

REFLECTION / ABYSS / VISION / LEGACY

Porsha Olayiwola

2020 Heimark Artist in Residence

Dara Kwayera Imani Bayer

2020 CSSJ Visiting Artist

Center for the Study of
SLAVERY
& **JUSTICE**

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Director's Note

Resolutely Black

This exhibition, *reflection/abyss/vision/legacy* was an experiment. Not the usual kind of experiment to make a discovery nor to test a hypothesis, rather an experiment of collaboration, of finding new ways to work. These forms of working are not to be found in books nor in simplistic gestures of combining individuals to pursue specific tasks, rather they are in the practices of the imagination, the radical Black imagination to be specific. When CSSJ invited Porsha Olayiwola, the world slam poetry champion and current poet laureate of Boston, and Dara Bayer, artist and activist for social justice to collaborate, we did so with an open horizon. There were no rules to follow, what was crucial was the production of a poetic/artistic project, one in which blackness in all its complexity would come alive. As the collaboration unfolded, both found that they shared a passion for the work of Octavia Butler. A visit to the Butler archives at the Huntington Library opened the project in unexpected ways. Poetry, drawings, photographs, the installation of an altar, all were now generated by the enveloping engagement with Butler, her writings, but more so with the fragments of her writings, notes, letters, and more notes. One note reads, “The only lasting truth is change.” As I read that I reflected on this moment, in which the possibilities of change seem open yet not certain. A moment in which the freedom dreams of Black people once again shake America, as they always do. What will happen after the shaking? Both Dara and Porsha provide us with a possible answer, to lift oneself up from the abyss means, “engaging with a legacy,” and that legacy is Black freedom dreams. This then is an exhibition about black possibilities, in which to cite the black musical thinker Sun Ra there is, “always something else.”

That something else is anchored by Black life in this America. Yes, there is racial oppression and domination but in the midst of these forms of domination and death, there has always been the Black struggle for life, the refusal to be what power wants us to be. And so the Black imagination works its magic in this collaboration, refusing the conventional, opening a different space, an alternative horizon in which an altar of possibilities can be built for an “altered future.” There is in this project currents of Afro-futurism and Afro-surrealism running through it, making an appearance here and there, now hidden, but then exploding in the poetry:

and in the background a man
sings out loud to his dead

in a language our grief does not
know but the chant biographs

This project is a search for visual and poetic language. It is one which is produced within the alchemy of the work of the Black imagination, one in which as Butler writes in a fragment produced in the exhibition,

To teach
To shape
A new mind
A new figure
How to be human

The experiment has worked and for that we give thanks to Porsha and Dara for opening new horizons of the possible.

Anthony Bogues

Director, Center for the Study of Slavery & Justice

Artists' Biographies



PHOTO BY CARLIE FEBBO.

Porsha Olayiwola is a writer, performer, educator and curator who uses afro-futurism and surrealism to examine historical and current issues in the Black, woman, and queer diasporas. She is an Individual World Poetry Slam Champion and the artistic director at MassLEAP, a literary youth organization. Olayiwola is an MFA Candidate at Emerson College. Porsha Olayiwola is the author of *i shimmer sometimes, too* and the current poet laureate for the city of Boston.

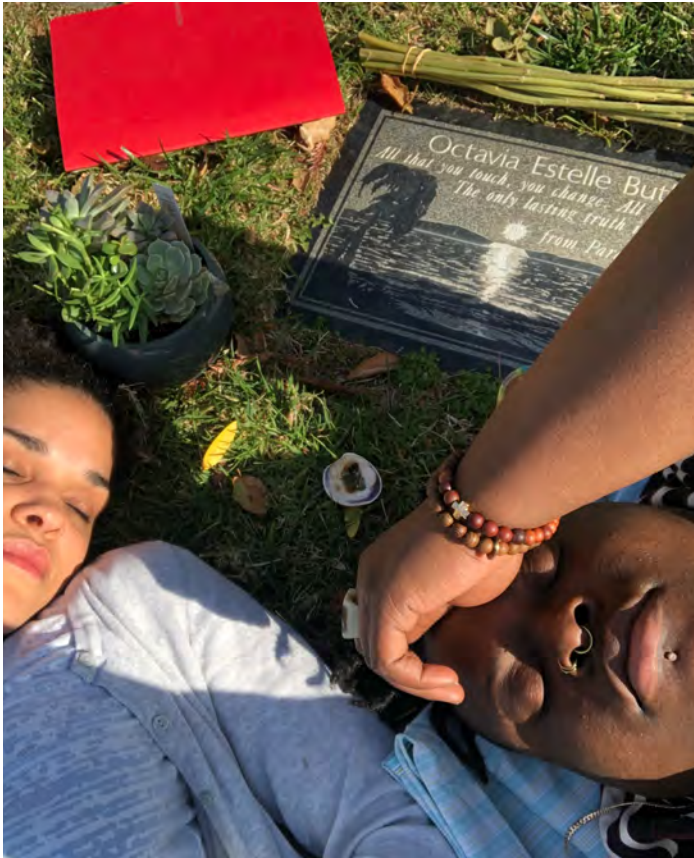


PHOTO BY SASKIA ROMBOUTS.

Dara Kwayera Imani Bayer is a social justice organizer, educator, and visual artist, who is passionate about building interconnected and self-determined communities through Transformative and Restorative Justice philosophy and practices. She has worked as a humanities teacher at a visual and performing arts high school, a Restorative Justice Implementation Coach in several Boston Public Schools, and is currently the Transformative Justice Program Coordinator at Brown University. As a painter, she is interested in exploring history, contradiction, and possibility, particularly as these themes relate to Black liberation.

*All that you touch, you change. All that you change, changes you.
The only lasting truth is change. God Is Change.*

OCTAVIA ESTELLE BUTLER MEMORIAL EPITAPH, 1947–2006



Writer and artist, Porsha and Dara lay at the gravesite of Octavia Estelle Butler after visiting the archives, January 5, 2020

PHOTO BY DARA KWAYERA IMANI BAYER.

