and the Western United States at large, with majority of the construction happening postwar. The Hollywood, Santa Ana and Harbor freeways (the Harbor freeway as an extension of Arroyo Seco Parkway, also known as the 110) were erected, and by the early 1960s the multi-lane San Diego and Santa Monica Freeways served as major nodes. Many associate the Los Angeles freeways with cruising along the open roads, car culture (and finish fetish), and the air of mobility, romanticized by many including Joan Didion. Banham regarded the freeway system as "one of the greater works of man," yet until recently, few have questioned the massive scale displacement of residents during the decades of construction, begging the question, mobility for who?

affecting and displacing people of color. The map illustrates Watts as spliced into four fragments by freeways and industrial parks. Because of this, Watts became physically and socially isolated from the rest of the city because of the massive freeway.[75] As Los Angeles transformed into an "autopia" in the post-war landscape of consumerism and the American Dream, residents and the surrounding counties became increasingly reliant upon vehicular access and commuting for daily life, work, shopping, and seeing others.[76] According to a 1964 survey, over half of Watts residents did not own a vehicle.[77] Those who had the means to leave Watts and follow economic opportunities did. Watts became segregated in part due to the lack of freeway and vehicular access coupled with suburbanization and deindustrialization.[78]

The modern future relied upon internalizations of self-worth reliant upon productivity, work, and participation in mass consumerism. Postwar consumerism placed value judgments on humans to feed the economy, to increase work and productivity for the sake of progress, and perpetual material desire. As Henri Lefebvre notes, capitalism

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[75] Southeast Los Angeles is essentially boxed in by freeway interstates: the 110 and 710 run north to south along the western and eastern edges while the 10 runs east to west along the north side and the 105 runs parallel along the south side of Watts.

[76] Banham; see "Ecology IV: Autopia" 213-223. Regarding the freeway network as a way of life, "a comprehensible place, a coherent state of mind" a totalizing force in the mid-twentieth century onward in the city requiring mode of transit, reliance upon individualized and privatized vehicular transportation to move through the city.

[77] Uddin, 313.

[78] Uddin, 315.

thrives by "occupying space, by producing a space." [79] Here, in Los Angeles, modernity and capitalism connect, consequentially displacing those unwilling or unable to participate in the market economy of material excess.[80] Although the city had grown exponentially, innovating in technology, military, and industrial production, Watts was rendered a "no place" through its empty lots, scrapyards, and accumulation of waste from the city's economic restructuring; its residents were affected across all aspects of life by physical and intellectual constrictions of space.[81]

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[79]Henri Lefebvre and Frank Bryant. *The Survival of Capitalism: Reproduction of the Relations of Production*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), 21.

[80] Watts is not an isolated example. Under the power of eminent domain, the State of California can purchase private property for public use, as evidenced not only by the construction of freeways, but this power was also used in the 1920s to seize Bruce's Beach in Manhattan Beach, a beach resort run by and for Black residents and in the 1950s for the Chavez Ravine neighborhood, a primarily Mexican-American neighborhood in Southeast Los Angeles for the construction of the Dodgers Stadium. In regard to Bruce's Beach, the Manhattan Beach city council dispossessed Willa and Charles Bruce of their property to instead erect a park, yet the land went unused and transferred to the state in 1948. In 2021, reparations began when the land was given back to the later generation of the Bruce family by Governor Newsom. In regard to Chavez Ravine, the neighborhood was deemed as "blighted" in the 1930s, and by the 1950s the city of Los Angeles used eminent domain to purchase residents properties to build a public housing project. Many residents resisted, resulting in violent police intervention. Instead, the new Dodgers Stadium was built, burying demolished houses, schools, and churches under the development, displacing over one thousand families and residents. This is exemplified through recent events, such as the new So-Fi Stadium in Inglewood.

[81] See also: Ed Ruscha's *Every Building on the Sunset Strip,* 1966, Self-published book, offset lithograph, 1966 (second printing 1971). 7 1/8 x 297 in. *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* is a 25-foot-long accordion folded book that stretches to reveal two continuous photographic views of quite literally, ever building, parking, garage, and empty lot on the mile and a half section of the Sunset Strip. In the production of this book, Ruscha makes a material commentary on processes of mass-productions and distribution, in addition capturing the formal and affective contrast between positive and negative space, that which is produced and where one consumes versus vacant buildings and lots and the transitory spaces in between.

As Purifoy went on to show *66 Signs of Neon* nationally and internationally in the subsequent years, the series provoked conversations as well as fierce criticisms around conventional definitions of art but also how one's surroundings could be utilized as a tool for social change and communication.[82] The criticisms *66 Signs of Neon* received were ultimately a reflection of those who were unwilling to communicate or engage with an aesthetic outside of their purview. Despite the series' success, Purifoy grew frustrated with the lack of change he saw in Watts; many of the same disparities still persisted. He stopped making art for nearly a decade, shifting toward a career in public policy, where he was appointed by Governor Jerry Brown as a founding member of the California Arts Council in Sacramento between 1976 and 1987. While there, he initiated the Art in Education program to attain funding for art in public schools across the state, conducted exhibitions and workshops with localized organizations, and developed the Artists in Social Institutions program to bring art into the state prison system.

In 1987, Purifoy retired and moved back to Los Angeles in an old Masonic lodge at the corner of Pico Boulevard and Arlington Avenue. He resumed his junk art practice and hosted exhibitions of his and others' works for two years. He sold many of his works in order to pay for rent, yet as the cost of living increased, he found himself once again at

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[82] Uddin, 317-319. Purifoy and Powell went on to show *66 Signs of Neon* at the second Watts Arts Festival in 1967, then across several of the Universities of California, the Los Angeles Sports Arena, in D.C. at the Washington Gallery of Modern Art in 1968, the Hunter Gallery in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Industry Fairs in Berlin and Poland after 1970. As Uddin notes, *66 Signs of Neon* provoked outrage upon several occasions, where spectators refused to engage with the effect of junk and ridiculed it as trash, unsightly, "a demented junkman's paradise."

a crossroads. His longtime companion since Watts, Debby Brewer, invited him to stay out on her two-and-a-half-acre lot in Joshua Tree, where he would have more space to work, and the cost of living was cheaper. Though he was apprehensive about the desert, living in urban metropolitan areas for much of his life, he drove roughly 130 miles east on the I-10 East to Highway 62 until he reached the town of Joshua Tree. From there, he took a series of paved and dirt streets several miles until he reached 63030 Blair Lane.[83] Purifoy's junk art praxis, penchant for improvisation, and ability to find value in the discarded served as the foundation for his Outdoor Desert Art Museum. What started with a few standalone works grew into a sprawling site of environmental sculptures where he worked until his death in 2004, at 86 years old.[84]

JOSHUA TREE: THE DESERT AS PRESERVATION AND ACCUMULATION

In Joshua Tree, the sea of freeways dissipates into sun-bleached sand, desert brush, and a jagged monzogranite skyline in the distance from Noah Purifoy's Outdoor

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[83] As per the Noah Purifoy Foundation website: "From Los Angeles: Take the I-10 East to Exit 62/Hwy 62; continue on Hwy 62 through Morongo Valley, Yucca Valley and into the town of Joshua Tree. Pass the intersection of Old Woman Springs Road (Hwy 247) in Yucca Valley and in 2.6 miles, turn left onto Yucca Mesa Street. Continue on Yucca Mesa Street about 4 miles and turn right onto Aberdeen. Travel about 4-1/2 miles, past Border Street to Center Street and turn left. Take the first right onto Blair Lane (graded dirt road); you will see the sculpture site on your left." http://www.noahpurifoy.com/visit.

[84]Sirmans, Lipschutz, 43. One of the first works Purifoy made on site was *Sculpture Defined* (1989), made from three-quarter inch pipes welded together to form a Mondrian-like arrangement of intersecting geometric shapes encased within a larger rectangular frame, standing at nearly twenty feet long. After that, he constructed *The White House* (1990-1993) an architectural wooden structure painted white that one can walk through, and *Icon* (1990) an anthropomorphic sculpture installed within *The White House.* As Lipschutz notes, Purifoy was interested in creating sculptures within sculptures.

Desert Art Museum. Because the vast, sparse landscape in Joshua Tree stands in stark contrast to the sprawling metropolis of Los Angeles and the lush, humid greenery of Alabama, he felt the desert gave the impression of sheer desolation and impoverishment.[85] Although the desert appears barren, it too is full of life. Purifoy's perception of the desert transformed the longer he was there, becoming attuned to the minute processes of nature despite the harsh environment.

The weather facilitates transmutations and improvisations to create new relations between objects, organisms, and their physical surroundings.[86] Purifoy became interested in watching how his pieces weathered over time. He grew intrigued by what happened in his absence, how nature and the elements interacted, and became "an intricate part of the creative process," documenting his work's exposure to the elements over the years.[87]

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[85] Mason, 164.

[86] Sharpe, 106.

