

## Introduction to the forthcoming Creative Documentation of the San Joaquin Valley Assembly

Dear Reader,

We write this letter as an invitation into our story. And beyond that, to join in the blessing of harnessing the endless potential of creative placemaking, to embody the conditions of collective liberation.

In 2020, the San Joaquin Valley began its journey through ArtPlace America's Local Control, Local Field(s) initiative. Sixteen of us, a combination of culture-bearers, community organizers, creative place-keepers, and artists with complex and lived relationships to how arts and equitable community development meet, said yes to an invitation from ArtPlace and became an Assembly. Together, we undertook a shared journey of stewarding funds to uplift the field of creative placemaking in the vast geography and challenging conditions in the San Joaquin Valley. As Assembly members and Creative Documenters, we welcome you to learn from our process.

Depending on the lens from which you look at this forthcoming project, it can be defined as many things: in one way, it is a diary of observations for community resilience as we embark on this work. In another way, it is a long and nostalgic hug for these fertile lands and expansive waterways, and for the 4.3 million people from lineages all over the world and the indigenous peoples originated here that call this place home. It is a love letter and it is a spell. It is the result of many years of organizing and commitment, beyond the lives of even the two writers of this publication, and a tribute to our past, present, and future movements, and human and other-than-human beings that share visions of a better world beyond this one. This work draws inspiration from the universal energy that exists when a person is in love with a place, an idea, a culture or a history- and we offer these words and concepts as a medicine to soothe our society and to ground us in the work that can turn that vision of a better world into reality.

May the contents of this project tend to the details and the specific, while nurturing the bird's-eye view and the big picture. Our greatest hope is that it inspires connection between cities and towns, between youth and elders, between knowledge and action: that it equips the future with possibility, that it contributes to the momentum that will keep on moving. While 2020 has been difficult for so many reasons, we write to remember that even if we may be distant, we remain in community. The labor for collective liberation goes beyond sectors and work titles. Let's collaborate and find it.

We look forward to sharing the culmination of our work with you,

Orion Camero and Tianna Arredondo  
Creative Documenters and members of the San Joaquin Valley Assembly