2020, in its early months, has proven itself to be an uncertain year. One of the most grounding experiences, on the contrary however, is the time we spent together sprawled on a blanket at a beach in southern California. We sat witnessing the sun turn from our side of the globe for the evening. What a reassuring and peaceful calm it felt to be near water and reflecting. We had just come from spending the afternoon finishing tacos and sitting at the memorial site of Octavia Estelle Butler. Dara brought succulents and a candle and Porsha brought sunflowers. We lay there thinking of Butler, ancestry, and legacy. Is life's culmination the reciprocal relationship of touching and changing ourselves and others? After we have passed do we live on through our impact? Here we were, at the cusp of so many thoughts and places, the edge of the country, the spin of a new day, a meeting yard of life and life past.

Two days before we entered Butler's archives at the Huntington Library completely unaware of what to expect but eager for the opportunity to pour over the contents of the archive. We took special care in learning which, among the nearly 400 boxes, we wanted, and then how to request those boxes. Though the website contained a description, each box's content was a surprise. Starting together we spent our first hour in the archive pouring over photos of Octavia Butler or photos Butler had taken: landscape, colleagues at writing festivals, a plethora of elaborate plants and landscapes. In our own separate inquiry, we each began a journey through Butler's archives. In addition to photos, we explored intimate manuscripts (some complete and published, others unfinished drafts), research material, journal entries, old posters, interviews, birthday cards and whatever else one can imagine keepsaking over the years. We both found ourselves, however, somewhere embedded in the verses of "Earthseed: The Books of the Living." Earthseed is a religion created and practiced by one of Butler's most prodigious protagonists, Lauren Oya Olamina. Lauren, a character inspired

by both the Yoruba Orisha, Oya, and Octavia Butler's own grandmother, is a teenage girl who deviates from her father's christianity to form her own religious practice and community. Earthseed is a religion that embraces shaping change and investing in the living. In an interview found in the archives, Octavia Butler states "I wanted to create a religion I could believe in." And how powerful is that, to write and share a philosophy one can believe in. This creation of a belief system is what served as a muse and guide for us. What would it look like then, literary and visually, if we mapped the cartography of our own religion.

Teacher, Trickster, Chaos, Clay. This progression of words shows up in Butler's writing over and over again. They are metaphors for the concept of "God as Change" in the Earthseed verses. Scribbled as notes, they become archetypal descriptors in the unpublished *Parable of the Trickster*. They represent different ages and stages of collective/societal development, both past and future. They are the title of a memoir fragment about Butler's relationship to writing—both her love and obsession with her craft. The repetition of these words seems to be cyclical and iterative, a vehicle to reach greater creative insights and deeper understandings of humanity's possibility for positive transformation as well as its capacity for destruction and devastation.

In observing Butler's obsession with cycles, her searching, unpacking, unpeeling, engaging with her reality and its relationship to the future worlds she was building in her work, we began to explore our own relationship to cycles. We asked ourselves how we moved through our process of inner development and transformation, as well as how we were moving through our relationship with Butler's work. In our discussions during our time together in Pasadena and then after, four dimensions of a pattern of evolution, initiation, and

Parable of the Talents - Doon (2032)

ASHES (TEACHER) 2030s

REACTION (TRICKSTER) 2040s

ACTIVIST CHAOS (CHAOS) 2050s

ASHES (TEACHER) 2060s

REACTION (Teacher) The 2070s

Handwritten notes:
 "Missionary Towns" begins
 War = Techno Leap and/or Techno Devista
 Trans Dermal
 From Simple Solution Pain to Complex Gathering, organizing, setting up
 Adult-Imago
 Fighting NOT to be nice
 The Ecists very seductive to many young men after them, women

1. Parenting the INFANT helping it grow, keeping it safe as it gains strength and basic skills. Most of the important people, especially members of Earthseed, appear first in Book I. Ends with the "father" of the infant deciding to stay and help it grow and survive. Seeing that he is needed & loved and that he cannot pry himself apart the unit, he will stay. (Growing in place.)

2. Parenting the TODDLER helping it grow, keeping it safe, helping it learn core skills. "Parallel play" with other small communities--alongside, but not with. Growing via gathering in Dovetree and Sullivan. (Growing, branching out: First branches. It out of place and perseveres to raise her child and grow. Nazi parallel players in government (or trying to get into government), her brother makes himself the dangerous, sexy in the end, he demands and disrupts too much. He and his followers must go!

3. Parenting the CHILD helping it grow, keeping it safe, helping it learn core skills, helping and allowing it to work with, play with, and learn from other children and adults. The child, short on experience, can be credulous, is easily seduced by flash and shine and size and age, by almost anything. BANKOLE DIES AS THIS SECTION OPENS. President Hitler--K.W. Drew--47, reaches power, opens Florida, Texas, Alaska, Hawaii... He also states-- "recreate" America by recovering the succeeded states-- for a future plus United States down to Panama, wants Canada and Mexico plus Central America down to Panama, but that's A BAD TIME TO BE A SHARER, a non-English speaker, black, Jewish, or notably foreign in any way. Of course some blacks, foreigners, etc. have joined their masters. This is war. Marcus returns, honest LEAVES with him--her handsome, romantic, when he leaves, induces many young ES men to volunteer to fight. Idealistic, narrow, honest PREACHER. The child is weakened, but is sustaining, is sending out MISSIONER COMMUNITIES to take root elsewhere, grow, spread, prepare her beloved father out with Larkin leaving with Marcus. She is weakened, is dead. Under her mother's thumb. Her beloved father is dead. She rejects Earthseed as her mother teaches it and buys into Marcus's Earth first, last, and only version (VISION).

4. Parenting and partnering the adolescent. Olamina in prison--recalling how she got there and who put her there, describing the indignities and possibilities of Jail-- converting people, seeing people die, enduring pain, her own and that of others. We begin with her going in, writing about others. She is writing from memory because her early notes were found and destroyed by another prisoner. Both the other were found and destroyed by another prisoner. are potential prisoners and the guards are dangerous and LOVED ONES AND ENEMIES. REMEMBER EARTHSEED AND ACORN AND SIMPLY BECAUSE SHE DOES NOT CARE. They may be absent because she doesn't care. She must remind herself to care. DATES AND DAYS MAY BE ABSENT

5. The first ship is going. Mandela. They may be absent in cold sleep are being ferried out to the first ship(s). Olamina writes of watching the ferrys leave, remembers which of her people are on it. Larkin? Last conversations. How we got this far. Government and sponsors won't let her go due to age & health

Preparatory notes on Butler's unfinished manuscript, *Parable of the Talents*, wherein she explores cycles of social evolution
 PHOTO BY DARA KWAYERA IMANI BAYER.

consciousness emerged: **reflection / abyss / vision / legacy**. These four themes/dimensions are not linear and can be understood as existing in a cyclical way; they do, however, carry a progression, which has animated our process of creation and collaboration for this exhibition.