[87] Sirmans, Lipschutz, et al. *Noah Purifoy: Junk Dada.* 46-51. Relevent here is Purifoy's relationship to land art, which Lipschutz details first in her dissertation and subsequently in *Junk Dada*, through an analysis on his 1999 work, *Earth Piece* on site. Place and space are significant in considering land and earth art's proliferation across the Western half of the United States in the 1960s, across vast desert landscapes and bodies of water. Purifoy's work has been considered in dialogue with Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970)*,* Michael Heizer's *Double Negative* (1969), and Nancy Holt's *Sun Tunnels (*1973-76), through their human and industrial interventions upon the landscape. In *Earth Piece,* Purifoy had saved up for nearly a decade to rent construction equipment necessary to excavate a deep U-shape into the sand, roughly six feet wide and descending fifteen feet below the earth's surface, lined with corrugated sheets of steel, and wire spires extend upward and above ground level and interplay with a broken bridge and architectural elements. What distinguishes Purifoy work from many of the land artists is availability of funding and institutional support, which many earth artists relied upon despite their espousal of the white cube. Many commercial galleries and institutional spaces did not show artists of color's works in the 1960s, although this slowly began change moving

Such transformations are evidenced in *Bessemer Steel*, where winds have blown some of the panels crookedly out of place to reveal the structure's shadowed interior, and small patches of brush grow in between the foundation's cracks. Purifoy's sculptures engage in a reciprocal relationship with the environment as they are embedded into the sandy, dusty ground and exposed to animals, plant life, and the elements- wind, rain, sun, heat, and snow. As the landscape's forces act upon his work, his works act upon the landscape through their presence and manipulation of the ground.

Though the warped, dented, and rust-streaked sheets of steel in Purifoy's work are weathered from their past lives, they are simultaneously preserved within his Joshua Tree site. Oxidation is a natural process that occurs over time in both metals and the human body. Exposure to wet weather, humidity, and pollutants corrode structure, strength, and permeability in metals, particularly iron and steel, resulting in rust. Rust is an entropic process that evokes a sense of disuse and deterioration.[88] Climate affects oxidation, where the high desert's arid climate desiccates matter. The low humidity range hovers around fifteen percent, while low precipitation, hard alkaline soil, and the high altitude of over two thousand feet above sea level combine to create a natural form of preservation against oxidation processes.[89] Because of the distinct climate, the desert functions as an

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forward, Purifoy relied upon various careers throughout his lifetime as an arts educator and administrator, social worker, and blue-collar laborer, he was able to maintain independence from institutions, maintaining his art practice without financial backing from galleries or museums and without assistants for most of his career.

[88] Robert Smithson, *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, edited by Jack Flam, (Berkeley, California: University Of California Press, 1996), 106.

[89] Stephen Dowling, "The Secrets of the Desert Aircraft Boneyards." BBC Future,

archive of capital accumulation, as evidenced through Purifoy's site, aerospace storage, boneyards, and growing waste deposits scattered across the land. Purifoy collected the discarded in order to navigate through modern, postwar notions of disposability where the overflow of such processes is entombed within seemingly endless sands.

The residual effects of wartime efforts and surplus linger not far from Joshua Tree. With a strong history of defense production and aerospace industries, along with an active Marine Corps base in the neighboring 29 Palms, located just north of Joshua Tree, the Mojave Desert houses numerous outdoor commercial and military aircraft storage sites and boneyards. These include the Southern California Logistics Airport (SCLA) in Victorville, the Mojave Air and Space Port in Mojave, and the Davis Monthan Airforce Boneyard in Tucson, Arizona. Aerial maps evidence the great expanses of land where planes line up in geometric tessellation-like patterns by the hundreds or thousands, nose to tail, parked on flat desert surfaces with their noses pointed to the wind to mitigate the impact of strong winds. Planes are prepared for storage by a process called mothballing: some parts are wrapped in protective plastic, ports and openings sealed, oil drained, refilled, and drained with preservative oil in a process called pickling, which coats the interior.[90] For military planes, classified hardware and weapons are removed. Old or

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September 2014. https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20140918-secrets-of-the-aircraft-boneyards.

[90] Tory Shepherd, "'There Could Be Snakes': Planes Mothballed by Covid Prepare to Fly Again." The Guardian. Guardian News and Media, October 31, 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/01/there-could-be-snakes-planesmothballed-by-covid-prepare-to-fly-again.

unused planes are stored for future reactivation, and retired planes are disassembled within boneyards. These storage sites and boneyards alike contain a funerary element; laid to rest in the wake of their former functions.

In nearby Tucson, the Davis Monthan Airforce Boneyard is the largest in the world, serving as both a boneyard and for parts reclamation. The site houses roughly 4400 aircraft, including retired World War II fighter jets from 1946. [91] Similarly, the Mojave Air and Space Port, located about 95 miles north of Los Angeles, was expanded into a Marine Corps training facility for the Second World War; Navy and Marine pilots trained by the thousands for combat in SBD dive bombers and F4U Corsairs.[92] The site spans 3300 acres across the desert floor. In Victorville, the SCLA encompasses 2200 acres of the former George Airforce Base and specializes in aircraft research, maintenance, and development along with end-of-life-cycle services. These airport

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[91]"Davis Monthan AFB Amarg Boneyard," AirplaneBoneyards.com.
The Davis Monthan Airforce Boneyard stored the Enola Gay for a period of time, the first plane to drop an atomic bomb, used on Hiroshima, Japan during the Second World War, piloted by Tibbets and Robert A. Lewis on August 6, 1945. Some of the B-29's onsite were repurposed for the Korean War in the 1950s, including over 600 B-29 Super fortresses and 200 C-47 Skytrains. Now known as the Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Group (AMARG), facility for all excess military and government aircraft.

[92] "Discover: Mojave Air and Space Port," Mojave Air & Space Port, Accessed May 7, 2022, https://www.mojaveairport.com/discover.html. By 1946, it was decommissioned into a Navy Airfield and by the 1970s Kern County obtained the title to the airport, leading to its present role. At present, it conducts aerospace research, design, development, and manufacturing, serving as airliner storage and reclamation facility along with innovations in wind and rail power. Known for its involvement in the 1980's Voyager expedition, the first aircraft in history to fly around the world without stopping or refueling. Also known for innovations in the space industry, licensed as the first facility in the United States by the Federal Aviation Industry for horizontal spacecraft launches in 2004, most notably SpaceShipOne.

boneyards and storage sites attest to California's strong wartime efforts that link place and space with the desert's distinct climate.[93]

The desert juxtaposes preservation with the unpredictability of nature. Like Purifoy's Outdoor Desert Art Museum, boneyards are subject to uncontrollable wildlife intrusions and winds.[94] Bird nests and insect colonies nestle in crevices and contaminate air data lines that help determine flight altitudes while in air, take-off, and landing. Rattlesnakes are attracted to warm rubber tires and are often found curled up around wheels and brakes. In *Bessemer Steel,* the structure is built upon an unstable and disintegrating wood foundation, with holes large enough for animals to enter, finding respite from wind and sun or the rare case of precipitation.

The desert is an archive filled with dust-laden materials preserved within its arid environment. In their catalog on the formless, Krauss and Bois note that dust is indexical where its trace is one of duration; it builds up over time.[95] Dust is entropic in a sense; it homogenizes surfaces; it threatens cleanliness, newness, and innovation yet is an inescapable product of consumption. Like rust, dust further signifies disuse as it

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[93] Shepherd, "'There Could Be Snakes,'" As Shepard notes, during the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic thousands of planes were mothballed and stored across various storage sites across the globe during the travel restrictions, having to undergo meticulous processes to enter back into the air.

[94] Shepherd, "'There Could Be Snakes.'"

[95] Yve-Alain Bois, and Rosalind E. Krauss, *Formless: A User's Guide*, (New York, New York: Zone Books, 1997), 226. Krauss and Bois exemplify the indexical quality of dust through Marcel Duchamp's *Large Glass* (1915-23) where he built layers of dust upon cracked panes of glass, encapsulating the particles with a fixative, much like one would with charcoal or chalk pastels.

accumulates on surfaces, creeping into crevices and cracks. Dust becomes a symbol of overproduction and inescapable waste as it gathers upon plane boneyards and the scrap materials on Purifoy's site.[96]

Although Purifoy noted the desert's sparsity of excess materials in comparison to Los Angeles, the desert at large accumulates junk whether it's stored, dumped, washed up from the sea, or carried over by the wind. While "trash islands" are forming in the ocean, so too are they forming on land. Like the ocean and empty lots in Los Angeles, the desert is utilized as a form of negation, where the excesses of commercial production are deposited in the perceived barren landscape.[97] As the historian Dipesh Chakrabarty notes, humans have become geological agents, asserting an extensive impact on the earth and environment. [98] The industrial, capitalist urge to produce amounts in uneven distribution of resources and waste across geographies, where the excess repercussions are

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[96] Bois, Krauss, 225-227; Krauss and Bois build upon Georges Batailles' notion of the *l'informe,* or rather, that which threatens notions of beauty and form in art as an elitist object; from his ongoing periodical, *Documents* from 1929-1930, where Bataille categorizes dust as a component of formlessness.

[97] Sharpe posits the ocean as negation; for further discourse see: Lisa Blackmore and Liliana Gómez. *Liquid Ecologies in Latin American and Caribbean Art*, New York; London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020; also: Eric Paul Roorda, *The Ocean Reader: History, Culture, Politics.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2020.

[98] Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (2009): 197–222. Chakrabarty marks the Anthropocene as the between humans as "biological agents" (living organisms) and "geological agents" (having a large-scale impact on earth/environment). Humans have had geological agency for a short time yet impact the atmosphere at an alarming rate since the industrial revolution, exponentially increasing from the twentieth century onward. He further states that capital flow of wealth impacts who is affected by climate change, resulting in uneven distributions of wealth where poor countries and regions are affected most by pollution, rising water levels, rising temps, waste, and loss of biodiversity.

exemplified in the Mojave as well as the neighboring Saguaro Desert in Arizona and the Atacama Desert in Chile. In both the Mojave and Saguaro, hordes of plastic debris disrupt the biome, affecting human, animal, and plant life.[99] Such repercussions are amplified in the Atacama Desert, where over 60 tons of fast fashion clothing form graveyard mountains, impacting communities and ecosystems. Analogous to Purifoy's junk art praxis in the face of climate change, the accumulation of junk in the desert, in the ocean, and urban infrastructure of Los Angeles raises the questions of what and who is deemed disposable, in addition to where.

