

## THE SOIL

My training and artistic practice are rooted in a particular time at a small CSU state school, in Sacramento California. In the early 2000s, while earning a B.A. and M.A. in studio art, I worked closely with some seminal American Artist. Artist, such as [Stephen J. Kaltenbach](#), whom many Art Historians have suggested is the grandfather of American Conceptual art. Steve worked closely with Eva Hesse, Bruce Nauman, and Vito Acconci, to name a few. [Oliver Lee Jackson](#) was at CSUS during this time and situated prominently at the center of this art program. [Oliver is an African American artist](#) who is arguably one of the most prolific painters and sculptors in American Art History. In his mid-80s, Jackson recently had a major survey of the last 15 years of his work at the [national gallery in D.C.](#), where the Museum director declared Oliver a national treasure. I wholeheartedly agree. [Linda A. Day](#) studied and received her training from artists who worked directly with Hans Hoffman. Linda became one of the most influential painters in Los Angeles in the early and mid-2000s. Linda was significant in challenging me and motivating me when I needed it most. Linda was able to bring Judy Pfaff to CSUS for a [one-month artist-residency](#).

As an undergraduate, I was selected over graduate students by Linda and the department Faculty at CSUS to serve as Pfaff's studio assistant during this residency. While Judy had already brought her assistant, who primarily worked with her, the chance for me to study her studio practice and her work first hand; activated my ambition in ways nothing else had. Shortly after that, I served as a studio assistant to CSUS Professor and painter [Joan Moment](#), who had had a storied career that started at 30 years old in 1974 when Joan had her first major solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum of Art. [Brenda Louie](#) is an incredible Chinese-American artist mentored by Oliver Lee Jackson and the great Bay Area figurative painter Nathan Olivera. Brenda introduced me to Olivera's work and pedagogy which greatly inspired and pushed me to excel at Painting and Drawing while also developing my craft as a teacher. [Tom Monteith](#) helped me synthesize each of the other artists that significantly impacted me while pushing me to find my maker's voice as a serious painter and thinker. Tom studied with Oliver Jackson at CSUS. Other Professors welcomed me into the context of their lives, such as [David Wetzl](#) and Mark Emerson. [Mark Emerson](#) showed me the ropes as an art handler and taught me the ethics behind the trade. Dave challenged me to push against tradition and consider more widely the power of aesthetics. Oliver, Tom, and Linda profoundly shaped my experience as a teacher by giving me many opportunities to do so under their respective pedagogical tutelage.

From Linda, Tom, and Oliver, I was intensely trained to teach and make, without bifurcation or having these two spheres of influence pitted against each other. Somehow all of these incredible makers were intertwined and proved to be an excellent family tree full of rich overlap, contradiction, creative tension, and great force. The soil for learning and training was rich, diverse, intense, and focused. All of the artists mentioned above closely mentored me at one point or another. As a result, my introduction to Painting, Drawing, Sculpture, Performance, and Conceptual art was deep and wide. Oliver Lee Jackson was a towering figure during my time studying. He, in some ways, gave me the most license to pursue being a painter. Oliver was a catalyst for many artists and makers of the last 60 years; his catalytic brilliance could be traced back to his time with his groundbreaking involvement in a movement of the 1970s called the [Black Artist Group](#) or (BAG). BAG involved painters, sculptors, poets, musicians, and theater production as a vibrant community of artistic expression, protest, and pursuit for justice. This kind of background experience was brought intensely forward into the class studying with him. Oliver enabled in-depth, comprehensive Painting and Philosophy training, as he was a professor in Art, Philosophy, and Pan African Humanities. I have briefly mentioned how each one of the artists upheld excellent making, excellent thinking, and incredible community building. The embodied examples above

of making, thinking, and generating communities served as the conceptual and dialogical soil and framework for my current research practice, as these passions and desires became rooted deeply in my DNA and growing vision for a studio practice with measurable scope.

## THE STAGE

For a time, I worked with great curiosity across artistic disciplines. Around [2004 my artistic practice](#) began to narrow and took shape centered on painting in the context of the school's dialogical tensions. Shortly after graduating from CSUS with my [M.A. in Studio Art](#), I began teaching art at a progressive private school called Courtyard Elementary for one year as an art teacher. I was selected to instruct at another elementary school called Joseph Sims as a resident artist for two years. Grant-funded through the Warhol foundation, I took on building a new arts curriculum to compete with California's standard art curriculum. This time was unique because I was brought in as an experiment to supplement the lack of art education by having working artists teach in a school that had its funding cut for the arts. The results were formative for all involved. The impact it left on me solidified my view of how art-making, teaching art, and community building and service were not at odds but profoundly linked. The relationship of teaching, making, thinking about art, and community building, led me to move across the country in the fall of 2007 and enter into VCUarts MFA in Painting and printmaking.