Reflection emerged as the process of situating self on a continuum of existence, of seeing where we have been in our lifetime and in our lineage, as a way to inform where we will go—the practice of Sankofa. Our experiences with each other and at the archives were anchored in our subjectivity as people of Afrikan descent with overlapping, as well as, very different lineages. Our identities as artists, and all that has shaped our creative practice, informed our relationship to Butler’s writings and images.

From the place of reflection comes a widening awareness of the world and the inner and outer landscape, a process of looking down into the **abyss**. This broadening and deepening of awareness can be overwhelming, yet it is the essential ingredient for responding to our external conditions and our conditioning. With a sober understanding of an ugly reality, we think of abyss as a crossroads, a recognition and questioning of many possibilities. This was Lauren Olamina’s orientation to life, her steadfast vision of “God as Change,” that called for adaptation and foresight, what her father described as “[noticing] the abyss.”

With looking down into the abyss, both a terrifying and luminous space, we come into our **vision**: the consciousness we need to shape our experience, to “shape God.” Our visions are rooted in the interdependence of the collective and in the possibility for something to grow and evolve amidst the fiery destruction. Vision recognizes and holds all the complexity of our existence while shining a way forward. Lauren’s founding of Acorn, the first Earthseed community at the end of *Parable of the Sower*, is a powerful reference point for how we can find ways to honor those we’ve lost while also co-creating something new, rooted in care and love. Perhaps most importantly, vision is not static, but a spiraling force that guides us across space and time to continually help us see within and beyond the abyss.

In manifesting our vision, we birth a **legacy**—that which we leave behind for those who come after us to reflect upon,

grapple with, and further evolve. Butler possessed a powerful foresight about the significance of her work; she kept all of her notes and ensured that they were kept in a secure place, amidst the resilient succulents at the Huntington archives. What are the pieces of ourselves that we want others to hold, nurture, and grow long after we have departed this physical plane? What kind of ancestors do we want to be for future generations?

It is this question that we pondered at Butler’s memorial, our humble offerings of succulents, sunflowers, and sage framing her grave stone. We sat with our hearts overflowing with gratitude for this powerful being who graced us with her imagination, insight, stories, raw determination and obsession. Butler’s reflections, her journeys into the abyss, her profound manifested visions and her legacy, have materialized in our consciousness and in our bodies. This experience of legacy, of being in sacred space and relationship with each other through a shared reverence for Butler’s contributions, led us to invite you, those who choose to engage with our creative work, into conversation. We wanted this exhibition, a collection of poetry and paintings, to also include an altar as an invitation for our broader communities to consider their spirals, their contributions, their legacies. Butler would never have wanted an altar that focused on her; her writings and notes warn against the obsession with the individual and the psychology of the cult. However, we could imagine honoring her by creating a sacred space for **possibility**, the consciousness that leads to questions and visions beyond our current reality.

We are in a moment of profound uncertainty and in an age where the conditions have upended the status quo. Butler’s questions can be a guiding light in this time of the abyss. How will we emerge from the current chrysalis in our collective spiral? How will you participate in this movement? What will you share and leave for others as part of your calling?

