

# ASH PRINT

A PUBLIC ART  
PROPOSAL IN  
RESPONSE TO  
THE LA FIRES

CARA LEVINE



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# WHO I AM

I am a third generation Angeleno. I am a sculptor. I am a professor at Otis College of Art and Design. I make public participatory work about loss and grief. I lost my childhood home in the Palisades Fire in January 2025.

I earned my Bachelors of Fine Arts at the University of Michigan (2007) and my Masters at the California College of the Arts (2012). I have exhibited widely including a solo presentation of my work at the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco (2023), public workshops at our own MOCA Geffen (2020), along with other one-person, group exhibitions, and participatory events from New York to Alaska, Japan and Iceland. I recently founded a project space in my Los Angeles studio, I am a recent awardee of the Mandel Institute Cultural Leadership program (2023-2025) and Lucas Artist Fellow at Montalvo Arts Center in Saratoga, CA (2024-2026).

I explore themes of absence, empathy, and equity through a practice encompassing studio-based artmaking, social engagement, and curatorial projects. Unifying my work is the belief: art practice is tasked to reveal and explore otherwise irreconcilable realities, both personal and collective, historic and current. Since the fires, I have been collecting donations of broken ceramics - and the memories carried within them - found on the sites of burned homes in both the Pacific Palisades and Altadena. With these shards, I intend to make a public memorial for all that's been lost, titled Ash Print.



More about me:  
<https://www.caralevine.com/about>



Ash Print, a term I learned from the Army Corps of Engineers who bulldozed my mother's property, refers to the layer of ash left on the ground after a wildfire. All that survived these fires, home to home, block after block, were ceramics.

This memorial is our Ash Print.

The structure of this memorial remains open-ended and can respond to various sites. The purpose, though, is fixed: create a memorial that honors the families who lost everything by bringing new life to their lost and destroyed family treasures. Dozens of families have contributed to my collection of shards - redefining the idea of resilience and unity in the face of true tragedy.

What is so important about remembering? Remembering anchors this community, recently cast out in every direction. Remembering honors the legacies that came before us and sustain us now. A memorial offers us the essential place to do this remembering. I hold a core belief that objects contain stories. These ceramic shards hold the stories from around our dinner tables, the adventures of our ancestors, and our thoughts during ritual morning cups of coffee. Each is deserving of a place of honor.

More about me:

<https://www.caralevine.com/about>

# WHAT THIS IS <sup>4</sup>

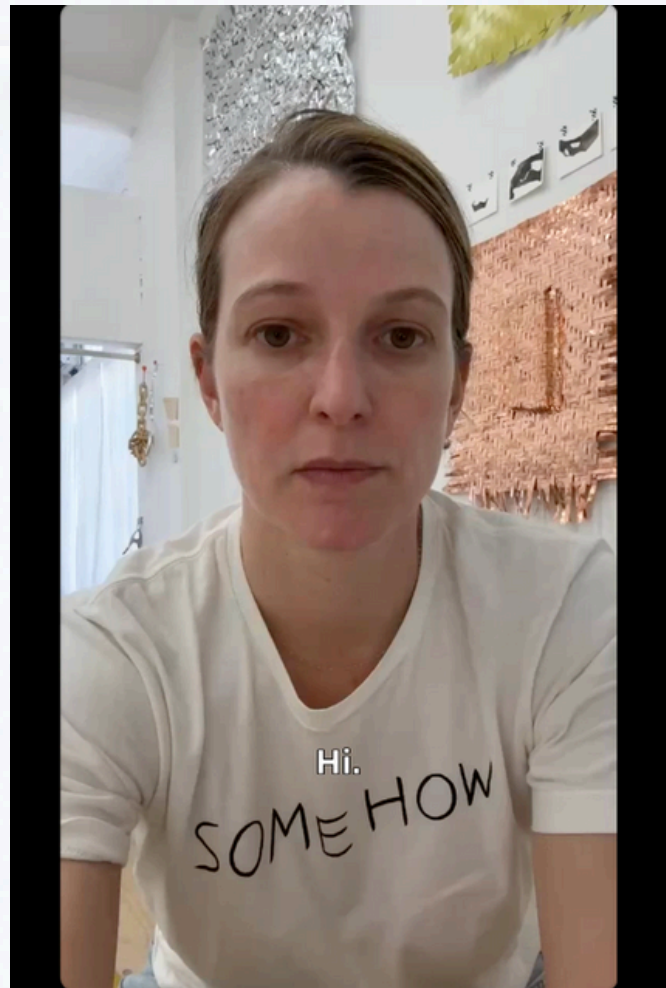


WIP / ASH PRINT <sup>5</sup>

# ASH PRINT / HOW IT STARTED

January/ first call

1. MADE PUBLIC CALL / SOCIAL MEDIA.  
UTILIZED INSTAGRAM TO GET MY  
MESSAGE OUT



February/ bins

2. PLACED BINS - LEFT COLLECTION BINS AT MY  
MOTHER'S PROPERTY IN THE PALISADES AND  
AT A FRIEND'S PROPERTY IN ALTADENA



April / keep going

3. POSTED SIGNS / COLLECT COLLECT COLLECT:  
I WANTED TO REACH MORE PEOPLE OUTSIDE  
OF MY NETWORKS, SO I PLASTERED THE  
NEIGHBORHOODS WITH SIGNS ABOUT THE  
PROJECT AND CONTACT INFO



## Summer 2025 / 6 months since fires

1. STILL COLLECTING: DONATIONS KEEP COMING IN, AND WE'RE PLANNING A DONATION EVENT MID-AUGUST IN THE PALISADES



2. CLEANING: HAVE SMALL PART-TIME CREW HELPING W SAFE CLEANING



3. SEEING WHAT WE HAVE: PHOTO OF A FRAGMENT OF A BOWL I MADE FOR MY MOTHER IN 2000. IT WAS FROM A SET OF 10 CEREAL BOWLS. THEY WERE TRANSLUCENT GREEN - MADE RED FROM THE HOUSE FIRE.

WE ARE SEPARATING SHARDS BY COLOR AND TYPE.