At the time, Richard Roth was the Chair of Painting and Printmaking. The work coming out of the department was vibrant, and compelling. The department seemed to present an opportunity to hone in on the ideas I was contending with surrounding my painting research practice. During my time studying at VCU, I began to focus on concerns around the object ontology of Painting and how the ontology attaining to a certain quality then possessed particular generative possibilities for the way we experience and know the world around us. My research practice focused on Painting as a metaphorical vehicle with concrete expression and reinforcement of our present tense experiences and embodied encounters. I examined this idea concerning and in tension with Painting as a window of escape. The objecthood of a painting can generate effects that activate a genuine sensory understanding of our bodies, ourselves, and the relationships that immerse us all. Consider all that is genuinely aesthetic and how it shapes us in some way, from the roads we drive on, to paved sidewalks, to buildings, landscaping, shops, clothes, textures, and phenomenological effects that are occurring around us constantly. Therefore, there seems to be an intense correspondence that points to the kind of inherited reality that sits powerfully behind what can be plainly perceived. The set of ideas I mentioned was worked out to a greater extent in my [2009 MFA thesis exhibition Kingdom Compossible](#). The work in this exhibition served as a vehicle employed with contradictions bound up in the object ontology of Painting and notions of transcendence, or allusive qualities that, when present in an object, always point towards a kind-of ineffable-more. Embedded throughout this show were expressions of human longings for more. Longings we might associate more so with the window of escape many paintings throughout history have alluded to while being contingently grounded in a given place and time. This both-and relationship, one of imminence and transcendence, has gripped me for a very long time.

When I got to VCU in 2007, I started teaching in Art Foundation that Fall semester as a grad teaching assistant with program head Jack Risley in honors courses that Jack and I designed together called Art Worlds. One semester of GTA turned into two full years of graduate teaching assistantships working in AFO with Jack. My two years in foundations, taken together with my MFA, created a very fertile soil to expand the ideas I was working through when I left CSUS. However, a strange fortune was at work during my final year in Grad School at VCU. When I graduated, I realized I had a unique health condition happening with my hands. This condition was causing extreme pain, open sores, infection, and the

requirement of constant bandages and gloves with the increasing risk of severe-infection and danger of losing the use of my hands altogether or worse. [By 2010 my hands were making it to where I may never get to paint again.](#) The idea that I could not paint had me wrestling thoughtfully with the prospects of never making art. While at a low point in my life regarding my desire to paint, I realized there might still be a way to involve myself in the arts.

I decided my critical understanding through education, my ability to verbalize ideas through teaching and critiques, and my know-how as a maker could help other makers. My knowledge and desire for generating community compelled me to take a shot at hosting underground exhibitions in an old warehouse space in downtown Shockoe Bottom, which turned into open art critiques every Friday night. These crits were attended by sometimes up to fifty people who were often in attendance to listen in on three artists having their art critiqued for an hour each. In 2011 my sparked interest in curating shows, supporting artists, and generating community, or what I call now, creating an ecosystem of art and design that is multigenerational in scope boiled over to a fevered pitch. Things also began to look up for me as an artist as my hands healed. I was in my first few years of teaching Drawing Studio at AFO and making paintings again. [So, I returned to Painting with a renewed appreciation in 2012;](#) however, I could not let go of the gallery. With that in mind, my wife Laura and I continued developing a nonprofit space to curate, serve artists and build community. These years proved critical to setting the stage for what my research practice looks like now in its full-orbed expression. Without the issues with my hands, I could not have developed the studio practice scope I currently hold.

## **THE WORK**

The arts are pervasive; the impact of art and design touches upon every facet of life. From the food we eat to the plates we eat off of to the clothes we wear, the chairs we sit on, the rooms we find ourselves in, to all the things we see in front of us, to designs that create the blueprints for architecture and urban planning, and more. Essentially there is no place where art and design don't touch. Creativity in the Arts is so pervasive that if you removed art and design, you would not be able to cash a check. There wouldn't be any typography to read or to communicate with to understand how much you are paid, let alone get paid because currency would have no designed individuation. Without art and design, we would be essentially naked in a desert, and even then, you would still be able to dance and sing until you died of starvation or lack of shelter. So, when people see the arts as holistic and pervasive, as I'm suggesting, the studio practice has ample space to move freely, humbly, and with great purpose, for the scope of arts importance is far too great for any one person to fulfill. My research practice operates out of that holistic framework to create generative spheres of overlapping influence. In this framework, opportunities saliently emerge for other artists and designers to work individually and collaboratively across disciplines and mediums to reinforce, extend, and care for culture. What this means then for me is that it is critical to work concurrently in diverse manners and modes of art and design as I see my practice being catalytic in nature.

