

POR EL RÍO

Christopher Suarez

WITH Carlos Agredano,
Diana Yesenia Alvarado,
and timo fahler

September 29, 2024–January 25, 2025
Los Angeles State Historic Park

Por El Río traces the visual languages and utilities of the Los Angeles River (Paayme Paxaayt) and 710 Freeway parallel at the convergence of land and city. Often working in clay miniatures of built environments central to immigrant communities, Suarez designs a site for gathering at an interpersonal, human scale. Together, the artists produce a series of functional architectures that investigate personal and civic geographic histories and the traces they leave behind.

The artists, each with roots along the north-south corridor that terminates at Long Beach, consider the uneven and residual racial and ecological harms caused by the expansions of modern transit infrastructure. The channelized river, a flood control project built to direct inflow into the ocean, and the 710, a major throughline designed for regional connection, both catalyze dislocations of people and wildlife. *Por El Río* mines these sites of severance to suggest how new social ecologies might form through conscious reconstruction.

Through interpreted reproductions of civic infrastructural elements like public benches, traffic barriers, and freeways, the artists' "benches" span registers of material inquiry and utility—two of which can be sat on, one leaned on, and one laid under. In iterations and variations, collections of found organic objects and sourced industrial materials are compressed, cast, and inscribed upon to improvise the ways people and wildlife adapt interstitial spaces for shade, leisure, and life. The benches are positioned in formal and suggestive configurations, facing one another to invite congregation and staggered to capture singularity. Through community building workshops, the artists will invite the public to cocreate complementary structures. A foil to the physical and psychic boundaries of hostile architecture, *Por El Río* forges emergent structural conditions for connection in public space.

PROGRAMS

Opening Reception & Artist Walkthrough
Sunday, September 29, 2024

Community Build Days
Sunday, October 27, 2024
Saturday, December 14, 2024

Closing Reception
Saturday, January 25, 2024

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."



ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Christopher Suarez (b. 1994) is an artist born, raised, and based in Long Beach, CA. Foundational to Suarez's work are examinations of his personal and familial memories of home, the histories of place, and the ways they are lived vis-à-vis built environments. He employs clay and mixed media sculptures to simultaneously celebrate immigrant working-class communities' aesthetic and cultural identities and to reveal their precarious state.

Carlos Agredano (b. 1998) is an artist from Southeast Los Angeles. He uses readymade and process-based artworks to record and reveal environmental racism, such as paintings documenting the cumulative buildup of pollutants and smog on surfaces or found objects such as dust-caked window air conditioners. In his research practice, Agredano interrogates how policies like redlining and private racially restrictive covenants enabled freeway construction and manufactured air pollution disparities in racially diverse, low-income neighborhoods.

Diana Yesenia Alvarado (b. 1992) explores mythologies, archetypes, and cultural histories through earthen materials. Her work encompasses abstract sculptures, figurative explorations, and animated creations that embody narratives both personal and mystical. Through manipulating form, vibrant colors, and intricate techniques, Alvarado creates works that serve as cultural reflections.

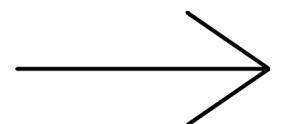
timo fahler (b. 1978) is a Los Angeles-based artist using steel, glass, plaster, wood, and found objects to construct culturally significant works that celebrate and reconsider multicultural aesthetics in America. His practice is inspired by science fiction, historical texts, and comparative mythology. Through rebar drawings, glass compositions, and plaster replicas of body and earth, he invokes familial relationships to manual labor and presents alternative narratives.