# ASH PRINT / HOW ITS GOING



WIP / ASH PRINT 8

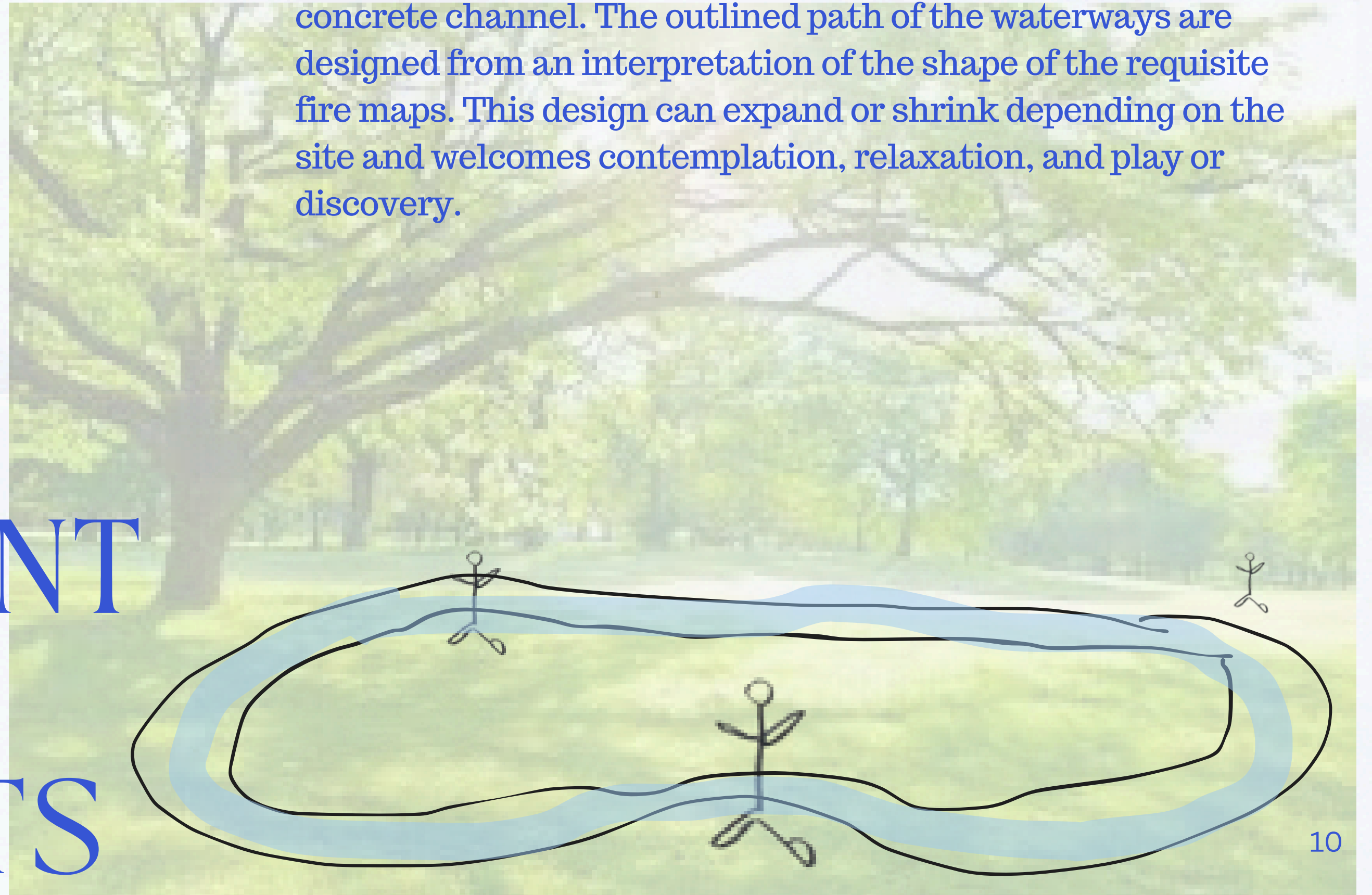
# ASH PRINT / 3 CURRENT DESIGN CONCEPTS

Concepts illustrate the many possibilities for different public works with these materials.



# ASH PRINT / 3 CURRENT DESIGN CONCEPTS

**1** Looping Water Path Design: This design draws a simple loop along the ground of flowing water that runs through a mosaic concrete channel. The outlined path of the waterways are designed from an interpretation of the shape of the requisite fire maps. This design can expand or shrink depending on the site and welcomes contemplation, relaxation, and play or discovery.