This chapter has traced Purifoy's spatial and temporal movement through various climates. To conclude, Purifoy's *Bessemer Steel* operates as an allegory of extraction as it relates to resources, labor, and migrational autonomy. As national and globalized disparities continue to intensify; through its found and recycled materials and dilapidated construction, Purifoy's work remains relevant by re-presenting narratives and asserting physicality; to take up space is to resist erasure, distortion, and constriction.

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[99] See studies: Andrew D. Walde, Meagan L. Harless, David K. Delaney, and Larry L. Pater. "Anthropogenic Threat to the Desert Tortoise (Gopherus Agassizii): Litter in the Mojave Desert." *Western North American Naturalist* 67, no. 1 (2007): 147–49; Pandika, Melissa. "Garbage Patches--in the Desert?" The Green Life. *Siera Club,* February 19, 2013. https://blogs.sierraclub.org/greenlife/2013/02/garbage-patches-in-the-desert.html.

Chapter 2: Polyvalent Perspectives: *No Contest (Bicycles)* and Assemblage

This chapter explores Purifoy's work within the more significant assemblage movement. Drawing upon Jones' chapter "Claim: Assemblage and Self Possession" in her book *South of Pico: African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s,* she contextualizes Purifoy's early body of work *66 Signs of Neon* and his junk art praxis within socially engaged art, carving out a narrative alongside the likes of John Outterbridge, Betye Saar, and David Hammons, amongst others, as part of an interconnected network of Black artists working with assemblage in Los Angeles.[100] This chapter closely examines how Purifoy's Joshua Tree artwork, *No Contest (Bicycles),* along with select pieces by Saar, Outterbridge, and Hammons, utilizes found objects to link identity and place through compositional space in order to disrupt traditional notions of perspective.

Assemblage signifies the everyday: it occupies real space, composed of found or manufactured objects, materials, or fragments that are juxtaposed together.[101] Early twentieth-century European artists such as Picasso, Braque, Duchamp, and Dubuffet began to explore assemblage, shifting from two- to three-dimensional form in their works to probe anxieties around the First and Second World Wars, anti-elitism and class

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[100] Kellie Jones, "Claim: Assemblage and Self-Possession," In *South of Pico: African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s*, (Duke University Press, 201767–138.) https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11hpmsq.7. Although this chapter focuses on Purifoy, Saar, and Outterbridge, they were part of a larger network of African American artists working with assemblage and collage across the nation, including but not limited to John T. Riddle, Daniel LaRue Johnson, and Timothy Washington in Los Angeles, Thornton Dial in Alabama, and Romare Bearden along the East Coast.

[101] Lowery Stokes Sims, "Noah Purifoy: A Place to Go," *Junk Dada,* 62.

structure, processes of mass production, consumption, and the discarded.[102] Assemblage offers a reflection of life, of one's environment, of what and whom one is surrounded by.

While conventionalized drafting and painting rely upon the illusion of space, assemblage relies upon three-dimensionality, replacing artifice with materiality.[103] Purifoy considered juxta positioning objects over top of one another as a more honest tool to create depth in his work.[104] In an interview with Karen Anne Mason, Purifoy spoke about his interest in early assemblage artists; he stated: "Because what they were protesting most of all was perspective… drawing in perspective to create depth. They were in opposition to that altogether. So, in order to achieve depth, they would juxtapose one object on top of another and therefore achieve depth without perspective."[105]

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[102] As Kellie Jones notes in "Claim: Assemblage and Self-Possession" 67, Apart from assemblage, Picasso and Braque are often falsely credited for conceiving collage, although many examples across the globe prove otherwise, including but not limited to: Lewis Carroll and Oscar Gustave Rejlander's nineteenth century photomontages, along with collages from twelfth century Japan (see Penelope Mason, History of Japanese Art (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993)) and China dating back to the year 700 C.E (see Harriet Grossman Janis and Rudi Blesh, Collage: Personalities, Concepts, and Techniques (Philadelphia: Chilton, 1967).

[103] Relevant here is Vladimir Tatlin (1885-1953), Russian constructivist whose career spanned across painting, sculpture and set design and into architecture, marking a shift from two to three dimensional. Influenced by cubism, and how art could exist in the world, socially, though never fully realized, *Monument to the 3rd International* (1919-20) was meant to be made from steel and glass, an immense spiraling form that reached heights of 1300 feet and to function as a space for the Communist Third International, is significant as it contends with modernity, technology, and industrialism.

[104] Stokes Sims, 62.

[105] Stokes Sims, 62. See further on Lipschutz's *Through the Fire,* 64-66*:* Purifoy had learned about modernist artists and assemblage in an art history course while attending Chouinard, he studied under William Moore, whose research interests were on African

In *Perspective as Symbolic Form,* art historian Erwin Panofsky states in regard to formal compositions that a perspectival view of space occurs when "the entire picture has been transformed into a window, and when we are meant to believe we are looking through this window into a space."[106] As the material surface is thus negated as "a mere picture plane" through drawing and painting, the centralized perspective, or rather, the gridded Cartesian coordinate system, is regarded as a rational, unchanging, infinite, and homogenous plane.[107] Perspective is symbolic because it is epistemological. It is contingent upon the assumption that the human eye is singular and fixed rather than bi-optic and in motion; thus, he contends that perspective is no more than a mathematical abstraction of psychophysiological reality and space.[108] Although he is writing about Renaissance paintings and thought, Panofsky's perceptions remain relevant in understanding how the implications of linear perspective order the modern world.

To protest perspective is to protest the modern subject. Considering perspective as an abstraction of mental and bodily processes, its symbolic form not only contends with productions of knowledge but with notions of being- being in the world, of materiality

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art and mask-making, along with Susan Peterson, who taught ceramics and whose scholarship was on Japanese and Native American pottery.

[106] Erwin Panofsky, tr. Christopher S. Wood, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, (Zone Books, 1991), 27, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1453m48. Derives from the Latin *perspectiva,* meaning "to see through."

[107] Panofsky, 27.

[108] Panofsky, 30.

and flesh, and how individuals and groups of people move through time and space.[109] In *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle,* McKittrick probes how dominant modes of geography and cartography were formed from linear perspective (the grid) as a fixed and predetermined system that organizes the world three-dimensionally, or in real space and time, from a Eurocentric, "Cartesian, positivist, imperialist" vantage point.[110] She states:

> "The "where" of black geographies and black subjectivity, then, is often aligned with spatial processes that apparently fall back on seemingly predetermined stabilities, such as boundaries, color lines, "proper" places, fixed and settled infrastructures and streets, oceanic containers. If space and place appear to be safely secure and unwavering, then what space and place make possible, outside and beyond tangible stabilities, and from the perspective of struggle, can potentially fade away."[111]

People produce space and its meanings, where space is an active site of struggle, resistance, and creativity.[112] To rethink space thus exposes and destabilizes the fixed, singular vantage point in order to engage Black ontologies and further open pluralized possibilities. Re-spatialization is both discursive and material, conceiving modes of becoming, selfhood, and sovereignty in the imagination and through the physical site.

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[109] See: Heidegger, Martin, tr. John Macquarrie, and Edward Robinson. *Being and Time*. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1962). In this text, Heidegger posits the term, *Dasein*, translated from German as "being there," "presence," or sein as "to be," to exist in the world, be affected by it and affect it. This is a significant counterpose to the Cartesian mode of though which places conscious existence in the realm of the mind over matter.

[110] McKittrick, 13-14. In regard to what McKittrick terms, "traditional geography" has real time implications upon who controls state boundaries, borders, and the people within them. In reference to Cartesian coordinates.

[111] McKittrick, 11.

[112] McKittrick, 11.

McKittrick's critical geography builds upon Sylvia Wynter's wide-ranging scholarship on coloniality, the Black diaspora, science studies, and modernity. According to Wynter, in "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom," modernity is entrenched in 17th-century Enlightenment notions of imperialism, progress, and exclusionary definitions of humanity; the inherent violence of modernity is not only a presupposed ordering of rational, logical subjects within but, organizing humanity from a hierarchical position based upon racialized exclusions that result in structural and internalized forms of racism.[113] The secular shift during that time transferred power from God unto (hu)man to aid in state, colonial and imperial expansion.[114] She coins the term "overrepresentation" as a white, Eurocentric society that subjugates and Others nonwhite and nonwestern people, thus embedding a hierarchical system of human value. The present-day ramifications are exemplified by the construction of developed and

[113] Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation--An Argument," *The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257–337. https://doi.org/10.1353/ncr.2004.0015.

[114] Wynter foregrounds the Las Casas and Sepúlveda debate to present a twofold argument: first to show the parallels between the dichotomies of "Las Casas's theocentric Christian" and Sepúlveda's "newly invented Man of the humanists" (288). Second, to prove how secularization transgressed theocracy by transferring power from God to humans, granting Western Europeans the agency to conquest and colonize sovereign lands and people into subordination. In Part II, Wynter constructs a timeline to demonstrate the shift in power from theocratic to secular that occurred in Western Europe starting in the 15th century onward. She examines anachronic moments within the timeline to exemplify the Christian and humanist divide in Spain and how that divide furthered Spanish colonization of the Americas. Drawing from Aníbal Quijano's "Racism/ Ethnicism Complex," Wynter focuses on how the Atlantic slave trade and Spanish colonization of the Aztecs in South America and Arawaks' in the Caribbean were critical moments in defining the "overrepresentation" humanity as a white, Eurocentric construct at the expense of nonwestern societies.

underdeveloped nations, wealth distribution gaps, and mass incarceration; systems made benefit overrepresentation.[115]

As McKittrick contends with space and Wynter with modernity, Alexander Weheliye contends with being by conceptualizing the term, *Schwarz-Sein,* which translates from German to Blackness, ontologically shifting from Heidegger's *Dasein*.[116] This shift is significant because it opens a space in an otherwise exclusionary definition of human existence and history to dwell within, to further question and create. *Schwarz-Sein* is a matter of the flesh, temporality, and being in the world.[117]

To contrast the singularity of modernity, Weheliye further posits in *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human,* "that assemblages are inherently productive, entering into polyvalent becomings to produce and give expression to previously nonexistent realities, thoughts, bodies, affects,

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[115] Wynter, 261.

