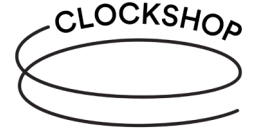


# the underpinning

Rodrigo Valenzuela

December 9, 2023 – March 24, 2024  
Los Angeles State Historic Park



*the underpinning*, a Clockshop public art commission by artist Rodrigo Valenzuela, serves as both a sculptural installation and a stage for public programming in Los Angeles State Historic Park. Mimicking the foundation of a home, this structure is informed by the standardized government housing of the artist's childhood in Chile and the site's proximity to William Mead Homes, a city-operated public housing project.

Situated on contested public land that serves immigrant and working-class neighborhoods, *the underpinning* reflects on the precarity of home while contemplating modularity and possibility in its construction. It also assumes overlapping temporalities, blurring between a stage for performance, an unfinished house, and a sculpture. With multiple viewing and entry points, the installation renders indistinguishable the interiority and exteriority of a home to disrupt the distinctions between public and private property, and modes of ownership.

Through the manual processes of fabrication using techniques acquired during his tenure as a construction worker, Valenzuela makes visible the presence of the worker, the unseen laborer, that undergirds the dynamics of class consciousness in this project. The bas-reliefs of the foundation are composite references to ancient and recent histories and imagined futuristic civilizations. Modular canvas partitions embedded throughout the foundation reconfigure the structure for each programmatic activation, mimetic to a living home always in progress. Valenzuela demarcates a territory undefined by linear time or spatial designation for the viewer's interpretation of home and belonging.

*the underpinning* interrogates the social aspects of our built environments through programming that traces architectural histories of the working class and examines contemporary tensions between affordable housing and public, green space in Los Angeles.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Rodrigo Valenzuela (b. Santiago, Chile 1982) lives and works in Los Angeles, CA, where he is an associate professor and heads the Photography Area in the Department of Art at UCLA. He works across photography, video, painting, and installation at the intersection of art history and architecture. Valenzuela examines his own relationships to labor and working-class identities, and excavates narratives built within the tensions of social cohesion between the individual and communities. Valenzuela has been awarded the Guggenheim Fellowship in Photography and Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship, Joan Mitchell Painters and Sculptors Grant, Art Matters Foundation Grant, and Artist Trust Arts Innovators Award. He recently exhibited at the Center for Maine Contemporary Art and Asya Geisberg Gallery.

## PROGRAMS

### Opening Reception & Artist Talk

with Rodrigo Valenzuela and Manuel Shvartzberg Carrió  
Saturday, December 9, 2023  
Los Angeles State Historic Park

### Conversation

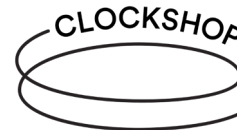
with Sissy Trinh and Molly Rysman  
Moderated by Theresa Hwang  
Saturday, January 27, 2024  
Los Angeles State Historic Park

### Spanish-language Walk-through

Led by Rodrigo Valenzuela  
English interpretation available  
Saturday, February 24, 2024  
Los Angeles State Historic Park

### Reading & Listening by Moonrise

Sunday, March 24, 2024  
Los Angeles State Historic Park



## ARTIST REFERENCES

Artist Rodrigo Valenzuela was raised in Santiago, Chile, in a government-subsidized housing project where he resided with his family—his mother, a retail clerk, and his father, a union organizer and postal worker. Valenzuela recalls that these buildings, or “poblaciones,” were populated by public employees in a cooperative format, which generated a community akin to that of a microcosm or small city, complete with replicated socio-economic stratifications. In their budget-conscious design, this project shared a set of standard unit plans, rendered identical to one another in layout. As a means of placemaking, resident families individualized their spaces through decoration. For *the underpinning*, the bas-reliefs of the foundation’s bricks that reference the aesthetics of modern architecture, Mesoamerican geometries, and futuristic civilizations are one way for Valenzuela, in the position of artist and laborer, to ornament the structure materially and psychologically.

An alternative format to the projects Valenzuela grew up in, the artist also references a social housing series in Chile colloquially known as “Half a House” by architectural firm Elemental. The two-story houses are split in two, with one side fully constructed while the other is a frame that can be built out by the resident later, if desired. The concept balances affordable construction conformity with an intentional design that centers the residents as co-creators.

The environment of *the underpinning* orients public space as contingent upon the constitution and consciousness of the working class, challenging the exclusionary public infrastructure that exists in Los Angeles. Conceived as frames of two houses collapsing in on each other, the rooms hold no specific function or designation, which invites the viewer to experience and conceive a psychic space where many modalities and uses are possible. In the configuration’s open-endedness and the movement of canvas wall partitions, Valenzuela imposes the laborer’s conception of time and space. Through both the artist’s labor-intensive process of fabricating the installation and the viewer’s positionality atop a foundation—the common denominator upon which all structures are established—one stands witness to construction-in-process and the lived realities of the oft-unrecognized worker.

## ARTIST READING LIST

*Fight Like Hell: The Untold History of American Labor*  
Kim Kelley, 2022

*No Shortcuts: Organizing for Power in the New Gilded Age*  
Jane F. McAlevey, 2016

*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*  
Paulo Freire, 1970

*Remaking Society*  
Murray Bookchin, 1989

*Sleeping Giant*  
Tamara Draut, 2016

## ABOUT CLOCKSHOP

Clockshop works with artists to deepen the connection between communities and public land, in order to build a shared vision of a future based in belonging and care. As a Los Angeles-based arts nonprofit, we produce free public programming and commission contemporary artist projects at Los Angeles State Historic Park in Chinatown, and Rio de Los Angeles State Park (“The Bowtie”) in Glassell Park, in collaboration with California State Parks. We cannot do this without acknowledging that the land we occupy was originally and still is inhabited and cared for by the Native First Peoples of this region. Read our full statement and how we are going beyond land acknowledgment on our website under “Location and Land Acknowledgement.”

[www.clockshop.org](http://www.clockshop.org)  
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