# ASH PRINT / 3 CURRENT DESIGN CONCEPTS

## 2

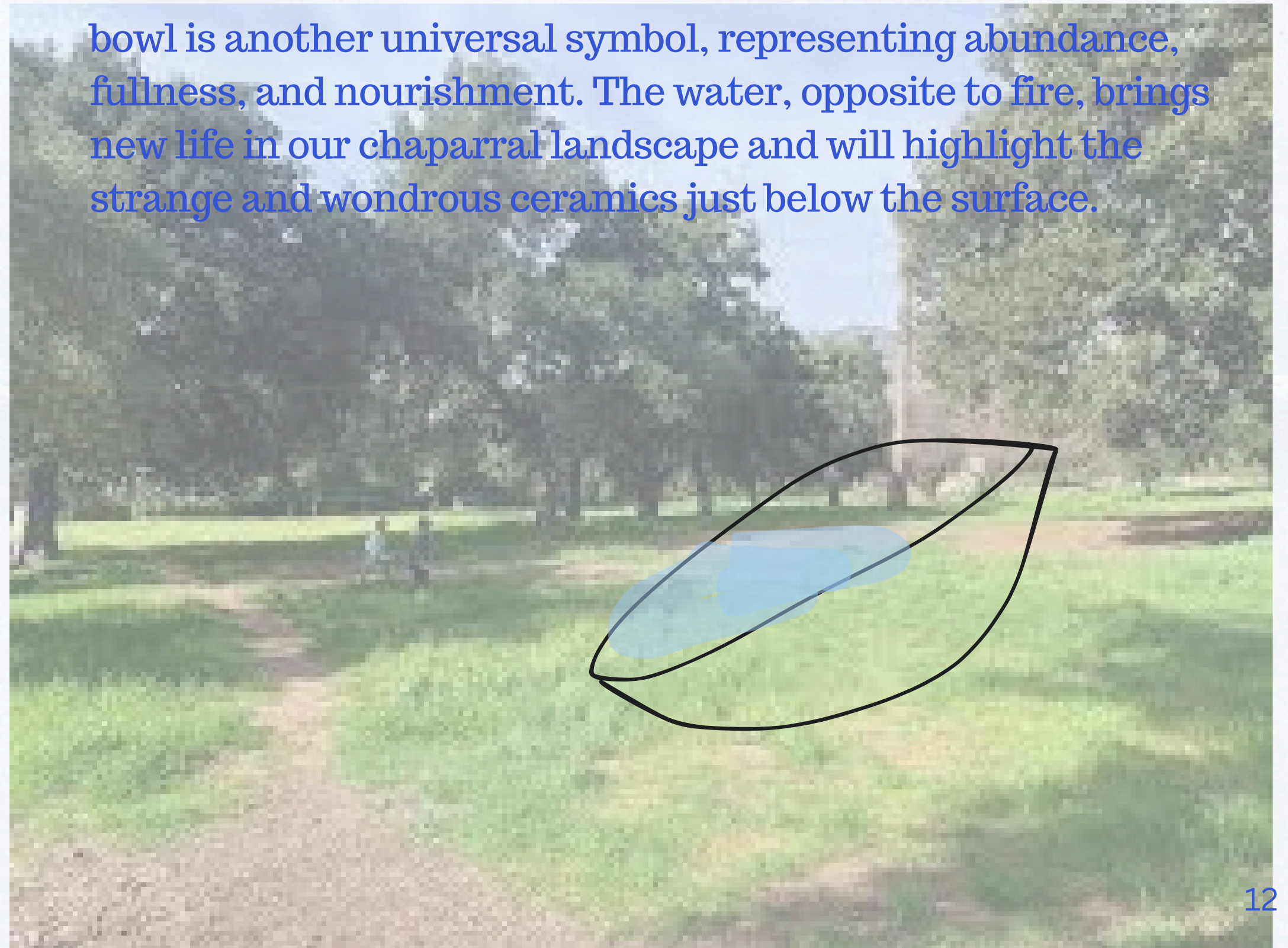
Staircase Design: This vertical concept places an oversized staircase sculpture at an outlook in the Palisades and another in Altadena and wraps the surface of the structure in mosaic from the gathered shards. The staircase is emblematic of new horizons and forward looking. It is a universally hopeful symbol that is reminiscent of our lost homes.



# ASH PRINT / 3 CURRENT DESIGN CONCEPTS

# 3

Mirroring Reflection Pools: This concept creates two freestanding reflection pools embedded in the landscape of a local park - one in each burn area. The interior of these pools are surfaced with the shards of ceramics in a mosaic form. The bowl is another universal symbol, representing abundance, fullness, and nourishment. The water, opposite to fire, brings new life in our chaparral landscape and will highlight the strange and wondrous ceramics just below the surface.



## 1. SITE SEARCH

I have received donations from both the Palisades and Eaton fires and believe there is enough material to complete TWO sister memorials, one in each area. OR there can be a centralized memorial, commemorating the losses from both fires.

The ideal site(s) is an outdoor, publicly accessible recreational area, a park, the Palisades bluffs, or the Altadena foothills.

## 2. PARTNER WITH ME

I am looking for community partners who can help make this vision into reality.

What support do I need:

- help locating then securing a city site
- funding for design development, fabrication, and construction
- support in finding other partners in the public art realm

## City Site + Partners + Final Design

# ASH PRINT / NEXT STEPS

## 3. SOME NOTES ON DESIGN

The design concepts included in this packet are initial sketches to be explored further. Each iteration provides a structural surface for the mosaicked ceramic pieces. The pattern, color, and movement of the broken pieces over the surface will be simple and abstract (i.e. not pictorial), rather, determined by flow of color and emotion.

Each design:

- creates spaces for contemplation, remembrance, and reflection
- uses simple forms to make space for the mosaicked surfaces
- is open for the public interaction and participation

# 4 WORKS ON GRIEF



**1** CARVE: THE MYSTIC IS NOURISHED BY THIS SPHERE, 2023.

## Carve: The Mystic Is Nourished From This Sphere (2023)

Bass wood, plywood, mixed media

Carve is a participatory sculpture commissioned by the Contemporary Jewish Museum in 2022. It continues the methodology developed in DIG (2021) in site-specific work created for The CJM. In Carve, Levine invites participants to contribute by sharing notes about the grief they may be experiencing in their own lives—be it the loss of loved one, or more abstract forms of grief like the experiences of loss that come with aging, watching children grow, the end of a friendship or romantic relationship, the destruction of a habitat, or a missed opportunity. In Carve, Levine engraves visitors' grief notes into the surface of the constructed hole throughout the duration of the exhibition. As the carvings accumulate over the course of the exhibition, the artwork increasingly represents the strength and compassion that come with the understanding that no one is truly alone in their grief.