[116] Alexander Weheliye, "Black Life/SchwarzSein," Essay, In *Beyond the Doctrine of Man: Decolonial Visions of the Human*, (NewYork: Fordham University Press, 237–62 2019), 238.

[117]Weheliye, 238. Weheliye further builds his discourse upon the American literary critican and Black feminist scholar, Hortense Spillers for which he states the flesh, according to Spillers represents the "pivotal domain through which Man marks the hierarchical species-level difference between himself and his various others, for instance, Latino, poor, incarcerated, indigenous, disabled, gender-nonconforming subjects, but especially African-descended populations." 238. For further reading on Spillers, see: Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 65–81. https://doi.org/10.2307/464747.

spaces, actions, ideas, and so on."[118] Because assemblage relies upon the juxtaposition of materials with one another, it fractures the singular perspective into multiple variegated planes.

While modernity signifies the violence of conquest, what lies beyond the plotted and stable points gridded within the axis makes space for new possibilities. As prewar artists used assemblage to provoke perspective in formal terms, as Purifoy contends, they symbolically constructed a Fordist discourse on the proletariat through standardization and commercialism, utilizing manufactured objects to bring the realm of fine art into the everyday. In the postwar years, a number of artists turned toward assemblage to further probe participation in modern life through the invocations of unsatiable material desires within mass consumerism and capital accumulation. While these artists do protest perspective through formal and class critique of modernity, many of these artists who have been inducted in this formal canon are whom Wynter deems as the overrepresented.[119] The following pages evidence how Purifoy, along with Saar, Outterbridge, and Hammons, contest perspective through compositional space within

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[118] Weheliye, Alexander. G. *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*. Duke University Press, 2014, 39.

[119] The 1961 exhibition, *The Art of Assemblage,* curated by William Seitz at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, gained national and international recognition in defining assemblage as a part of the modernist epoch. The exhibition included two hundred and fifty works spanning one hundred and thirty artists. The works range from unnamed and undated African objects and figurines, alongside works by early European generations of artists working with assemblage, such as Picasso, Braque, and Duchamp, Jean Dubuffet and Kurt Schwitters, were exhibited with postwar artists Man Ray, Joseph Cornell, and Robert Rauschenberg from New York, as well as the West Coast artists Lee Bonticou, Bruce Conner, and Edward Kienholz, amongst others. *The Art of Assemblage* exhibition attempted to establish global regional dialogues, yet prioritized artists from Europe and the United States.

their polyvalent assemblages in order to build a discourse around the social constructs of race, place, and space within an increasingly modernized landscape in Southern California.

NARRATIVES OF ASSEMBLAGE: THREE CASE STUDIES ON PERSPECTIVE

Purifoy achieves a multifaceted sense of depth through his site as a whole and within individual works. Made in 1994, *No Contest (bicycles)* is an asymmetric polygonal wooden structure that stands at fourteen feet tall, twenty-one feet long, and twenty-four inches wide (Figure 2). It resembles a slanted modernist house with a minimal footprint, featuring a shingled exterior, a painted interior, and a teeter-totter-like bicycle ramp on the roof. Upon the slanted roof are two bicycles balanced upon a long, narrow piece of wood that overhangs the structure, attached with two rusted metal clamps. Cylindrical pieces of wood fashioned like Linkin logs line the structure's perimeter.

Although the work looms large, it diminishes in the presence of the vast space that encompasses Joshua Tree at the Mojave and Colorado Desert's intersection. Like *Bessemer Steel, No Contest (bicycles)* is in dialogue with the landscape through its grounded foundation and exposure to the elements. The exterior shingles are sun-bleached, streaked from the rain; dust particles fill the cracks that shrink and expand depending on the weather. The wooden overhang atop the slanted roof borders between entropy and harmony at an angular thirty-five-degree incline, suspended against the forces of gravity. It is precariously narrow, with one expended bicycle balancing upon the upper left side and another bicycle turned upside down on the lower right, creating a

suspended teeter-totter, with the wooden abode serving as the fulcrum.[120] Cables extend from the roof and are staked into the ground, providing stability against the harsh desert conditions such as wind and flooding from rain. The structure rests upon two planks that connect to an underground foundation, visible only from sand erosion in one of the corners. *No Contest (bicycles)* plays with gravity to construct a work that looks as if it will topple over at any moment yet is, in fact, stable and grounded.

No Contest (Bicycles) functions autonomously while part of a greater totalizing environment, not unlike Kurt Schwitters' *Merzbau*, Allan Kaprow's *Environments,* and Simon Rodia's *Watts Towers.* Beginning in the 1920s, Schwitters expanded assemblage as a sculptural object into an immersive environment. He constructed his initial *Merzbau* in his Hanover home from 1923 to 1937 of a series of columns and grottos made from personal mementos and found objects. He collected pieces of wood, tufts of hair, rags, and wood from streets, sidewalks, and vacant lots. As the artist and writer Georges Hugnet wrote, "to the principle of the object, he added a feeling of respect for everyday life in the form of dirt and deterioration… like fragments of life itself."[121] Like

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[120] The bicycle wheels, along with the wooden frame in Purifoy's work, make a direct reference to Marcel Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel* (1913). Foreshadowing his devised terminology of the readymade, Duchamp constructed *Bicycle Wheel* from a metal bicycle wheel mounted atop an ivory-painted wood stool. Purifoy expands upon Duchamp's single wheel by utilizing two nearly whole bicycles. Paralleling Duchamp's inverted wheel frame, which is fashioned to the top of the stool so that the stool's legs are grounded, and the wheel is in the air, Purifoy, too, jests with functionality by inverting one of the bicycles and fashioning them both on the teetering plank atop the wooden structure.

[121] Alfred H. Barr, and Georges Hugnet. "Dada," in *Fantastic art, dada, surrealism*. Museum of Modern Art (New York, N.Y.): Published for the Museum of Modern Art by Arno Press, 1968, 29.

Schwitters, Purifoy found compassion for the repetition, abundance, and obsolescence of the everyday.

One's environment impacts choices, patterns, and relations.[122] In his work in Joshua tree, Purifoy states, "I think I've always wanted to do environmental sculpture. It only became possible when I moved to the desert… Environmental sculpture suggests something big enough to walk through."[123] Purifoy's descriptions of his works as "environmental sculptures" and his site as "one total work of art" suggests a reference to Allan Kaprow's *Environments.* An Environment is built in situ and assembled from irregular materials such as cardboard and rags to rubber and wire mesh, along with "a good amount of plain debris" rather than brought in as a whole from the outside. [124] For example, Kaprow's *Yard* (1961) was an environment built in the sculpture garden of the Martha Jackson Gallery in New York; consisting of hundreds of tires that filled the outdoor space, where visitors could interact- walk upon, touch, and move the tires as they pleased, reinvented in multiple locations over the subsequent decades. His Environments contrasted modernist notions of the autonomous art object that could be exhibited anywhere; instead, for Kaprow, Environments sought to obliterate the distinctions

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[122] Ingold, 122.

[123] Sirmans, Lipschutz, et al., 53.

[124] Kaprow, Allan. "The Shape of the Art Environment." The online edition of Artforum International Magazine. Artforum, April 1, 1968. https://www.artforum.com/print/196806/the-shape-of-the-art-environment-37553. Kaprow bridged the gap between the East and West coasts, working with/under John Cage, Hans Hoffman, and Meyer Shapiro while attending New York University and Columbia and taking courses at the New School in the 1950s. By the 1960s he moved out to Los Angeles to teach at Cal Arts and later, the University of California- San Diego.

between artwork, surroundings, and viewer, thus transforming the spectator into an active participant in real-time and space. The phenomenological experience of Purifoy's site unites his constructions with the given landscape, allowing the spectator to form into an active participant as one moves through the space.

Simon Rodia's *Watts Towe*rs are indicative of space and place in Southeast Los Angeles, connecting Purifoy, Outterbridge, and Saar to the experiential and experimental nature of assemblage. The *Watts Towers,* whose formal title is *Nuestro Pueblo,* meaning "our community," was constructed by Sabato "Simon" Rodia, an Italian immigrant, between 1921 and 1954 in the neighborhood of Watts, Los Angeles, where he lived on a small triangular parcel of land at the junction of East 107th, Graham, and Santa Ana Boulevard North.[125] Reaching heights of up to 99 feet, the series comprises seventeen handmade mortar and steel spires with embedded mosaics of found objects such as bottle caps and broken glass, seashells, and mesh. Rodia had worked in the logging and railroad industries in addition to tile-setting. He built his towers by hand with nothing more than hand tools while living on site. Now a historical landmark, Rodia's *Watts Towers* serve as a testament to space and place: reflecting migrational movements, vestiges of the built environment, and labor within Southern California assemblage.