Porsha Olayiwola

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Dara Kwayera Imani Bayer

2020 CSSJ Visiting Artist

May 2020

Porsha Olayiwola

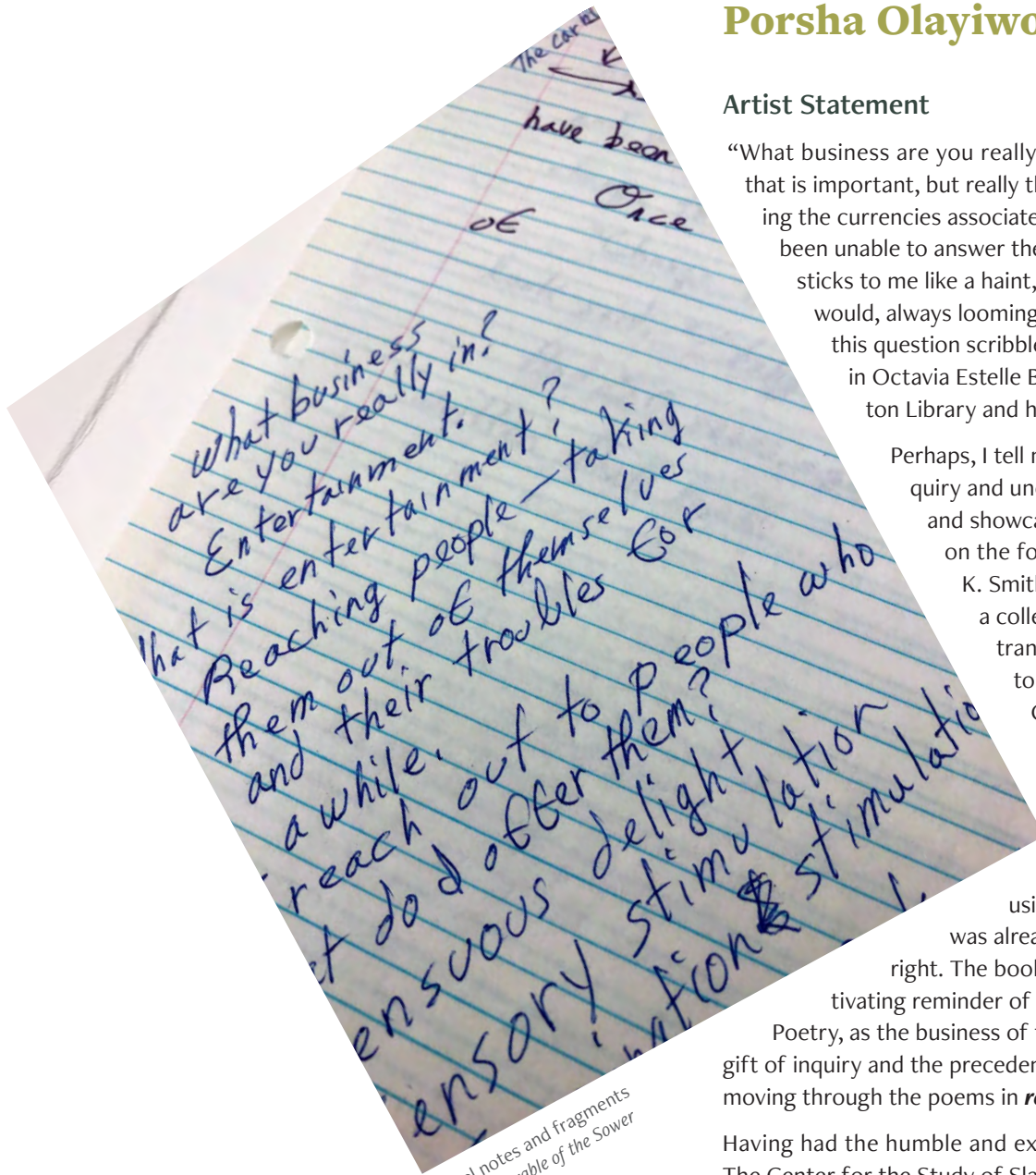
Artist Statement

“What business are you really in?” For me, it isn’t the answer that is important, but really the bravery and risk in confronting the currencies associated with one’s self. Though I have been unable to answer the question, it still haunts me, sticks to me like a haint, or better, as a fairy godmother would, always looming, but for good reason. I found this question scribbled in the corner of a piece paper in Octavia Estelle Butler’s archives at the Huntington Library and have carried it with me hence.

Perhaps, I tell myself, I am in the business of inquiry and uncovering, of searching and finding and showcasing. Specifically, I am thinking on the former U.S. Poet Laureate Tracy K. Smith’s book, *Wade in the Water*—a collection of poetry that includes transcripts of letters written by or to Black union soldiers during the Civil War. The poet’s choice to publish unseen and unaltered historical correspondences crafts poetry that reaches beyond where we know poetry to go. It is a way of using a platform to highlight what was already poetically brilliant in its own right. The book provides a necessary and captivating reminder of American History, untouched.

Poetry, as the business of truth-telling. I suppose Butler’s gift of inquiry and the precedence set by Smith, is the lineage moving through the poems in **reflection/abyss/vision/legacy**.

Having had the humble and exciting pleasure to serve as The Center for the Study of Slavery & Justice’s Heimark Artist-in-Residence allowed me and my collaborate, Dara Bayer, to embark back in time in exploring the life of Octavia Estelle Butler through Butler’s own unaltered historical documents. To say Butler’s archive is overwhelming is an understatement.



Novel notes and fragments
on *The Parable of the Sower*

PHOTO BY PORSHA
OLAYIWOLA.

Understand, our glorious ancestor kept every-single-thing. It is a privilege, at best, to pour over her photos, financial documents, drafted manuscripts, greeting cards, horse drawings, diary entries, newspaper clippings, her desires, her goals, her ideas and her fears. It is deeply intimate and spiritual through a liminal lens of time.

In addition to being spirited by Butler's self-scrutiny, I felt drawn to many questions within Butler's archive. Written in the margins of notes, in diary entries, on manuscripts, these questions became my way of speaking with Butler's transcendent of time, space, and experience. With the start of a new year and a naturally pensive mind, I felt myself extremely reflective as each question greeted me. I felt weighted with responsibility as I touched items that belonged to her and by the conversations she was forcing me to have with her, Dara and myself. "What business are you really in?" I became intrigued by these "conversations" and with Butler's own obsession with obsessions (cycles, succulents, patterns). By my last visit into the archives, I had tracked nearly four hundred questions I had found written throughout my brief time in the archives. The questions appear italicized and unaltered throughout the poems.

I wanted to share with folks who may lack the financial and academic freedom to spend time reading the maps Butler left. My goal with this body of work is to move through the cycles of reflection, abyss, vision, and legacy while showcasing the brilliance of Butler whose scribbles are worth preservation. In my responsibility to Butler, to Dara, to myself, to my mother, our people, and to truth-telling, it became necessary for me, through my own work, to also include the voice of Octavia Butler. This body of work is an experiment in what happens when a Black woman interrogates herself. Does she become a better version of herself? Does she create a better version of the world? And what of the lineage of Black women and girls who come afterward? Is this her legacy? Does Butler's interrogation of self allow me to do the same? And does that allow the same for you?

My hope, when moving through *reflection/abyss/vision/legacy* is that one might be able to hear my voice in conversation with Dara Bayer and the work of Octavia Estelle Butler. My greatest desire is that each reader might be able to find their own answers in the silence following the questions.

Dara Kwayera Imani Bayer

Artist Statement

My passion for Octavia Butler's work and the fertile ground of my collaboration with Porsha is rooted in a drive to uncover the mystery of the human condition—the intense specificity of identity, space and time, as well as the factors that move beyond it. Butler's writing questions what it means to be human, how to make sense of the skin as well as the bodies we inhabit....and both the horror and possibility of what we can do to/with each other and to/with the planet. There is an anchoring of herself, as a Black woman, in her work, that creates space and strength for her Black female protagonists to fully embody their power and potential without question.

In uncovering the pattern of **reflection/abyss/vision/legacy**, I too was drawn to my own subjectivity as a Black woman of mixed heritage. I wished to anchor my experience and my relationship with Porsha in the process of moving through the iterative journey of the pattern. I wanted my paintings to be an invitation for others to move through this process and I felt clear that I could only engage authentically with the viewer through sharing my own experience and communities. Like Butler's stories, Black women are also the protagonists of the paintings for this project; they are at the center of each narrative.

This body of work is a culmination of gathering images, juxtaposing and layering them into each other and engaging in relationships with myself and with others. I wanted to invite viewers into a narrative with multiple entry points and considerations that is both spacious and specific. Each painting draws from many different visual

Notes and reflections from Butler's Parable series
PHOTO BY PORSHA OLAYIWOLA.

A new life
Is a heavy responsibility
Beyond the sweetness of it
Beyond the wonder
Beyond the joy,
There is the need
to Protect
~~to protect~~
to guide —
to teach
to shape
A new mind
A new person
How to be Human

sources: photographs from Butler's archives, pictures I took during my time in Pasadena with Porsha, and people in my life, including myself, who I envision as protagonists in these stories or patterns that we are weaving together.