Levine amassed 1500 grief notes over the course of the exhibition and was able to engrave 100. The sculpture can be installed anew and continue to accumulate carvings.

More information and images here: <https://www.caralevine.com/#/carve/>

# 4 WORKS ON GRIEF



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DIG A HOLE TO PUT  
YOUR GRIEF IN, 2021

## DIG: A Hole To Put Your Grief In, 2021

8 day durational performance with accompanying in situ artworks and event series

DIG is a week-long performance of digging a large-scale hole in the ground, around which other artists were invited to utilize the site as a container for new works relating to grief and mourning, after a year of great collective loss, during the first year of the Pandemic, and after the 2018 Woolsey Fire which tore through this site. The weeklong duration contains a symbolic period of mourning or 'shiva', at the end of which, we filled the hole with water and performed a ritual cleansing or 'mikveh', then refilled it with its original dirt, and planted native seeds to complete the cycle for renewal.

First iteration: August 14 -21, 2021, Shalom Institute, Malibu, CA on a mountainside previously scorched by the 2018 Woolsey Fire. After DIG, the community returned to the land. Second iteration: July 2023, Ocean Beach, San Francisco, CA

More information and images here: <https://www.caralevine.com/#/dig/>

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DIG A HOLE TO PUT  
YOUR GRIEF IN, 2021



## This Is Not A Gun, 2016- present

A multidisciplinary project aiming to create awareness and action around police violence.

In December of 2016, Levine happened upon a list of 23 objects published in a Harper's Magazine article entitled "Trigger Warning: from a list of objects that were mistaken for guns during shootings of civilians by police in the United States since 2001." The mundaneness of the objects — a wallet, a toy truck, sunglasses — as well as the lack of context around the lives affected by the shootings on the list profoundly struck the artist. Levine immediately began working on This Is Not a Gun (TINAG), which began as a studio, wood-carving, project and has extended into an ongoing, national, multi-disciplinary community workshop series that engages participants in conversations about cultural trauma and racial violence through an embodied clay-based activity - wherein we replicate the objects police mistook for guns in clay. Lastly, TINAG is a book made in collaboration with 40 other artists, activists, healers, and writers. It is in its third printing.

More information and images here: <https://www.caralevine.com/#/this-is-not-a-gun-1>

Also see: [thisisnotagun.com](http://thisisnotagun.com)

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THIS IS NOT A GUN,  
2016-PRESENT

# 4 WORKS ON GRIEF



## Tidal: A Public Art Build, 2018 - 2019

Invested in exploring our irrevocable relationship with the earth, Levine created an all-day collaborative sand staircase on her natural home turf, the Malibu shore—an effort that highlighted both beauty and failure. Built with care and intention, the structure was ultimately surrendered to the rising tide. In this work, Levine explores the grief that comes from something as vast as climate awareness and as mundane as the daily loss of time passing.

The act of building was grounded in labor, dialogue, and shared action. Its disappearance was witnessed with joy and a sense of accomplishment. There was no need to mourn the loss—this ritual celebrated the grace found in ephemerality.

Participants gathered at low tide to toil, dig deep, and build boldly. They remained as the water returned, softening and dissolving their efforts. This work was made in collaboration with Adrienne Adar.

The first iteration was a part of Maiden L.A. 2018 programming. The second a part of The Every Woman Biennial in 2019

More information and images here: <https://www.caralevine.com/#/tidal/>

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TIDAL, 2018/ 2019



THANK YOU FOR  
CONSIDERING THIS PROJECT !



I HOPE TO HEAR FROM YOU  
SOON! FIND ME AT:

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INSTAGRAM [@CARA\\_LEVINE](https://www.instagram.com/CARA_LEVINE)



THANK YOU