

Artist Statement

Sydney Featherstone

I am a multimedia artist with a ceramics focus from the Washington, D.C. metro area who uses materials to illuminate social justice issues through the lens of the Black perspective. My creative journey is driven by a deep connection to and appreciation of the natural and supernatural realms. My art is a love letter to the world. It aims to expose and capture this inherent beauty, making it perceivable to all who engage. After all, I am an artist because I am in love with the universe and the complex beauty within it. With a commitment to fostering empathy, my creations serve as a bridge between individuals, encouraging a shared understanding of the inherent beauty that unites us all.

This performance and installation piece, "Remedy for Grief," exposes a poignant narrative. I sourced the clay for the ceramic tea set from coordinates 36.34200°N, 86.72110°W, Goodlettsville, TN. This location carries the weight of history — the site of Henry and Ephraim Grizzard's tragic lynching in 1892. Accused without trial, Henry was lynched at Mansker's Creek, while Ephraim faced a violent end under Woodland Street Bridge. Their story echoes the broader history of racial terror in the South, documented by Ida B. Wells. In my quest to encapsulate this history, I sought the expertise of a local herbalist. With their guidance, I steeped a blend of herbs used to atone for grief and loss, acknowledging the holistic approach to healing found in Black herbal and folk medicine traditions.

While collecting the soil, an eerie sense of reverence enveloped me. As I dug, layers of earth revealed charcoaled wood, perhaps remnants of the Grizzard brothers' fatal encounter with Jim Crow. Fired anew, the soil birthed the cups and jug of this set. These vessels, though utilitarian, bear witness to past injustices, prompting reflection on the enduring legacy of racial

violence in our society. In the performance, I recited words, penned in reflection of the experience, and directed participants to drink the tea. The experience became a communion that showcased the transfiguration of materials and presented a space for individual and collective transformation through reconciliation with history.

Link to video performance: <https://vanderbilt.box.com/s/9kfo8leie1zn91m0deofya4manj300wk>