The imagery in each painting has its own story to tell. The succulents which find themselves in each piece become a metaphor for Black survival and resilience; they are plants of incredible diversity and can blossom and flourish under the harshest conditions. I don't believe it was an accident that Butler chose to house her papers in a place surrounded by one of the largest and most diverse cacti gardens in the world.

The doorways featured in reflection, which quite literally invite the viewer into the continuum of Self, come from architecture on Cal Tech's campus in Pasadena, blocks away from the Huntington Library. But they also reference the Door of No Return, an experience most likely shared by my and Porsha's ancestors as they were enslaved and forcibly brought to the "New World."

California freeways overlaid by forest fires and desert become the background of abyss. Many of Butler's novels are shaped by the landscape of California, where she was born and raised, and reflect the devastating impact humans have wrought on the natural world. This painting asks the question: what does it

mean to be in touch with this reality while also feeling for other possible roads to travel outside of what appears inevitable?

Vision brings in the collective, the intergenerational and ancestral knowing that creates the possibility for survival with dignity and hope. Each person depicted in this piece is a member of my community, which includes my godmother and goddaughter, dear sister friends, comrades, and collaborators. The objects they hold draw from the wisdom of the natural world, fractals that can teach us about transformation and change. Each consciousness represented in paint holds the knowing for how to be in community.

These paintings are meant to be meditations for the viewer. For those who are able to see the work in person, these mediations will culminate in an engaged activity around legacy. This interactive sacred space is reserved for contemplation and embodied action related to possibility. Succulents and light and a mirror will literally reflect a gathering point for participants to take the contents of imagery and poetry and make it their own. I invite you now, dear one, to do the same. May this movement through **reflection/abyss/vision/legacy** be a fruitful journey.



REFLECTION



Reflection

2020, oil on canvas, 30" x 40"

THE MIRROR ANSWERS WHO IS FAIREST OF THEM ALL

“Please don’t use pictures of me on the book or off it. My picture won’t sell anything.”

—Octavia Estelle Butler

like honestly? i wish you’d stop asking
the same question as if you & i need
to show & flaunt. honey, not a grand
gesture in any galaxy could capture
a glance of both envy & admiration
like we do. so, *why the self-destruct?* why?

why?

why?

why?

why?

why?

why?

why?

why?

why?

why?

why?

why?

why?

have you ever known me to like that?

have you ever known glass to splinter

a body sharper than doubt can?

a shattered version of you is still the best

sacrifice the gods have to offer any

mortal. so, *why are you here? what*

business are you really in? ask your mother,

ask her mother & her mother & her mother’s

mother & her mother’s mother before

that, how a stare can become a shotgun

barrel for anyone thinking we don’t belong

to ourselves. we learned the lesson quick:

a well-timed squint cautions children,

dares men, threatens countries to cross

a lineage of “no”

of “too pretty”

of “not pretty enough”

dark spell spoiled

dark edge swoop

swoop of dark

dark

dark

chubby-nappy. we ethereal, baby. you & i

appease the sun. we cause mountains

to curtsy. there is a whole depth of
ocean treasured with the likeness of our
complexion. so why the scowl, darling?
why the weeping smile? the bleak eye?
we strut & the wind is a wistful lust
after our approval. the trees canopy
our crowns, arbor of inheritance. even
the concrete cannot bury us. gracious
craters convexing our cheeks, the skin,
as toiled as soil. praise the night
in the jaw. praise the neck unbowed
the *spiders?* webbing a geometry
of braids. you know, we've always been
flyer than the midnight sky, more
breakthrough than daybreak, we stay
the decadence of time. your archaic
inquiry, asking what we both know:
who cares about us? who cares for us?
not the government, not our brothers
not our lovers, nor our law,
not the schools, the council,
the supremacists, the news, no. it is us.

& hasn't it always been?

it is us. it is us. it is us.
it is us. it is us. it is us.
it is us. it is us. it is us.



ABYSS



Abyss

2020, oil on canvas, 30" x 40"

THE BOTTOM IS WHERE BLACK WOMEN ARE

poem composed entirely of questions from Octavia E. Butler's archive, with question marks removed

why am i so dulled is it that i have nothing
down | a need to say | do i need

to get past this time | another world | is it enough
if god is change what then |

then who loves us who is to blame
who will decide what is question | is this

to be now | how has it felt to begin with someone or
to give up several someone's

how can this be awakening | what i'd ever do to
a good thing | where you to[o] deserve a noose

is the bottom why should it stop me

what | if anything is to stop us | now

The background is a dark, monochromatic green with a complex, layered texture. It features a faint, repeating pattern of a person's face and hands, which appears to be a high-contrast, possibly infrared or thermal image. The word "VISION" is centered in a clean, white, sans-serif font.

VISION

ARE WE MARCHING TO A PLANETARY CIVILIZATION?

how to salvage | an antique
descent | is beyond knowledge
the bones carry | hardheaded
droplet | diminishes | downriver
and swoosh | water baptizes
the lungs of someone | we cannot
live without | pneumatic | accident
and adrenaline | crime of conceit
all i wish | is to catch myself
sweet-toothing | the hunger | of night

how to salvage an antique ascension | map the smile of a past | go up yonder's river | and swoosh | swoosh swoooooosh | night is filling | the

i long to love myself a while | o' how i lust to lawn the law | grow into ourselves | i long to love myself a while | o' how i lust to lawn the law |
i lust to lawn the law | grow into ourselves | i long to love myself a while | o' how i lust to lawn the law | grow into ourselves | i long to love
ourselves. i long to love myself a while | o' how i lust to lawn the law | grow into ourselves | i long to love myself a while | o' how i lust to lawn

lungs | a tooth | of adrenaline | an accidental burst | of the mirror's sweet and we are ego | a droplet claiming | itself the rain.

hard heads | you and i
hungering the antique
salvaging time | let go
and we are endless
a sweet blooming
a baby's lungs | a wish
living between a pair
of friends past | come
with me and we water
a river | run it up | and
down again | once more
and perhaps we night-
tooth the years | leave
a mark | a swosh | a drop.