A key aspect of my studio practice consists of my paintings that focus on the historical and problematic dialog around painting as a milieu for a philosophical inquiry into the ontology of objecthood with the dual visual proposition of an elusive otherness that exceeds our direct comprehension and self-understanding. I often think of these categories as evidence seeking transcendence. As the interplay of this dialectic conversation serves as a broad-based metaphor and proxy for our shared experiences with objects and forward-looking to longings into what we might be and, by extension, what the world might look like. Examples of work that embody the concepts mentioned above can be found in my box paintings that have taken shape since 2017 along two groupings. One grouping is my [Parkwood Series;](#)

the other is my ongoing series of box paintings called the [Moss Side series](#); these painting series flow from the title, the street name I lived on in Parkwood Street, and the street my home currently resides on called Moss Side Avenue. The Moss-side series will continue as long as I take residence on this given street. The hope that my dwelling richly in this environment will allow me to absorb much of the indirect "stuff" that connects to where I live, thereby giving it back in some distilled form to the community. It is in that sense a kind of hopeful act of faith, based on whatever actual knowledge I am situationally experiencing and then displaying through the form and structure of these minimalist paintings. My primary line of Painting takes the object aspect of both the Parkwood and Moss-Side, box series and infuses it with the Painting as a window concept. This work began early in 2012 and continues now with Paintings being curated more recently into exhibitions at the Taubman Museum and the Virginia Museum of Contemporary art. Five of my Moss-side series paintings and a large painting from my MFA [Thesis show](#) were more recently collected into Capital One's sizeable permanent collection here in Virginia.

Spanning 4000 Square feet of gallery, [Shockoe Artspace](#) officially became the name of this project at the beginning of 2016. SAS officially established the nonprofit status of 501 c 3 in 2018. That said, SAS has run and operated as a nonprofit since 2011. Since the beginning, I have intended to view Shockoe Artspace and the work that flows from it as a part of my studio and research practice. I have curated over 30 shows through this nonprofit art space; I have held more art critiques and open dialogues than I can count. The work of supporting artists and generating a community that widens and encourages new patrons to join in the partaking of and support of art and design has developed many new projects out of Shockoe Artspace. One such critical project is our [Podcast Shockoe Artspeak](#), co-hosted by one of my main collaborators Dr. Garreth Blackwell, a designer, artist, and professor in the center for creative economies at VCU. This podcast has been listened to in over 140 countries and averages 34000 listens a month. It has enabled a rich conversation to extend to several visiting guests, like Sterling Hundley, Chino Amobi, Wes Taylor, Katy Becker, Ron Johnson, Abigail Gesepie, Miquel Carter-Fisher, Dontrese Brown, and many more. We are in year three of this project and have just released our 76th episode. One of my goals for doing this podcast came out of recognizing that we needed art writing here in Richmond and abroad. My goal was to start an art and design Journal, but nothing like this has lasted or been created well, in part because more people are listening to things like podcasts rather than reading. I determined that a podcast might be a way to generate a listening audience who might later become a reading audience. With this goal in mind, I shared it with Dr. Blackwell, who turns out had been mulling over some similar ideas. Together we decided to collaborate on this podcast while having Garreth join our SAS volunteer staff as our Director of Design communications. Our work's chemistry and collaborative focus have created enough content to where listeners are now asking for our podcast to take the form of printed journals and written content. We are working on releasing one such journal this year. The podcast content is deep and wide, aiming at dispelling myths and rumors about art while enlightening makers' minds and garnering interest from possible patrons. My research focusses here centers on closely examining how to bridge gaps between artists and a watching world.