When Rodia left the Watts Towers in 1955, he entrusted the deed to his property to a neighbor, and the towers fell into a state of neglect and vandalism. By 1957, the City and Building and Safety Departments had plans to demolish it over concerns about its

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[125] Andrew Purchuk and Catherine Taft, "Floating Structures: Building the Modern in Postwar Los Angeles," In *Pacific Standard Time: Los Angeles Art, 1945-1980*, 4–65, (Getty Research Institute and the J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011), 5.

safety and stability.[126] The city's attempt to condemn the towers evinced notions of what and who was considered disposable. Shortly after the city began planning for the Watts Towers demolition, a counter committee was formed to preserve the site, and by 1963, the towers became established as a cultural heritage site. The Towers emanate a bricolage mythos of making do with whatever is at hand, with Rodia standing as a bricoleur, working with such finite and heterogeneous materials with his hands to create something new.[127] The following year, Purifoy became the founding director of the Watts Towers Arts Center, carrying the bricolage mythos throughout his junk art praxis.

Place and time garner a significant impact, whereupon Betye Saar (b. 1926) attributes her exposure to assemblage to Simon Rodia's *Watt's Towers*.[128] Born in Watts, Saar spent her formative years between Pasadena, where she was raised and spent the summers in Watts to visit her grandmother. While many view them as fixed structures, Saar grew up watching them grow, evolve, and transform the residential parcel into a sculptural and architectural monument.[129] For Saar, the *Watts Towers* represented the ability to make something out of nothing except recycled and discarded materials.

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[126] Cecile Whiting, *Pop L.A.: Art and the City in the 1960s*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 141.

[127]Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, (University of Chicago Press. 1968), 11-12.

[128]Betye Saar, "Influences: Betye Saar," (Frieze, 2016), https://www.frieze.com/article/influences-betye-saar.

[129] Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October* 8 (1979): 31–44. https://doi.org/10.2307/778224, 37. One could examine Rodia's *Watts Towers* through Krauss's "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," as a complex and contradictory work, dwelling in the space between sculpture, architecture and not-architecture, indeed complicating perceptions, and categorizations of the work of both intense criticism and

Two pivotal works for Saar were *Black Girls Window* (1969) which marked her transition into assemblage, and *The Liberation of Aunt Jemina* (1972), which she regards as her first protest piece.[130] In *Black Girls Window,* Saar utilizes a found worn and wooden window frame, with its lock and rusted hinges still attached to disrupt the compositional perspective. The windowpanes divide the upper half into a grid of nine smaller frames, each with its own composite imagery, while the lower half opens to one larger image, creating a total of ten compositions within the singular frame.

The window frame in *Black Girls Window* alludes to the grid that upholds a secularized modernity. As an abstraction, it resists time, space, and narration.[131] Saar utilizes the grid in order to juxtapose and expose the contradictions of the scientific with the spiritual and personal, fracturing a single, fixed perspective into many. The upper half of the composition is laid out like a tarot deck where the top three frames depict alternate views of the moon in different phases and stars in primary colors. Pictured below are children playing, a pair of skeletons, and a phrenological skull that references the 19th-century pseudoscience based on racialized hierarchical ordering by equating cranium

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high regard. This discussion could extend further into Purifoy's Outdoor Desert Art Museum, which further expands and contradicts all quadrants between sculpture, landscape and not-landscape, and architecture and not-architecture.

[130] Saar, "Influences: Betye Saar." Saar attained her Bachelor of Art from University of California- Los Angeles in design in 1947. She later pursued graduate studies across California State University- Long Beach, the University of Southern California, California State University- North Ridge, and the American Film Institute. Like Purifoy, she had an early career in social work before she turned to a career in art, where her work has been widely received in exhibitions in Los Angeles, nationally and internationally.

[131] Rosalind Krauss, "Grids," *October* (1979), 50. https://doi.org/10.2307/778321.

shapes with cognitive ability, which had at one point been considered an objective science. The lowest three frames show the lion of Leo, Saar's astrological sun sign, a daguerreotype as both technological innovation and reference to part of Saar's heritage, pictures of Saar's maternal grandmother of Irish heritage, and an eagle with the word "love" across its chest.

The lower half of the frame depicts a prominent silhouetted figure in front of a blue background and grey curtains.[132] The figure's face and hands, which are adorned with astrological symbols, press up against the window, and whose lenticular eyes appear open or shut depending upon the viewer's proximity, are entrapped in the space. Windows are both mirrored and transparent spaces, centripetal and centrifugal, allowing for a reflection of oneself while simultaneously looking outward.[133] Saar creates a polyvalent space in order to complicate notions of science, logic, and objectivity that have been historically used to undermine people of color, with the spiritual, or that which has been considered as subjective and irrational, as well as through the technological and personal. In doing so, she breaks down modernist dichotomies to allow for a nuanced plurality. She acknowledges pain while advocating for love.

In *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima,* Saar uses a shadow box to actualize space, drawing from circulated imagery and consumable objecthood to confront racial and sexist stereotypes. The shadow box acts as a framing device, where a looming figurine of a Black mammy caricature stands as the focal point. The figurine encompasses a vast

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[132] Saar, "Influences: Betye Saar."

[133] Krauss, 62.

majority of the compositional space, fixed to the ground of the frame and extending upward to the top. She is equipped with a broom in one hand and a gun in the other, each cascading down vertically into a sea of cotton. In front of the figure is a postcard of a Black woman holding a mixed-race child, signifying the ways in which slavery and its subsequent manifestations have exploited women. In front of the postcard is a raised Black power fist. The background is made up of the Aunt Jemima icon, based upon the mammy caricature, repeated in a pop art-like grid across the back and walls.
Saar disrupts traditional framing devices by folding harmful visual and material culture in on itself. She states: "I had a lot of hesitation about using powerful, negative images such as these – thinking about how white people saw black people, and how that influenced the ways in which Black people saw each other… I was recycling the imagery, in a way, from negative to positive, using the negative power against itself."[134] As these various elements come together in *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima,* Saar asserts space by actualizing depth within her material articulations of relational connectivity and difference.

John Outterbridge (b. 1933, d. 2020) first encountered Purifoy at the Watts Towers Art Center in 1964, where he started to consider and implement into his own praxis how art could garner social change, build community, and re-present cultural narratives.[135] For Outterbridge, the aesthetic of assemblage, making use of one's

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[134] Saar, "Influences: Betye Saar."

[135] Jones, 88. Originally from North Carolina, Outterbridge studied engineering at A&T State University in Greensboro in 1952 before he enlisted for the army the following while on a tour of duty. Upon his discharge in 1956, he moved to Chicago to attend the

surroundings, "is not mere material but the material and the essence of the political climate, the material in the debris of social issues."[136] When Purifoy left to return to social work and then later, as a policymaker and founding member of the California Arts Council in Sacramento, Outterbridge served as a subsequent director for the Watts Towers Arts Center from 1975 to 1992 while maintaining and exhibiting a prolific body of work.[137]

In his "Containment Series," Outterbridge uses the traditional wooden armature for paintings to create assemblages from scrap sheet metal, bolts, nails, and leather straps to signify the frame not as a window but as a device of restraint. As Weheliye contends, "it becomes paramount to understand and amplify alternate modes of being that does not rest on abjuring Black Life— but rather possibilities, albeit without erasing the traces of violence that give rise to them."[138] Finding material from local scrap yards near his Pasadena residence, his use of found objects recalls his upbringing in North Carolina during the time of segregation and the Great Depression, where his father worked as a

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American Academy of Art, studying commercial art and illustration. In 1963, he relocated to Los Angeles becoming involved in the Compton Communicative Arts Academy as a teacher Watts Towers Arts Center in addition to working as an art preparator at the Pasadena Art Museum throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s.

[136] Jones, 94-95.

[137] Jori Finkel, "John Outterbridge, Who Turned Castoffs into Sculpture, Dies at 87." *The New York Times,* 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/01/arts/john-outterbridge-dead.html.

[138] Weheliye, 238-239.

hauler, transporting scrap metals with his truck, while also salvaging resources for his family that others no longer needed.

The work, *Let Us Tie Down Loose Ends* (1968) is an intimately scaled work whose dimensions are 13.5 x 14.5 by 1.75 inches. Rectangular pieces of weathered steel are bolted and soldered together, some with a cool sheen and others with warm rust. In the upper half of the composition, there are two intersecting leather straps bonded together by buckles and ties. Below and to the left is a polygonal pocket of crooked nails arranged vertically. Jones posits that the metal in *Let Us Tie Down Loose Ends* wraps around the frame like a skin, addressing constraint while simultaneously acting like a tough impenetrable epidermal layer.[139] If the grid rejects, or rather silences narratives and histories, the fragmentary nature of assemblage acknowledges absence, where silenced histories within dominant narratives fills the gaps, the interstitial space between objects. The weathered steel and nails carry with them their own story, where Outterbridge takes familiar objects and re-fashions them into something new.

In "Venus in Two Acts," Saidiya Hartman posits that by addressing silence, one makes tangible the fractal, fractured narratives, allowing for the possibility to re-present or re-spatialize personal and collective narratives.[140] In Outterbridge's composition, as throughout his series, the soldered, punctured industrial materials render the work opaque as the compositional space does not open but rather close; it contains and contends with

[139] Jones, 98.

[140] Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts." *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008): 1-14. muse.jhu.edu/article/241115.

silence by confronting various forms of spatial negations, constrictions, and isolations in reference to slavery, segregation, and the prison industrial complex across time and space.[141]

Throughout their assemblages, Purifoy, Outterbridge, and Saar implement framing devices to contest perspective. Their arrangements draw from found and salvaged objects, remnants of their surroundings, memories, and experiences to reflect African American life not through a singular frame but through multiple. In, *No Contest (Bicycles),* Purifoy employs a window in his cabin-like structure to shift the spectator into an active participant; the window opens to the desert landscape, thus embodying participant, environment, and artwork. Saar utilizes both the window frame and shadow box to layer handmade prints, found photos, and circulated figurines to re-present narratives, and Outterbridge uses opaque sheets of metal to wrap around the canvas armature, signifying the material as both a protective barrier and an index of spatial negation through his compositions. By contesting perspective, they contest modernity in order to construct a polyvalent discourse around Black ontologies through compositional space.