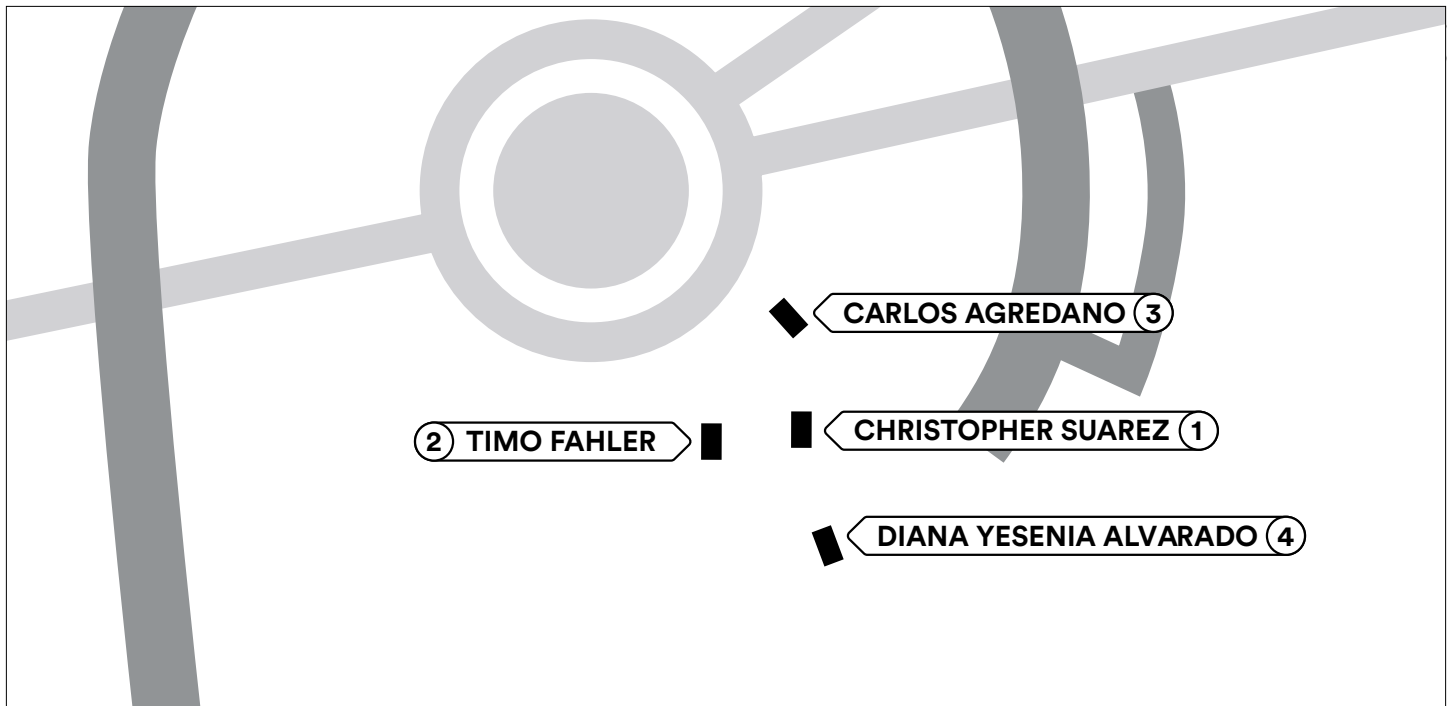
ARTIST REFERENCES

Concrete is embedded into the visual texture of Los Angeles, having been embraced by architects for its pragmatism, its economy, and its allusion to power and progress in the West in the 20th century. The city's decentralized spatial identity, largely dictated by automobile-driven sprawl, reveals concrete's instrumentalization in architected principles of demolition and construction as inextricable from its model of reorienting and ordering bodies in space.

The channelized river and the freeway system are two public works projects that have come to dominate the lived and symbolic realities of our urban landscape. The river's courses, for millennia undefined across the basin's natural floodplains, were straightened and concretized by the US Army Corps of Engineers to protect the industrial capital investment flanking its embankments from flooding, the consequences of which continue to affect the relationship between life and access to the river. The freeways, similarly funded by tax-payer dollars, outline socioeconomic disparities by partitioning upper-class neighborhoods from working-class communities that are routinely subject to right-of-way displacement and coercion in their perpetual extensions. These projects beget an architecture of containment whose configuration relies on the equation of human life and ecology as material that systemizes the fracturing of communal networks.