grow into ourselves | i long to love myself a while | o' how i lust to lawn the law | grow into ourselves | i long to love myself a while | o' how
myself a while | o' how i lust to lawn the law | grow into ourselves | i long to love myself a while | o' how i lust to lawn the law | grow into
the law | grow into ourselves | i long to love myself a while | o' how i lust to lawn the law | grow into ourselves | i long to love myself a while



Vision

2020, oil on canvas, 30" x 40"



LEGACY

EKPHRASIS FOR LYING AT A CEMETERY ENDING IN A SÉANCE THAT RINGS OUR KINFOLKS' NAMES INDEFINITELY

and in the background a man
sings out loud to his dead

in a language our grief does not
know but the chant biographs

our day all the same. the sky
is never consistent in it's blue,

at times it is a bursting blueberry
or at best, a bleeding violet.

sometimes, though, it is a field
of whispers offering quiet.

the sun is a neutral god
of celeste today, glimmering

the marble where i lay
the sunflowers to sleep.

the succulents settled at the head
of the gravestone do not outgreen

the grass. the clovers and blades
are a museum of living. all across

this burial garden, the dirt is soft.
our bodies consult the earth and i can't

remember the last time i floated,
held by the ground or an ancestor.

*i wonder what it feels like
to be a sacrifice?* the truth

is we are all a brief instant.
the blink of a stoic god

and poof: an aged photo,
recollection, refraction

of glitter in a beret, the caving
of arched lips, memory of a smile

lining a palm opened. how
temporary of us—to move

in a fashion that outshines
the stars setting horizons,

to evade the serenation swaying
just outside the gates, sweet

magnolia, the music, a wraith
never forgetting our names.

beloved Octavia and Toni and
Audre and Zora and Harriett

and Rekia and Betsy Bayer
and Breonna Taylor and

Grandma Bessie and Elise
and Paul Haler and Auntie

Chris and Nina Pop and
Lexi and Winne Mae Davis

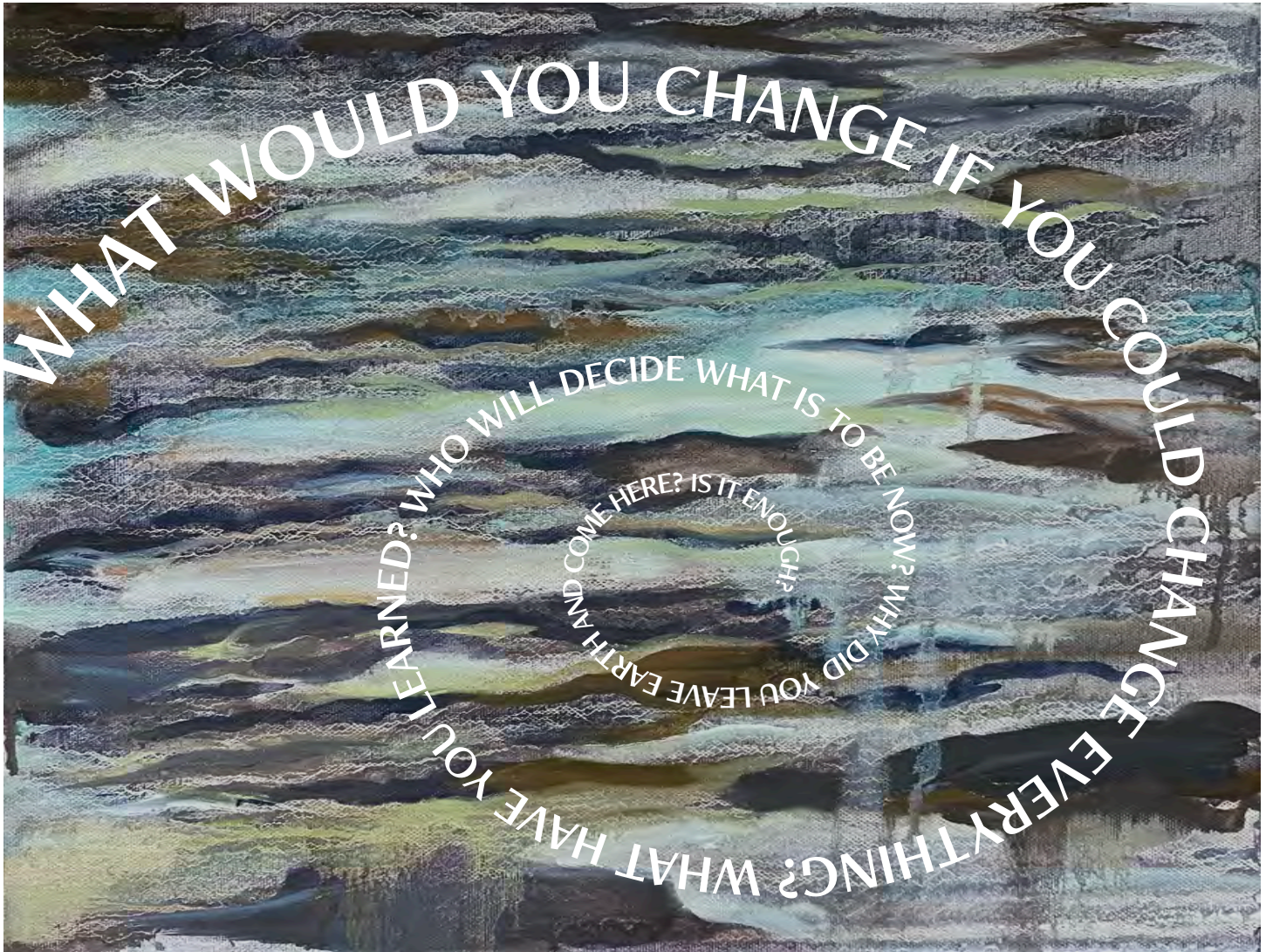
and Adaline and Donna Minoweh
and Mutiat Nelson and Juliana

Nelson and Sandra and Sakia
Gunn and Atatiana Johnson

and Fannie Lou and Monika
Diamond and Ida B. and—

Altar of possibilities / Altered possibilities : What is the offering of your spiral?

This symbolic altar is meant to be a contemplative space to reflect on what we have brought forth from our ancestors and what we will leave behind for our descendants. The questions all come from Butler's notes and they are here as a guide for mapping your legacy, your relationship to the spiral.



PAINTING BY DARA KWAYERA IMANI BAYER.



Porsha and Dara in front of the Huntington Library, January 2020.