CONFRONTING AND DISMANTLING INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS

In 2015, Yael Lipschutz, an independent curator and archivist for the Noah Purifoy Foundation, and Franklin Sirmans, the Terri and Michael Smooke Curator and Department Head of Contemporary Art, co-curated the posthumous retrospective, "Noah

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[141] Jones, 98.

Purifoy: Junk Dada," at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The exhibition spanned several gallery spaces in and outdoors, showcasing Purifoy's life's work spanning his time in Watts during the 1960s, assemblages made in his Brea home studio in the 1980s, and selected environmental sculptures translocated from Joshua Tree. Exhibited works from his Joshua Tree site included *Ode to Frank Gehry* (2000)*, From the Point of View of the Little People* (1994)*,* and *No Contest (bicycles).* Because these works were done in situ for the desert environment, their placement in the museum affects their reception, all the while signifying Purifoy's complicated relationship with the institution, or rather the institutions' fraught relationship with Purifoy.

At LACMA, the gallery space feels sanitized in contrast to the unpredictable outdoor setting at Joshua Tree. *No Contest (Bicycles)'* battered framework juxtaposes against the clean white facade of the Jane and Marc Nathanson gallery space. The effect is like a vacuum where the gallery space operates as a framing device to encapsulate *No Contest (Bicycles)* within the white cube. The history of the wood as a found object, worn and weathering like a badge of honor, embracing the materials and their imperfections, contrasts the gallery's exceptional clean surfaces whose wear has been painted over, buffed, covered up, erased, and perfected. Within the temperature-controlled room, the desert air in one's mouth is replaced with filtered air conditioning. Shadows are fixed and minimized from the inert overheard lighting. Nothing is left to chance.

The work rests upon a large, elevated, sand-filled plinth whose exterior is painted white. The sandbox-like plinth operates as a simulacrum, referencing the desert environment the work originated from, abstracting the figure from the ground. It is a

level, homogenizing stage that the work sits upon, blending in with the museum's architecture. The plinth furthermore demarcates the space around the assemblage, creating an impenetrable barrier between the object and viewer. The window that once opened to a view of Joshua Trees, brush, and sand under an often blue sky now purviews a flat white wall. The viewer is permitted to look from a distance but is unable to step up, touch it, or peer into the work's colorful interior.

No Contest (Bicycles) contends with the constructs and violence of modernity through what Ingold calls surfacing both on-site and in the museum. Surfacing refers to the "engineering of the ground surface by coating it with a layer of hard and resistant material such as concrete or asphalt… or laying the foundations for urban development."[142] In doing so, surfacing converts the ground into an inert, level, and homogenized platform to become an "infrastructure upon which a superstructure of a city can be erected."[143] Hard surfaces comprise the built environment where life is lived on or above the ground rather than in. Modernity thus evinces a sense of groundlessness; the ground becomes a Kantian stage of acquiring and applying knowledge by detaching *No Contest (Bicycles)* from the ground and into the controlled museum environment, surfacing fractures the embodied relationship between humans, artwork, and Earth.[144]

As Purifoy turned to assemblage to protest perspective, in the act of respatialization, he turned further to the desert to protest the social and racial imbrications

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[142] Ingold, 126.

[143] Ingold, 126.

[144] Ingold, 126.

of the Los Angeles art scene. Reflecting upon his Outdoor Desert Art Museum in a 2002 interview with Joan Robey, Purifoy stated:

> "… It was in protest that the County Museum (LACMA) refused to show my work. And I thought it was good enough to go in there. And so, I wasn't conscious that it was done out of protest, but now that I have been consistent with an idea without knowing, it becomes something unique, something that somebody else hasn't done before."[145]

Considering assemblage as a medium that mirrors life, it was further codified through social space. While institutions such as LACMA, MOCA, and the Pasadena Art Museum garnered support in showcasing assemblage across the 1960s, granting artists such as Edward Kienholz, Robert Rauschenberg, and Joseph Cornell support and visibility through multiple career surveys, solo exhibitions, and retrospectives, as Jones notes, commercial galleries and museums were not interested in showing many Black or other artists of color's work, so many made their own.[146] At the time of his first and only living retrospective at California African American Museum in 1997, the LA Times art

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[145] Lipschutz, 181-182.

[146] In Chapters 2 and 3 of *South of Pico*, Jones traces the network of exhibitions, art spaces and artists working across assemblage, conceptual art and performance. While Seitz was creating a trans-regional discourse around the assemblage movement in New York, Walter Hopps brought the conversation to Los Angeles. Hopps served as the curator and director for the Pasadena Art Museum from 1959 to 1967; during his time there, he exhibited the first American retrospectives for Schwitters, Duchamp, and Joseph Cornell, as well as Rauschenberg's first mid-career survey. Known for his patronage of living artists, he helped bring Edward Keinholz and Ed Ruscha's careers to prominence. Together, Hopps and Kienholz established the Ferus Gallery along La Cienega Boulevard, which played a crucial role in hosting an array of working artists from Los Angeles between 1957 and 1966. They created a social space for experimental art practices within galleries and institutions. Just as Kaprow wrote "Assemblage, Environments, and Happenings" in 1966, Hopps' curatorial practice helped connect the improvisational nature of assemblage with conceptual and performative undertakings.

critic Christopher Knight noted at that point, neither MOCA nor LACMA had any of Purifoy's work in their collections.[147] Purifoy played a prominent role in the Los Angeles art scene for over half a century, yet his recognition at LACMA came over ten years after his death.

As Purifoy carved out space through his Outdoor Art Museum at the turn of the twenty-first century and the Watts Towers Arts Center in the 1960s, a myriad of art spaces and collectives in Los Angeles launched in between.[148] Alonzo and Dale Brockman Davis opened the commercial Brockman Gallery in Leimert Park Village in 1967, where Purifoy, Outterbridge, Saar, and Hammons exhibited, in addition to Judy Baca, Romare Bearden, Carrie Mae Weems, and Maren Hassinger, amongst many others, for over twenty years.[149] Like Purifoy, the Brockman brothers grew up in Tuskegee, Alabama, about a two-hour drive from Birmingham, and maintained careers as high school art teachers to support their endeavors. Between 1968 and 1970, Suzanne Jackson, a painter, dancer, and theater designer, ran Gallery 32, an experimental art space near the Otis Art Institute and Chouinard, to exhibit emerging Black artists, and promote community activism and socially engaged art.

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[147] Christopher Knight, "An Overlooked Journey," *Los Angeles Times*, 1994.

[148] Jones, "Building an Exhibitionary Complex," 139.

[149] For more information on the Brockman brothers, see: Lizzetta Le Falle-Collins, "The Brockman Gallery and the Village." KCET, March 2014. https://www.kcet.org/shows/departures/the-brockman-gallery-and-the-village.

Both the Brockman Gallery and Gallery 32 hosted events for the Black Arts Council, which formed in 1968, the same year that Hopps, Coplans, Leider, and Glicksman put together *Assemblage in California: Works from the Late '50s and early '60s.* The Black Arts Council had formed with the goal of promoting the visibility and inclusion of Black artists in Los Angeles institutions and galleries. It was founded by Claude Booker and Cecil Fergerson, who worked as art preparators at LACMA. The Black Arts Council's efforts led to LACMA's first exhibition showcasing work by Black artists titled "Three Graphic Artists: Charles White, David Hammons, Timothy Washington" in 1971, curated by Joseph E. Young. The following year, the council helped organize "Los Angeles 1972: A Panorama of Black Artists," a guest curated by Carroll Greene, Jr., which featured works by Purifoy, Outterbridge, Saar, and Hammons, amongst many others.[150]

[150] "Two Centuries of Black American Art at LACMA: Who's Who." Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Accessed May 7, 2022. https://www.lacma.org/two-centuries-black-american-artlacmawhoswho#:~:text=In%201971%2C%20LACMA%20mounted%20. Although this exhibition opportunity was commended for its representation of living artists, it was simultaneously subordinating as space was limited to a corridor gallery in what is now the Art Rental and Sale Gallery at LACMA. The same year that Betye Saar made *The Liberation of Aunt Jemina* and "Los Angeles 1972: A Panorama of Black Artists," exhibited at LACMA, the Chicano/x collective Asco made the work *Spray Paint LACMA* (1972) (also known as *Project Pie in De/Face*) as a form of institutional critique. The collective began in the late 1960s, formed by four members: Harry Gamboa Jr, Gronk (aka Guglio Nicandro) and Willie Herrón III, and Patssi Valdez staging No-Movies and guerilla street performances throughout the city.[150] Three of the members signed their names in spray paint on the museum entrance in response to a derogatory statement made by a LACMA curator about Chicano art and graffiti. By signing the wall of the entrance, Asco initiated a commentary about the lack of Chicano and Latin American representation in the museum. In the museum's subsequent act of removing their signatures, the museum further indicted itself in cultural erasure and absence, illustrating museums' at large fraught relationship with communities of color.

Notably, the Black Arts Council's efforts culminated in the landmark exhibition "Two Centuries of Black American Art" in 1976. The exhibition showcased two- and three-dimensional works of art by sixty-three artists spanning from 1750 to 1950. The goal of the exhibition was to help make visible underrepresented artists and artworks.[151] Twentieth-century artists Charles White, Jacob Lawrence, and Elizabeth Catlett were included, along with Alma Thomas, Selma Burke, and Horace Pippin were shown alongside unnamed artists dating back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Subsequently, the following year, the exhibition toured the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, Georgia; the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, Texas; and the Brooklyn Museum, New York, as the first major survey of African American art in the United States.

