

SHARITA TOWNE



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Black Life, Black Spatial Imaginaries: Glimpses Across Time and Space, A Visual Bibliography (detail), 2018–2019

Mixed process print
Research and concept with Lisa K. Bates
Printed with Watershed Center for Fine Art Publishing and Research

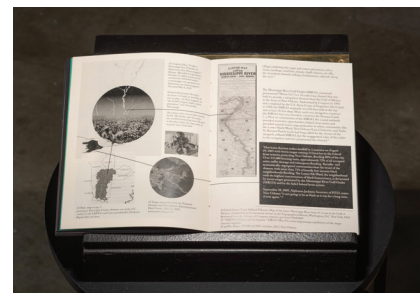
Photo: Mario Gallucci

Alluvium: collective thinking and writing for Black Life, Black Spatial Imaginaries: Glimpses Across Time and Space, A Visual Bibliography, 2018–2019

Book
8¼ x 6½ in
Research and concept with Lisa K. Bates with original written contributions from Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Derrais Carter, Katherine McKittrick, LaShandra Sullivan, Shana Griffin, and Treva Ellison
Designed by Sharita Towne with Garima Thakur
Printed at Eberhardt Press, bound at Container Corps

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Installation view



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Installation view

Dimensions variable

Research and concept with Lisa K. Bates

Printed with Watershed Center for Fine Art Publishing and Research

BLACK AS SEED, BLACK AS SOIL

by Ashley Stull Meyers

Contemporary art is first and foremost concerned with expanding or altogether eschewing notions of form as introduced by the canon. Its practitioners and their works endlessly theorize about the value of containers. How do we break open the confines of static media, and instead allow our creative impulses a vehicle as fluid as the landscape it addresses? Sharita Towne exercises true vision in this manner of thought. Her work's chosen form is the city itself, her medium the Black community. She doesn't mold either, but culls the material resources for viscosity and sustainability. Her practice is one that centers collaborative principles. Her immediate and extended family, the houses where they've grown, and the land within which they've buried the ones they've lost, are her most treasured source material and living archive.

Sustainability is an increasingly fragile concept in 2020. We see it in conversation about environmentalism, labor, and survival. It's a concept marketed to us on the scale of issues that are make or break for the planet on the whole. But Towne, diligent and focused, knows that for Black communities, a different kind of sustainability starts "at home." It is a concept she applies to her practice of community care—to intimately know one's neighbors and acknowledge all Black folks throughout the diaspora as "cousin." The sustainability embedded in her work is a seed for a micro-ecology of Black thought, makership, and resource gathering. Her practice, at once the best of material and conceptual, leverages the idealism of those that support "art" (and the often very real privilege and exposure that accompanies that support) to provide her community what it needs—tangibly and spiritually.

What Towne creates visually can often be described as an environment. Her exhibitions and gatherings are punctuated equally by her print works as they are the people who have coalesced around them as collaborators or friends bearing witness. Where it concerns the Pacific Northwest, public imagination is quick to repeat generational grumblings detailing

the region's history as a haven for white supremacy—and the Black and brown bodies that have been subject to forced diaspora. But what this narrative troublingly leaves out are the stories of the many Black families that have inhabited this land for generations, and will continue to. Towne has intimate knowledge of that narrative—she is herself a product of that resilience and refused invisibility.

In the name of combatting erasure, many of her works (prints and otherwise) function as maps dedicated to the Black and Indigenous love and labor that made this landscape possible. She traces the timelines and footprints of those who have inhabited Oregon, existing in full, joyous, and generative ways, but whose contributions too often take a back seat to racial indignity. Towne's works are a new kind of land acknowledgment. They state, at maximum volume, that the creativity and politics of the Black community is unmatched and immune to restraint. They construct public remembrance not just around pain, but acts of commitment, nurture, and humor. The poetically acronymed BLERG (Black Life Experiential Research Group), BAEP (Black Arts Ecology Portland), URe:AD Press (United Re:Public of the African Diaspora) past and current collaborative projects of which she is a founder, have been working groups larger than the sum of their parts. They have been reminders of the value of bringing art into the spaces where non-white communities truly live—and detailing other ways to exist. Their collaborators show us the art of thriving where power doesn't want you—be it in deep, rural connection to the land, or frenetic, influential connection to urban cultural space. The results are a new kind of cinematic short story—Black family and agency in starring roles.

