

Los Angeles Archives: Our Stories and Yours
By Shayda Kafai

Our personal stories are woven into us. They are our flesh, our memories, our histories. In his introduction to *The Stories We Live By*, psychologist Dan P. McAdams invites the reader this way: “If you want to know me, then you must know my story, for my story defines who I am” (11). Herein lies the power of the personal story, your story. You are informed by your body, by your experiences and the ways you engage with your surroundings. As you navigate Los Angeles, every part of it, you actively do so with your body. In this way, your body is most certainly a location where stories live. The narrative, the conversations from the day, are within the skin, carved in bones, held in muscle.

Los Angeles, the corridors, the streets, what grows in and on the city, has been made flesh. Los Angeles itself is memory: the allure of California citrus, the spirals of the Watts Towers, how objects can be repurposed, the ways we see fantasy, suburbia, and urban neighborhoods clash and speak to each other. Los Angeles, as a body, examines fusion, remaking itself by tearing itself down. It is a city that calls forward the themes of our show: bodies, communities, migration, and borders. As we examine Los Angeles’s body, we pass through an archive of stories and histories. We remember David Siqueiros’s whitewashed murals, how the city shouts music, the forced evacuations in Chavez Ravine, and what grows and twists in Hollywood. As we walk, peeling back the taken over, we see how the stories grown on Los Angeles have been celebrated, covered, and rewritten.

As we walk through, drive on, or enter below city, our bodies become the vehicles of this journey. The sounds collide with our bodies and push back: the music of vendors, the sounds of passing cars, and buses. We carry what we see in our bodies and on our skin. We are carried across streets and through downtown mazes. Our unique journeys, the maps we follow or walk out of, carry with them valuable stories. I argue that we must create an assemblage of these stories. The collaborative installation, “Los Angeles Archives,” speaks to this need, this desire, to record our voices. Your own location within the city, the places you travel through during the day, the night, all illuminate. The “Los Angeles Archives” asks how do you connect with or move through the city of Los Angeles? What is your story? The goal of this collaborative installation, besides from recording narratives, is to privilege the personal story, that which we, at times, may keep to ourselves. Susan Griffin, author of *What Her Body Thought*, argues that the body was the first theater, the first space of actions and stories. The camera and microphone in this piece honor that lineage, the stories we carry and the journeys our bodies take. The city impacts us all in a different way. That difference is something that needs documenting.

The personal voice, our personal experiences, speak to our cultural heritage, to our family stories, and our traditions. We are the stories we tell, I once heard said. We are part of the landscape that we embody. This recording will become an archive of all these stories and our all environments. The ways we move through the city, the way the city moves us, and how this delicate and violent relationship is manifest within.

Ultimately, “Los Angeles Archives” may be housed in a more permanent, perhaps digital, space. Perhaps not. If stories of Los Angeles will ever endure, it is not because one story or another will be retold forever. Rather, it will endure because we will return to the act of telling the story. I hope that this installation will incite conversation at the intersection of the personal and political, at the intersection of the individual and the environment.

Tell me your story. Lean in to the microphone.

Works Cited

- Griffin, Susan. *What Her Body Thought*. New York: HarperCollins, 1999.
- McAdams, P. Dan. *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self*. New York: HarperCollins, 1993. 11.