The artists in *Por El Río* use the conceit of a public park bench to broach the possibilities of people-forward civic design, filling a dearth in a park where few opportunities for shade, seating, and gathering exist. In doing so, they participate in a tradition of interventions by marginalized communities, adapting infrastructure to suit their needs for survival and mutuality. In this project, the utility of the bench is contorted and stretched to the limits of signification; the four benches' contours amalgamate, each infused with the personal references of its designer. They are, however, united through a dialogue with materiality, wherein the materials become willful actors in the conceptual and corporeal lives of these structures. Concrete becomes a core anchor, either by way of direct reference or physical implementation, hinting at its inseparability from an Angeleno psychology.





1. **Christopher Suarez** weaves a narrative that collapses encoded binaries of the manmade and natural by layering modes of construction, orienting matter and material as inextricable from their lived contexts. While the privatization of land and concrete banks of the river thwarted the excavation of local clay, the use of commercial earth echoes the contradictions of a developed river. Using a process of rammed earth—an ancient technique wherein raw materials and a stabilizer are compacted into a formwork—soil, clay, and water solidify into the base of the bench.

As if part of a meditative ritual, Suarez walked and biked the river to collect and assemble the debris that accumulates there. He encountered sun-baked clothes, paper ephemera, and objects from his childhood era that prompted interpretations of their potential origins and points of contact. In contrast to concrete’s perception as impermeable to time, rammed earth—and the embedded relics he’s collected—weathers naturally. Suarez juxtaposes wood and bricks with temporal materials to develop a structural language of precarity, signaling his attempts towards the preservation and reconciliation of personal and communal histories as an archival document.

2. **timo fahler’s** structure is framed by a rebar armature modeled on a Jersey barrier, also known as a k-rail, a concrete or plastic divider used to separate traffic lanes and moderate damage in head-on collisions. They delineate social and abstracted borders, and when affixed with a chain link fence, they signal exclusionary practices in urban planning, having become common sights at border crossings, unhoused encampments, and the boundaries of public parks. fahler recognizes the binaristic nature of the object, existing as both a tool for protection and a means of keeping people in/out. As one link untethered from a catena, its function is neutralized as an obstruction; it may be leaned

against on either side. Limestone and gypsum are used in place of concrete in a casting process activated in the river channel, where the chemicals, discard, and alluvium of the river unify in function, and the distinctions between them erode in the flow.

3. In public parks, as in controlled-access highways, regulation manifests as gradients of the intolerable. Communities that have been walled in by freeway projects live daily with the realities of toxicity, subdivision, and displacement; their green spaces are traded for miles of cement and blacktop, as is true of his neighborhood, shadowed by the 710. **Carlos Agredano’s** cross section of a freeway overpass rescales and compounds symbols of hostile architecture; it is a bench unable to be sat upon in a park bare of shade structures. Rendered essentially nonfunctional as seating, it invites the creative placemaking modeled by the people who repurpose the space beneath or above freeway stack exchanges as a commons, whether as shelter or protest.
4. Before the city, before the skyline, the ecology of the watershed was lush, replete with coastal sage and grasslands and overlapping habitat areas. As in her ceramic works where heat gives form to clay, **Diana Yesenia Alvarado** alchemizes the essences of land and riparian flora and fauna into a chimeric emblem. An image of hybridized symbols of wildlife endemic to the river corridor acts as both an inventory of loss and a gesture to honor those species that remain. The design is printed on the reclined backrest angled toward the sky, its dimensions taken after the benches in Guadalajara’s Parque Rojo designed by Luis Barragán, an architect whose concrete houses defined Mexican modernism. Alvarado transposes the land memory between park spaces across nations and over borders, reimagining it in Los Angeles in an offering for meditation.