Selected Pieces from Octavia E. Butler's Archives

OCTAVIA BUTLER PAPERS, THE HUNTINGTON LIBRARY, SAN MARINO, CALIFORNIA.



From collected drawings of Butler's teen years
PHOTO BY PORSHA OLAYIWOLA.

Emotional Drive
Strive Always
— In All Ways
At All Times —
Always
For Intensity
Cold or Hot
Hard or Soft
Gut - Wrenching or
Deeply Stilling
Utter Intensity

Butler's
notes on
writing

"EMOTIONAL
DRIVE"
OEB1673.

INTRODUCTION

Writing fiction is the love of my life. It's who I am, what I do, how I learn. It's why I'm alive. More important, it's why I want to be alive.

The novels that I've written, the bad ones as well as the good have been the building blocks of my life. I'm going to talk about them one by one—about how I wrote them, how I got the ideas, what I did to those ideas to turn them into stories, and what the ideas and the shaping of them did to me and for me.

There's never been anything simple about creating a work of fiction. But then, if writing were simple, it wouldn't be fun—and it is fun. To inspire a lifetime of loyalty, a lover, however difficult, however complex, must be fun.

So, then, this book is a love story, joyous, personal, difficult, intense, irrational, and filled with hopes, fears, and fun.

And as for the title, Trickster, Teacher, Chaos, and Clay are some of the names of God in my novels, *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*. This was not a warm, loving, caring God but a powerful one, an irresistible, but malleable one. "God is Change," my main character says. "God exists to shape and to be shaped." Writing is my way of changing. Sometimes it takes me places I don't want to go or wouldn't think of going. It's been known to trick me, teach me, drag me through chaos, and offer itself to me for shaping.

Bank
Target (fan)
OTC Cosmetics

Manuscript fragments from Butler's memoir, entitled "Trickster, Teacher, Chaos, Clay"
PHOTO BY DARA KWAYERA IMANI BAYER.

Black & Latino Multicultural Book Center
23 N. Mentor Ave.
Pasadena, CA 91106

Midnight Special
1318 3rd St. Promenade
Santa Monica, CA 90401

PLEASE BE AWARE THAT ALTHOUGH I AM USUALLY THOUGHT OF AS
A SCIENCE FICTION WRITER, I HAVE THREE AUDIENCES:

1. Science fiction
2. Black
3. Feminist

ALL THREE GROUPS HAVE THEIR OWN INDEPENDENT BOOKSTORES, OF COURSE.
Please write a brief biographical sketch. Do not include any information you
do not want released:

PLEASE SEE ATTACHED BIOG

To attain wisdom

Test your
Present self
against your
past self

Pursue the destiny

What have you learned?
What have you done?

Whom have you helped?
Whom have you harmed?

What have you done to right
your ~~wrongs~~ wrongs

For publicity purposes, we would appreciate having a black-and-white glossy
photograph of you, professionally taken if possible.
PLEASE DON'T USE PICTURES OF ME ON THE BOOK OR OFF IT.
MY PICTURE WON'T SELL ANYTHING.

6 of 6

Notes from Butler's
brainstorm on Earthseed
PHOTO BY DARA KWAYERA
IMANI BAYER.

Correspondence between Butler and publisher
PHOTO BY DARA KWAYERA IMANI BAYER.

Visiting Butler's Archives, Pasadena CA, Circa 2020

after orientation | left to the wilderness
of the sterile library | uncivilized and a fascination
to some people | here | papers laid to rest in this cream
prestige sanctum | stiff marbling a garden of politics
shy | though not gushing the color of blood
afforded a privilege | grateful for the route

inside the huntington | backed by ivy | the route
is minimal | having navigated | the wilderness
of the security system | the technicalities of bleeding
in a brown body | in the box of photos | Octavia fascinates
her eyes | bangs permed and curled as in political
stance against her brows | a plain shirt | no collar | cream

she stares into her future | pupils centered in cream
beckon | *why are you here* | an innate route
of exploration | *what have you learned* | political
rantings | insecurities | clippings | outline the wilderness
of Butler's mind | each document fastens
read her journals | see the self bleeding

alone but shared | doubt and unworth blotting
accolades | don't mention this | instead cram
a new companion | Octavia's blues | brood fascinated
to entries as though them a reflection | as if she the route
in which to be seen | sorrow | a wilderness
tunnelled in | our appearance is a statement of political

warfare even though | we ain't aiming | for political
simply vexing | to breathe | trying to bleed
and have it march the body like a wilderness
her likeness peaks curiosity | interrogate | gleam
Butler | nebula of night | became an unexpected route
onto | even if only in the dead | it is still fascinating

to be seen | if it is only dark | brief | it is still fascinating
to be alive | sometimes to go on | living | is political
even if only attempting to map | the route
to the self | beyond ache | even if the eyes are bleeding
there is a prayer | someone cropped and creamed
in which you might grow | to be | your own | wilderness

let our hearts be fascinated | let our minds be a wilderness
let my spiritual be political | if the skin is uncreamed
a bit more tangled is the route | a bit more deadly is bleeding