Recently, LACMA debuted the exhibition "Black American Portraits," creating a dialogue with "Two Centuries of Black American Art" by drawing upon approximately 140 works from the permanent collection from c.1800 to the present, moving beyond the fetishization of Black trauma to re-present narratives of empowerment, love, and togetherness during the eras of emancipation, the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, and 90's identity politics and present modes of representation. [152] By creating a temporal dialogue between the past and present, "Black American Portraits"

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[151] "Two Centuries of Black American Art." Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Accessed May 7, 2022. https://www.lacma.org/art/exhibition/two-centuries-black-american-art.

[152] "Black American Portraits." LACMA. Accessed May 12, 2022. https://www.lacma.org/art/exhibition/black-american-portraits.

signifies the importance of visibility representation and the re-presentation of cultural narratives that create future potentials.

As assemblage opened the way into environments and performances and video, David Hammons, along with Maren Hassinger, Senga Nengudi, and Ulysses Jenkins, formed loose collectives called Studio Z and Othervisions Studio in the 1970s and 80s. Taking place either in Hammon's studio or outside in public spaces, the improvisational nature of assemblage resonated through their performances, based on dance, movement, and the juxtapositions of video recordings with archival montage.[153] Nengudi further initiated the Freeway Fets in 1978 to explore the connection between bodies and place, hosting performances under freeway underpasses.

Just as collectives and galleries asserted space in Los Angeles, so too did new institutions. In 1973, the artists Carlos Bueno and Antonio Ibanez, along with Sister Karen Boccalero, founded Self Help Graphics & Art was established in the East Los Angeles neighborhood of Boyle Heights, promoting experimental and innovative forms of printmaking by Chicana/o/x and Latino/a/x artists at the intersection of art and activism. Three years later, near Leimert Park off Baldwin Hills and Crenshaw, Dr. Samella Lewis established The Museum of African American Art as a nonprofit 501(c)(3) to promote the representation of African American visual culture through an accessible and free platform for visitors.[154]

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[153] Donna Conwell and Glenn Phillips, "Duration Piece: Rethinking Sculpture in Los Angeles." In *Pacific Standard Time: Los Angeles Art, 1945-1980*, (Getty Research Institute and the J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011), 228-230.

[154] Samella, Lewis. "About MAAA." The Museum of African American Art. Accessed

In 1977, the California African American Museum (CAAM) was founded as a state-supported institution, formally opening its doors in 1981 and moving to its current location in Exposition Park in 1984. The African American architects Jack Haywood and Vince Proby designed its 44,000-square-foot building to showcase artistic, historical, and cultural exhibitions around the American West and African American diaspora.[155] In 1997, when Purifoy was eighty years old, he had his first and only living retrospective at CAAM. It was titled "Outside and In the Open" and curated by Lizetta LeFalle-Collins, the staff curator there. The exhibition brought together a mixture of his earlier assemblages from Watts with works such as *The Kirby Express* brought in from Joshua Tree. By asserting physical space for intellectual innovation and representation, these institutions cemented a framework of support and care for their artists and artworks, fostering sustainable models that are still in operation today.

May 12, 2022. https://www.maaala.org/about.html. Lewis was first an education coordinator at LACMA in 1968. Dissatisfied with the lack of African American representation regarding the staff and collections, she left to excel in academia and museum work. She was the first tenured African American professor at Scripps College in Claremont where she worked from 1969 until 1984 while serving as the curator of the Museum of African American Art until 1986. She has published numerous articles and volumes in addition to launching the academic journal *International Review of African American Art* and publishing house known as the Contemporary Crafts Gallery.

[155] "Mission and History." California African American Museum. Accessed May 12, 2022. https://caamuseum.org/about/mission-and-history-of-caam.

ARCHITECTURAL FOOTPRINTS OF FORM AND FUNCTION

This chapter concludes with a series of case studies that explore Purifoy's relationship to architecture in order to demonstrate how modernist design has the capacity to codify and re-imagine equitable spaces. Just as Tony Bennet contends with modern art museums' exploitative origins, modern architecture and design must contend with a racialized past.[156] When the Austrian architect and theorist Adolf Loos wrote "Ornamentation and Crime" in 1908, he equated Semitism and Blackness with ornamentation, or excess, as a derogatory espousal while heralding minimal, unadorned design to cultural and aesthetic superiority.[157] As the scholar Lisa Uddin states, "this particular design vocabulary has nourished specific racial identities and opportunities, functioning not only as an aesthetic violence against minoritized people who disidentified with the conventions of white bourgeoise heteropatriarchy but also as an exercise of biopower."[158] Purifoy's *No Contest (Bicycles)* suggests a reference to modernist design through its minimal footprint, along with the interplay of geometric angles: the moderately slanted roof intersects at varying degrees a series of metal cables that cascade sharply into the ground while re-framing excess through his use of discarded materials, linkin-log decorum, and brightly painted interior and nonsensical bicycles on the roof. Through his use of locally repurposed and industrial materials, he further references a

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[156] For further reading on art museums and modernity, see: Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex," *In The Birth of the Museum*, (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge. 2013), 70–104.

[157] See: Adolf Loos, *Ornament and Crime*, (Penguin Books Limited, 2019).

[158] Uddin, 312.

sense of place through California's mid-century modernism and asserts space for ornamentation.

Mid-century modernism was characterized in both public and private residences by indoor-outdoor living, informal open layouts, flat and clean-cut surfaces and shapes, rectilinear lines and volumes, large windows, and open staircases. The utopic intonations of this particular modernism are evinced throughout Los Angeles and the Mojave, with Purifoy's work standing as both point and counterpoint. This aesthetic was epitomized through a series of Case Study Houses, a postwar architectural initiative undertaken from 1945- to 1966, primarily in the Hollywood Hills, ranging eastward to Pasadena and westward to Santa Monica along Chautauqua Boulevard.[159] The Case Study House Program was initiated in 1945 by *Arts & Architecture* magazine, and John Entenza, in particular, a designer and editor for the publication; sponsored prominent architects to design simplified, compact, experimental residences using low-cost stock or donated materials from industry manufacturers with designs by Charles Eames, Eero Saarinen, Richard Neutra, and Julius Ralph Davidson, amongst others. The wooden framework in *No Contest (bicycles)* suggests a dialogue with Richard Neutra's elemental woodwork characterized by his wood beam slanted ceilings, exteriors, and overhangs. Neutra's woodwork is exemplified through the 1945 Omega Case Study House no. 6., no. 13 Alpha House in 1946, and no. 20 Bailey House in 1947-48.[160]

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[159] See: Elizabeth A.T. Smith, *Case Study Houses*, (Köln: Taschen, 2017).

[160] Smith, 19, 35, 43. Case Studies No. 6 and 13 went unbuilt, however, architectural plans and renderings exist. No. 20 is fully realized and was built along Chautauqua Boulevard.

Perhaps the most iconic case study is the 1959-60 Stahl House no.22 by Pierre by Koenig on Woods Drive in West Hollywood. Stahl House exemplifies the most minimal designs with an L-shaped blueprint, a concrete foundation, and steel beams to support glass walls, which has an extraordinarily light-handed touch.[161] Captured by the photographer Julius Shulman, Shulman's black and white photograph depicts the interstice of the two glass walls jutting out, creating a dramatic interplay of geometric angles while groundlessly overlooking the city lights at night. Inside, two women sit in mid-century modern designed living room chairs. To see and be seen, the glass house encases the penultimate vantage point. Just as Panofsky notes that perspective functions as an abstraction of physiological reality, the fixed viewpoint from Stahl house codifies the socio-geographic hierarchy of space, accessible only to a select few while looking down on the masses below. The Case Study initiative both problematizes modern design through its inaccessibility yet attempts to utilize cast-off and excess materials to promote low-cost housing options.

The paradoxical Case Study Program exemplifies Purifoy's own experience upon attempting to enter the field of architecture and design. After graduating from Chouinard in the 1950s and before his term at the Watts Towers Arts Center in the 1960s, Purifoy had a brief career in design and fabrication.[162] He worked at the Los Angeles-based firm Chaffin Interior Designs on Wilshire as a window trimmer. Cannell and Chaffin was a

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[161] Smith, 68- 71.

[162] Lipschutz, 10-16.

prominent design firm located at 3000 Wilshire Boulevard along the “miracle mile,” catering to Hollywood clientele in addition to Ella Fitzgerald, Richard Nixon, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in its opening days.[163] While there, Purifoy sought upward mobility; he worked extra hours on the weekends and, despite not being allowed to interact with customers, did so anyway to increase rapport; however, he was terminated from his position for doing so.[164]

He was then hired at Angelus Furniture Warehouse to design furniture, but the company refused to manufacture his work, moving him into a different position in machine operation. Between 1956 and 1964, he set up furniture for window displays at the Broadway Department store but again flatlined from any upward mobility. During that time, Purifoy partnered up with John H. Smith, a more established fellow Black alumni from Chouinard, in interior design but the partnership dissipated for various reasons.[165] As Purifoy has stated, “It’s been said that I’m a frustrated architect.”[166] Though his career in architecture and design did not play out conventionally, his applied knowledge is evidenced throughout his works in Joshua Tree through scale, materials, and form.

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[163] Lipschutz, 9; see also: https://archive.architecturaldigest.com/article/1965/12/los-angeles-county-museum-of-art).

[164] Uddin, 311.

[165] Uddin, 312.