Curating exhibitions is a passion and flows from my deep connection with Painting. I have numerous shows I am proud to have curated. However, two exhibitions highlight the curatorial power, range, and impact the arts can have on civic discourse. One such example is an exhibition with Patterson Lawson called [Dignified](#), a large-scaled exhibition with large format Photographs masterfully developed and focused on people living with Alzheimer's. This show allowed Shockoe Artspace to generate a relationship with Pat, partner with the Alzheimer's Association, and receive an exhibition grant from the Chenoweth foundation. I believe one of the powerful things the arts can do is enoble and humanize people. This exhibition did that; tears of joy flowed in the gallery as families of loved ones who had

recently passed had their image and story on display in this show. The show was cathartic for many and brought healing, pride, and dignity back to so many lives affected by the devastating impact of Alzheimer's, who could for a time see themselves a fresh and valued in these Photos. The exhibition generated so much hope and gratitude from so many who were proud to be in a contemporary gallery space that was not elitist, with gratitude for us leveraging the gallery brand to serve this very diverse community through this significant project. We also created an exhibition book complete with essays that sold out and with the book landing into a lobbyist's hands who lobbies to the senate for Alzheimer's awareness.

The other curation example of note is perhaps the most important exhibition I've put together; titled the [Four Horsemen and Apocalypse](#), a four-person exhibition including artists Chino Amobi, Curtis NewKirk Jr., James L. Williams, and Josh Williams. These four brilliant painters and African-American men are close longtime friends of myself and each other. Some of whom I have mentored over the years and continue to know. These four artists have been faithfully working across disciplines for years, but especially for the show, making paintings that echo much of the ideas I have been processing in my painting practice. This show consisted of unique painting expressions that are diverse departures while also maintaining subtle threads of unity through color, composition, and form. To my understanding, there has never been an exhibition at a major gallery of four African-American men in Richmond, Virginia. This show was developed in tandem with a gallery-produced one-hundred-and-twenty-page [exhibition catalog with full-color photos](#) and written essays by myself and Dr. Blackwell. The show's content aimed to make a general statement of support amid the protest happening in the summer of 2020. The show's idea, its heart, was in dialogue with the monuments being taken down in RVA.

One of the conversations happening amid several important topics surrounded what monuments to put up in place of the now-defunct confederate monuments. One goal of the exhibition was to help us consider the living monuments of artists like Chino, Curtis, Josh, and James. These four Black men are real examples to follow, real people to celebrate and consider. In so many ways, these artists are living examples to look towards. The art that they were working on with hope and excellence long before and during Covid, could show us a meaningful way forward as they are leaders, generals even that in the midst of what feels like the end of the world, could show how seeds of hope abound right here in our backyards. I found it essential to celebrate these people of color who are alive now and might serve as the ones to envision what monuments should go up in the future. Each painter's work retained a kind of hopeful future-forward spirit that embodied something of where we want to be as a culture and society. The show was one of the only shows that happened in the fall and was critical for the artist. One such success out of this show is a Paris curator coming to see this exhibition. Upon seeing Chino's works Curator and gallerist, Robert Okuda Fitzpatrick selected Chino Amobi to exhibit his work in a successful exhibition in Paris through Robert's new contemporary gallery. This show's recent success has now turned into a six-month residency for Chino in Paris, along with significant sales of his paintings. For me, this is why Shockoe Artspace exists as part of the generative research practice that I have worked hard to cultivate.

More than just a gallery, Shockoe Artspace has created a creative platform for other collaborative work to follow. One of my goals is always to find a suitable medium for the right message. One such project launched out of Shockoe Artspace entails a [feature-length documentary](#) that Nick Seitz and I co-directed. I wrote and conceptualized this film while Nick did most of the shooting and editing with assistance and input from me. The film is called [The Builder](#) and details Don Childress's life as a local contractor who barter construction for contemporary art. Not only that, Don had bartered construction work with me for some of my contemporary paintings. I discovered that, in working with Don that his art



collection was remarkable. Don owns Ron Johnson paintings, Heidi Trepanier paintings, Bill Fisher paintings, Francisco Clemente work, and so many other established artists. I saw a connection between Don and other working-class patrons of the arts in the past who helped to build museum collections. I also saw a great need for inspiring and encouraging Richmond collectors while also cultivating new Richmond collectors. Moreover, Don needed to know how much his story mattered, and by extension how much he matters. The Builder is a true story that talks about Don and the city of Richmond and the unique art scene built over many generations. The film finished and screened at the Current Art Fair in November 2019. When 2020 hit, film festivals closed down due to Covid. Our plans for showing the film at the VMFA and other museums were delayed, and our lineup for Movie Theaters went away completely. But this film got into a film festival in New York which moved to Minnesota, where the Builder received nominations for Best Feature film, Best documentary, and Best Director. To our surprise, the film won for best special interest documentary. This success launched the Builder into multiple film festivals with more awards for the best independent documentary; it is now being screened in London and Italy at film festivals, most recently in 2021. This film's content is built out of the concepts I have shared in my studio regarding Painting's ontological concerns and affects. Moreover, the film displays a vivid picture of how a generative ecosystem works for our good.