Towne chose the inscription, "For Us," as the dedication for one of many publications she has produced and distributed on the subject of Black life in the Pacific Northwest and beyond. This inscription, simple and yet beautifully weighted, is the signature sentiment for her practice as a whole.

BAEP Takes Place, 2020
Installation view
Mixed media



Artists attending *Black (Working Title)*, 2017
Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR
Photo: Intisar Abioto



Left and above
URe:AD Press in Cleveland, 2017
Installation view
Mixed media

SHARITA TOWNE

b. 1984. Lives and works in Portland, Oregon

2019 Hallie Ford Fellow

Sharita Towne is a transdisciplinary artist born and raised on the West Coast of the U.S. along I-5—from Salem to Tacoma and down to Sacramento. She creates interdisciplinary community art projects that engage local and global Black geographies, histories and possibilities. She has received awards and support from Art Matters, Open Signal, and Creative Capital. Towne holds a Bachelor of Arts from the University of California, Berkeley in Interdisciplinary Studies & Art, and a Master of Fine Arts from Portland State University in Contemporary Art Practices. Exhibitions include *You in Mind*, Converge 45, and the Portland 2019 Biennial, Disjecta Contemporary Art Center, in Portland, Oregon; *Out of Sight*, King St. Station, Seattle, Washington; Brooklyn Museum, New York, New York.

Hallie Brown was born in 1905, outside of Tulsa, in Indian Territory that would become the state of Oklahoma. She supported herself as she earned a bachelor's degree at East Central University and taught in Oklahoma before her parents moved their family to rural Oregon. In 1935 Hallie married Kenneth W. Ford and together they established Roseburg Lumber Company in the midst of the Great Depression.

Hallie Ford was drawn to art all her life, specifically the accessibility of artmaking. She took classes with the painter Carl Hall at Willamette University in Salem, and painting became a central part of her life. Her philanthropy established and supported key Oregon visual art museums and universities.

After Hallie's death in 2007, The Ford Family Foundation's Board of Directors honored our co-founder by establishing a Visual Arts Program. The first element of this program was the Hallie Ford Fellowships in the Visual Arts, awarded since 2010. Through these unrestricted fellowships, we seek to make significant awards to visual artists who have worked to establish their voice and craft.

Another of our goals is to help support the ecology that builds connections and capacity in the visual arts community of our state. As the Fellows become the focus of exhibitions throughout the world, they bring more attention and support to their Oregon peers. We are certain that Hallie Ford would be pleased to see how both individual artists and the visual arts community in Oregon have flourished since the establishment of this program in her honor.

We could not be more excited each year to bring new Hallie Ford Fellows into this family, and to share their work with you.

Anne C. Kubisch
President, The Ford Family Foundation

The Hallie Ford Fellowships are the flagship element of The Ford Family Foundation Visual Arts Program. The Foundation commits to an ongoing relationship with our Fellows through exhibition support, convenings, and professional development opportunities. In addition, the Visual Arts Program offers grants to visual artists for unanticipated career opportunities; supports artists-in-residence programs in Oregon and nationally; brings curators and arts writers from outside the region to Oregon for studio visits and community dialogue; commissions arts writing and publication; supports exhibitions, catalogues and other forms of documentation for Oregon artists; and awards grants to enhance exhibition spaces.

The Foundation is pleased to partner with the Oregon Arts Commission, University of Oregon, Pacific Northwest College of Art (PNCA), Portland State University, Reed College, Portland Institute for Contemporary Art (PICA), Creative Capital, Native Arts and Cultures Foundation, United States Artists, and the artists and visual arts organizations of our state.

The Ford Family Foundation was established in 1957 by Kenneth W. and Hallie E. Ford. Its mission is "successful citizens and vital rural communities" in Oregon and Siskiyou County, California. The Foundation is located in Roseburg, Oregon, with a Scholarship office in Eugene. For more information about the Foundation and its Visual Arts Program, visit www.tfff.org.



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