[166] Sirmans, Lipschutz, et al., 53.

Many, such as Purifoy, live around Joshua Tree because it is quiet, affordable, and for artists, provides ample space for experimentation. [167] Yet, the pervasiveness of utopian modernism has infiltrated the Mojave by means of the "Joshua Tree aesthetic," not only a filter but an imagined way of life replete with increasingly gentrified Airbnbs buying out land and warm, sun-washed nostalgia. The Joshua Tree aesthetic is exemplified by the 2020 Invisible House by architect Tomas Osinski and the producer of American Psycho, Chris Hanley.[168] The Invisible House is a one-hundred-foot-long rectangular prism made entirely from mirrored glass that reflects the landscape while encasing in a sterile vacuum those within to lookout, reminiscent of Stahl House and Philip Johnson's 1949 Glass House. The house sits on ninety acres right of land next to the national park, deemed by Airbnb as a "horizontal skyscraper," the luxury rental costs over $4000 a night and more for events.[169]

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[167] Andrea Zittel. "Az-West." AZ-West. Accessed May 12, 2022. https://www.zittel.org/az-west. Such endeavors are exemplified by Andrea Zittel's *A-Z West* (2003), a series of built compact compounds, sleepers, and living spaces on eighty acres of land next to Joshua Tree National Park. Drawing upon modernist design, her work probes questions of homogeneity in modern capitalist life, building minimally evasive in contrast to single-dwelling homes and suburban layouts. She credits Purifoy's desert experimentation to her conception of High Desert Test Sites, a nonprofit arts institution that supports and stewards practices that delineate between art and everyday life within the local landscape.

[168] Itziar Narro, "American Psycho Producer Conceptualises an Invisible House in California." *Architectural Digest,* 2020. https://www.architecturaldigest.in/content/american-psycho-producer-conceptualises-invisible-glass-house-california/.

[169] See: https://www.airbnb.com/rooms/45054521?source_impression_id=p3_1652082524_1qbpHtY7PH1Rdyqa&check_in=2022-06-20&guests=1&adults=1&check_out=2022-06-21)

Just as assemblage opens new perspectives, architecture has the capacity to further isolate or bring people together in new spaces. While the Invisible House and Case Study Program are accessible to a privileged few, artists such as Andrea Zittel, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Theaster Gates, Tyree Guyton, and David Hammons have utilized architectural forms to provoke alternative modes of living, probing into everyday life on individual and collective registers.[170] Looking at Hammons' *House of the Future* (1991), which precedes Purifoy's *No Contest (bicycles),* the structures are in dialogue with one another through their narrow forms and use of cast-off materials exemplifying each artist's engagement with particular design vocabularies that are indexical of place and localized affect.[171]

Originally from Illinois, Hammons has a bi-coastal career in Los Angeles and New York, schooled at Los Angeles Technical Trade College, Otis College of Art and Design, and later Cal Arts. Hammons' *House of the Future* was constructed as part of the 1991 exhibition "Place with a Past: New Site-Specific Art in Charleston," South

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[170] On Theaster Gates's *Dorchester Projects* (2012) in Chicago, see: https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/may/03/theaster-gates-artist-chicago-dorchester-projects. Regarding Tyree Guyton's *Heidelberg Project* in Detroit, made in the 1980s and still stands today; Guyton's Heidelberg Project encompasses an entire neighborhood street of junk art and assemblage sculptures, spreading across lawns and houses as an everyday space see: https://www.heidelberg.org/history. Lastly, on Rirkrit Tiravanija's exhibition for the Hugo Boss prize in 2004 in which he creates DuChamp-esque dynamic spaces to enter and participate see: "Hugo Boss Prize 2004: Rirkrit Tiravanija." The Guggenheim Museums and Foundation. Accessed May 12, 2022. https://www.guggenheim.org/exhibition/hugo-boss-prize2004-rirkrit-tiravanija.

[171] Lipschutz, 172: In her dissertation, Lipschutz briefly establishes the connection between Purifoy's *No Contest (Bicycles)* and Hammons' *House of the Future but* does not go into detail beyond their formal similarities and basic exhibition information.

Carolina. With the help of local contractors, Hammons constructed *House of the Future* with materials from local demolition and scrapyards on an unused lot at the corner of America Street and Reid in a predominantly African American neighborhood.

Made in reference to the Charleston Single House, a residential-style of architecture particular to Charleston since the turn of the eighteenth century when the roads and neighborhoods were built.[172] The Single House is characteristically long, in-depth, and narrow to accommodate lot size with little street frontage, essentially turned sideways to the street. Their narrow frameworks range from single to multiple stories and are adorned with house-length piazzas as spaces to come together, supported by columns and often pale blue paint atop the ceilings that reflects the outdoors. The focal point of the piazza, with each story often accompanied by one, signifies the importance of gathering, in particular outdoors with a warm climate that can be used almost year-round. Common throughout Charleston, also adapted for public housing in the 1980s.

Hammon's *House of the Future* both mirrors and exaggerates the architectural style of the Charleston Single House through its narrow, six-foot-wide footprint and two-story framework. Unlike the traditional sideways placement, Hammon's House is built diagonally on its corner lot, gesturing toward a park, church, and corner store across the street, places that both common and signify togetherness, places to gather and commune. In the park, his installation continues across the street with a flagpole that bears the American flag with Pan-African flag colors of red, green, and black to signify African

[172] Robert Russell, "Buildings, Manners and Laws: The Charleston Single House As a Definer of Urban Form and Shaper of City Life." *Carolina Planning Journal,* 24, no. 2 (1999), 11-17. https://doi.org/10.17615/ydks-hn78.

American identities, both pluralized and unified. A billboard is adjacent that depicts a black and white image of local African American students gazing upward, positioned so that their collective gaze points toward the flag. Hammons utilizes the pre-plotted parcel of land to re-frame notions of home, design, and gesture towards spaces of togetherness to call attention to how people navigate through spaces and with one another.

CONCLUSION

The Noah Purifoy Outdoor Desert Art Museum departs from conventional modern institutions through open access year-round and accessibility by donation-based admission. There are no walls, fences, or gates to enclose his site, thus delineating spatial boundaries between in- and exteriority. His works on-site challenge notions of preciousness through their discarded materiality while not encased in a private collection or temperature-controlled setting; instead, they contend with chance, with the entropic processes of nature, inviting those who visit to meander through and learn about Purifoy's story.

Purifoy's Outdoor Desert Art Museum resists erasure, manipulation, and distortion through personal and collective lived experience as told visually, spatially, and orally, as well as through physical scale and site. In 1998, when Purifoy was 81 years old, he reached out to a longtime friend, Richard Cándida-Smith, and divulged that he wanted to start a nonprofit foundation to assist in the preservation of his works, site maintenance, and outreach in community arts and arts education.[173] He asked Cándida-Smith to serve as founding president, to which he agreed, with Sue Welsh as secretary-treasurer, and in 1999, the Noah Purifoy Foundation was officially established as a 501(c)3 non-profit

[173] Cándida-Smith, 1-3. Cándida-Smith Smith knew Purifoy for ten years, through organizing an oral history series around African American artists in Los Angeles in addition to writing a catalog essay for Purifoy's retrospective at CAAM in 1997. Recently, in 2009, he published *The Modern Moves West: California Artists and Democratic Culture in the Twentieth Century,* that includes a chapter on Purifoy's administrative impact while heading the California Arts Council in the 1970s and 80s.

private foundation.[174] They sought out recognized artists to help endorse the foundation; subsequently, Joe Lewis and Ed Ruscha joined the board of trustees at the start of the new millennia.[175] While Lewis took over as president after Cándida Smith in 2001, Ruscha assisted the foundation in purchasing the initial 2.5-acre plot Purifoy had started on. In addition, Ruscha purchased and then donated the adjacent lots to the Foundation, culminating in ten total acres for Purifoy to continue his practice and expand his site.[176]

The Noah Purifoy Foundation's main priority is to preserve Purifoy's legacy by maintaining the site and the works within as a "permanent cultural center" accessible and open to the public. Although Purifoy is no longer here to walk the site with visitors site and pass down oral histories, his legacy prevails through various forms of outreach, including the Urban Arts Initiative program, which provides middle school students and teachers from across Southern California access to curated and narrated tours of his site and story.

In conclusion, this project has demonstrated how particular works within Purifoy's Outdoor Desert Art Museum contend with space, place, and perspective to re-spatialize notions of the art museum and artistic practices. In doing so, Purifoy allows affect and chance to seep into his constructions, materials, and arrangements in order to

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[174] Cándida-Smith 1-3. Welsh and Purifoy had known each other for nearly four decades at this point, they had worked together at the Watts Towers Arts Center in the 1960s and worked on *66 Signs of Neon* together as well. Welsh helped with day-to-day operations to ensure his legacy.

[175] Joseph S. Lewis III is a nationally known artist, arts administrator, educator, and author, former Dean of the Claire Trevor School of the Arts from 2010 to 2014.

[176] Cándida-Smith, 5.

challenge modernist constraints. While his memory work confronts and re-presents spatial negations, constrictions, and isolations, such as redlining, segregation, and various forms of inequity, his environmental assemblages re-present narratives, utilizing the power of storytelling as a spatial practice as each work within his site links to a temporal past, present, and future.

List of Images

Figure 1. Noah Purifoy, *Bessemer Steel*, 1998, mixed media, dimensions approximately 192 by 144 by 80 inches, Outdoor Desert Art Museum in Joshua Tree, California.

Figure 2. Noah Purifoy, *No Contest (bicycles),* 1991, mixed media, 168 x 252 x 24 inches, Outdoor Desert Art Museum in Joshua Tree, California.

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