In some ways, all of my work is collaborative. As I said before, most of my work mutually reinforces each other through these distinct spheres I described. I believe that the arts are humanizing, and I have been examining this at multiple levels with great success. At this point, my work is free to move in very personal ways. I mean that not all of the work has to be towards contemporary art audiences, and by working across disciplines and zones, each is free to live more squarely in its zone. My work is thereby enabled to move into more narrative-based platforms and mediums while not compromising some of my work's abstract nature.

An example of this would be the collaborative work I have done on the Zebra Force project. [Zebra Force and the Island of Dr. Z.](#) is a critical project bringing together a life science Ph.D., a medical illustrator, a comic book artist, and myself as the concept author, art director and co-author. This collaboration is motivated and inspired by my experience with my son, who has a rare disease. In seeing my son go through treatment, I realized that the way doctors treat my son humanly or not affects his well-being and effectiveness in treatment and care experience regarding his illness. Zebra force was a way of doing something about this recognition. I hoped to bring a diverse team together to research genetic diseases utilizing an analog format containing factual information, dynamic imagery, great storytelling, and fantasy elements. What followed is a comic-coloring book. This 48-page book is the initial tale of a team of researchers and artists studying zebrafish's scientific benefits for treating childhood diseases. The story functions to move a child through discovery regarding treatment while humanizing the people there to help them. By being sufficiently detailed in a comic book style, this book means children who have time on their hands have more time to color and focus due to the level of rendering. The fantasy elements serve to heighten the child's experience and activate their imagination but not to escape their experiences. Still, they will rather live deeply into their own story with more richness, which can promote and improve all involved's mental health. The concept of this project serves to generate more projects in collaboration with Children's Hospitals. The ideas at work in this project include board games and designs that correspond with the illustrations and story. The children going through treatment can live in a more enriched and imaginative environment while undergoing treatment while reducing fear and anxiety around Drs and care physicians.

Finally, an example of a recent research collaboration currently developing is transforming a recently secured 1991 Honda Civic. My research collaborator Dr. Blackwell and I will be using this car as an anti-hero art gallery. Moreover, the hatchback will be a pristine gallery in the back of the otherwise dilapidated vehicle. This car will create an opportunity for artists and designers to show their work in the back of the car. The format will be a T.V. series or vodcast series that interviews artist, highlights their studio practice or design practice, and follows them as they tackle the problem of scaling their studio practice down into something suitable for the car. The research area's mission is to bring the arts closer to everyone by meeting them where they are. Bringing the art to them in neighborhoods through driving there and by video can generate a different conversation. Since the arts are pervasive, this car will highlight that fact while raising awareness and bringing conceptual and aesthetic richness into Richmond's city post-Covid reality. After the artist creates the exhibition's work, the [Hatchback Gallery](#) will host openings at strategic and planned places and events. These shows and the car gallery's novelty will generate community and highlight local organizations and businesses by bringing high-quality arts to these places. We have secured an excellent artist in Taylor A. White to be our first exhibiting artist. We are approaching the work of finishing out the restoration of this car as grant funding becomes available. Finally, this car is a way of dealing with the unique challenges Covid has presented to us all; with these mini-exhibitions, we can safely come together outside with social distancing and great art and good humor.

My research is broad and specific and inspired by the soil I mentioned at the beginning of this statement. The fruit of this soil has enabled me to not see tension and opposition in various expression modes where others might. From a comic-book/coloring-book project to abstract Painting to partnering with the Alzheimer's Association, to curating exhibitions of both students, professional artists, and emerging artists, to mentorships, all of it is community building. More importantly, it is contributory to the artist ecosystem that I believe must be multigenerational. The success of my studio practice and my research practice entails my love and extreme care for people. I firmly believe the arts play a significant role in shaping our lives. A mantra statement I've made for years in Shockoe Artspace is now the summary statement of our podcast: it's essential for artists to both know and be known by each other. Many want to be known but often find it hard to know others; some find it hard to be known. Taken together as Know and be Known, a world of real possibility emerges creatively. This interrelationship of diverse mutuality is the thread that runs through all of my work. The example set before me in my mentors helped to catalyze what I do; in the end, I see my work as pouring out and extending the legacy of those who poured so much into me.