Octavia Butler's Legacy Lives On

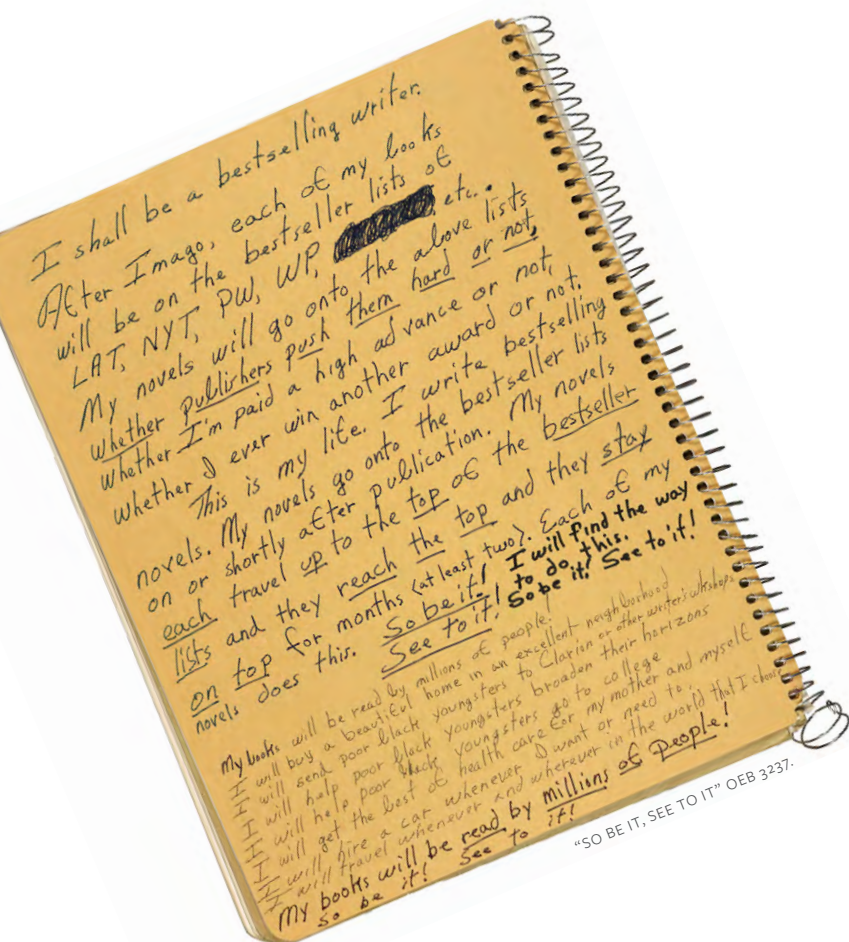


SCHOOL PORTRAIT OF OCTAVIA BUTLER OEB7174.

In Octavia E. Butler's 1984 short story "Speech Sounds," she imagines a world where a virus has decimated human populations globally and brought life as we've known it to a standstill. The government and public services are barely functional. People are unable to speak, some have lost the ability to read or write, and communication is only possible through a crude sign language. Butler's protagonist, Rye, moves through this dystopia alternately resigned, hopeful, and then disillusioned, only to be somewhat hopeful again. The journey of Butler's character asks readers to question what makes us human and whether humanity is worth saving. While this text may seem prescient given our current world stopping battle with COVID-19, it is just one of many works of Butler's that seems to have anticipated a future reality. Octavia Butler's keen understanding of human nature led her to create futuristic visions of worlds that are not that far off from the world we inhabit now. This incredible ability to use science fiction to wrestle with the problems of humanity make her an important storyteller and someone whose fiction deserves to be returned to again and again.

Born under a Cancer sun in Pasadena, California in 1947, Octavia Estelle Butler knew from an early age she wanted to be a writer. She was not the best student (explained later by a dyslexia diagnosis) but she believed in her writing and the stories she could tell. It was the decidedly D-list film, *Devil Girl From Mars*, that sparked Butler's life as a science fiction writer, specifically. After seeing the terrible film at the age of twelve, Butler thought, "I can do better than that." And so she did. She wrote prolifically and did what she could to improve her craft. She participated in writer's workshops, most notably the Clarion Workshop where she, as the only Black woman in her cohort, sold her first stories, "Childfinder" and "Crossover."

It was not always easy. Butler's archive at the Huntington Library in Pasadena includes many of Butler's personal effects, like scraps of paper that show her by-hand math to figure out how to pay rent and other bills for the month. Her rejection



letters from presses and more visibly today, her notes of encouragement to herself that kept her moving when writing got hard, are testaments in the archive to a writer dedicated to the hard work of the craft. In her own words talent and inspiration were nice but “habit was more dependable.” She wrote every day. Even if she wasn’t writing her stories she was writing in her journals and notebooks.

The archive is as impressive as Butler’s many published works. She knew that her writing was important and she preserved her own legacy through her papers in a way that spoke to her belief in herself. Every piece of paper is carefully curated first

by Butler and then by the wonderful staff at the Huntington. Her archives reveal a number of stories that were unpublished in Butler’s lifetime but are still yearning to be set free in the exhibits at the Huntington or the many symposiums and conferences developed to honor her work and legacy.

Octavia Butler is a writer whose legacy is revived daily by those touched by her words and work. Ayana Jamieson, founder of the Octavia E. Butler Legacy Network, was moved to start the organization when upon visiting Butler’s gravesite in 2008, found it overgrown and unattended. Jamieson organized a regular memorialization of Butler and started to connect people who were moved by Butler’s writing to create projects in her legacy. From the visionary social justice science fiction created by the writers of Octavia’s Brood, stewarded by adrienne maree brown and Walida Imarisha, to the sonic reinterpretation of *Parable of the Sower* into an opera helmed by acclaimed musician and singer Toshi Reagon, Butler’s works have inspired so many important projects that keep her legacy alive. Butler’s “found religion” Earthseed featured in *Parable of the Sower and Parable of the Talents* took off as an actual religion. Africanfuturist writer Nnedi Okorafor and filmmaker Wanuri Kahiu are working together to bring Octavia Butler’s Patternist series of books to television. Writer, director, producer Ava Duvernay is looking to adapt Butler’s *Dawn* for television. The artists in this project, Dara Bayer and Porsha Olayiwola continue to build on this rich multimedia tradition that Butler’s work still incites.

Dr. Moya Bailey

Dr. Moya Bailey’s work focuses on how race, gender, and sexuality are represented in media and medicine. She is also the digital alchemist for the Octavia E. Butler Legacy Network and is an assistant professor of Africana Studies and Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Northeastern University.

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ancestor, guide, and muse

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Erin Wells Design

Ben Kaplan

First verse of earlier book Parable of the Sower
and First and most meaningful to the religion called Earthseed:

ALL THAT YOU TOUCH
YOU CHANGE.

ALL THAT YOU CHANGE
CHANGES YOU.

THE ONLY LASTING TRUTH
IS CHANGE.

GOD
IS CHANGE.

(2)

Octavia E. Butler
P.O. Box 61293, Pasadena, CA 91116

In a very real
way, my grandmother
touched me and helped
me to create Lauren
Olamina 2nd
19th Century

Foundational verse of Earthseed with note on the derivation
of Butler's Parable protagonist, Lauren Olamina
"ALL THAT YOU TOUCH, YOU CHANGE" OEB2490.



POURTRAIT OEB7676. OCTAVIA BUTLER PAPERS, THE HUNTINGTON LIBRARY, SAN MARINO, CALIFORNIA.

Octavia E. Butler

1947-2006