so be it.

see to it.

so be it.
Inspired by the urgency of the handwritten affirmation ‘So be it. See to it’ in one of Octavia Butler's journals, Chicago-based artist Candace Hunter responds with a series of intimate collages set in dialogue with Butler's fiction. Octavia Butler's speculative fiction of the 1970s through early 2000s feels eerily prescient in a contemporary moment wrought by political upheaval, resurgent racism, and the ongoing devastation of climate change.

Hunter's visual storytelling likewise offers portals into other worlds. Using collage as an aesthetic strategy for speculative fictions, she offers an embodied disruption of the “rational cosmology” of traditional pictorial and political order: contradictions of perspective and scale, time and space; reimaginings of race and gender, past and present. Through layers of destruction and creation, Hunter unfixes our sense of reality as neutral, given, or immutable. Both Hunter and Butler shape alternate realities, prompting us to contemplate our own.

Curator: Amy Halliday  
Curatorial Assistant: Ray Mendel

Note: All italicised quotations with Hunter's images are directly from Octavia Butler's books, corresponding with the novels or series represented.
“Ordinary sun exposure burns your skin even though you’re black?”
“I’m…” I stopped. I had been about to protest that I was brown, not black, but before I could speak, I understood what he meant.

In this series of collages, Hunter layers evocations of vulnerability (youthful glances, fledgling birds, softly blooming flowers) with those of disarming or directed power (coursing fire, ancient architecture). Such simultaneities go to the heart of Octavia Butler’s *Fledgling*, a vampire tale with a genetic modification twist that explores intersecting experiences of otherness. At the outset, the protagonist, Shori, awakes alone, injured, and suffering from amnesia. Although Shori appears to be a young girl, we soon discover she is actually fifty-three and part of a vampiric race (the Ina) who have developed a mutually entangled biological and emotional relationship with their human “symbionts.”
I had come to remember sometime during one of my meals that the time of less light was called night and I preferred it to the day.

... I knew I would want more blood — want it as badly as I had previously wanted meat. And as I thought about meat, I realized I didn't want it anymore. The idea of eating it disgusted me.
She could feed me without harm to herself... this woman had possibilities. I needed to know several more people like her... One by one, I collected them.

Yet I wanted to get into the car with him.... I realized he smelled... really interesting. Also, I didn’t want to stop talking to him. I felt almost as hungry for conversation as I was for food.
... Much burned rubble, a few standing timbers and remnant walls. That's what was left. Why did it need guarding? The guarding should have come before the fire when it might have done some good.

When I found my father's and brothers' homes, they looked much like the ruin of my mothers'... completely destroyed, burned to rubble, and then trampled by many feet ... I could smell death, but I could not see it.
Eventually he found a reasonably intact little corner with two wall fragments still standing. That was better than a chimney because it was less of a potential trap.

Someone had targeted my family. Someone had succeeded in killing all of my relatives. And if this had to do with the experiments... then it was likely that I was the main target.
To my surprise, I did read and speak Ina ... I read aloud from the first in a language that I could not recall having heard or seen.

“You’re not Ina! ... And you have no more business at this Council than would a clever dog!”
I was not fully in control of myself as I approached Theodora ... I was not truly seeing or understanding what was happening around me. I could not believe my Theodora was dead ...

When your rage is choking you, it is best to say nothing.
The youngest Silks and their symbionts were herded out of the room by several adult Ina.

They were all gone ... restored.
I lost an arm on my last trip home. My left arm. And I lost about a year of my life and much of the comfort and security I had not valued until it was gone.

In the *Kindred* series, Hunter brings together the denim-clad 1970s figure of Butler's time-traveling protagonist, Dana, with signifiers of antebellum life: plantation mansions, hearthside cooking, eighteenth-century implements of instruction and inscription. Modeled on the genre of slave narratives, Butler's *Kindred* is a first-person account of Dana's experience navigating slavery from the perspective of a twentieth-century African American woman; she must constantly develop strategies of survival and resistance in order to return to her present. Her lost arm is a reminder of deep, intergenerational trauma and the legacy of slavery. Hunter's collages attend closely to this sense of violent rupture across time and space.
Before me was a wide tranquil river, and near the middle of that river was a child... He was unconscious by the time I reached him — a small red-haired boy floating...

I was back at home — wet and muddy, but intact. Across the room, Kevin stood frozen, staring at the spot where I had been.
Now the boy stood watching as the flames ate their way up the heavy cloth.

There was a stocky middle-aged woman stirring a kettle that hung over the fire in the fireplace. The fireplace itself filled one whole wall.
Sarah gave me the look of silent rage that I had not seen since my first day on the plantation. “Whose idea you think it was to sell my babies?”

Nigel asked me to teach him to read.
Then his voice dropped to almost a whisper. “I would have taken better care of her than any field hand could. I wouldn’t have hurt her if she hadn’t just kept saying no.”

“Cane, cotton, rice, they grow plenty down there.”
Not only did he get part of Nigel's earnings, but he got the assurance that Nigel, his only valuable piece of property, was not likely to run away again soon.

He was right, of course. I had no rights — not even any papers to be torn up...
So I told myself the map was more a symbol than a necessity anyway. If I had to go, I knew how to follow the North Star at night. I had made a point of learning.
The Weylin house surprised me too when I saw it in the daylight. It wasn’t white. It has no columns, no porch to speak of. I was almost disappointed. It was a red-brick Georgian Colonial...

“Don’t tell them ‘no.’ Don’t let them see you mad. Just say ‘yes, sir.’ Then go ‘head and do what you want to do.”
... food so inadequate they'd all be sick if they didn't keep gardens in what's supposed to be their leisure time ...

Something harder and stronger...
Something cold and nonliving.
You should have more children. Perhaps then you would be less concerned for these two.

Multimedia collage series (2016)

Focusing on the Pattern now was like shifting to view another night sky within his own head ... [Teray] was suddenly able to see the members of the Pattern not as starlike points of light but as luminescent threads. He could see where the threads wound together into slender cords, into ropes, into great cables.

Hunter uses a grid-like format for each collage in her Patternmaster series. Like Butler’s protagonist, Teray, the viewer can trace visual connections and perceptual paths, even as distinct elements overspill the grid’s orderly boundaries. *Patternmaster* is part of Octavia Butler's Patternist series, which covers a sweeping secret history from Ancient Egypt to the near future, in which the genetically-engineered development of telepathy and mind control has reshaped social relations and sensory perception.
The Clayarks chose that moment to end the year of peace.

The Clayark was ... well-muscled, tanned, lean, human-headed, and almost lion-bodied.
“Why do you raid us?
We wouldn’t kill you if you left us alone.”
“Enemies,” the creature said.
“Not people … Enemies. Land. Food”

Teray, whatever it is, go along with him …
I don’t want to be a thing won in a fight.
I want to be your wife. Please.
"I can't protect you. You ... aren't my wife anymore."

... It was Amber who gave him hope.
"You're welcome to come back to Redhill, to my House, if you're freed. But she's not for sale." ... "You'd never be able to hold her anyway."

Patternists and Clayarks stared at each other across a gulf of disease and physical difference and comfortably told themselves the same lie about each other ... "Not people."
The land around Forsyth had once contained a huge population of mutes ... packed together in great cities. Clusters of the buildings left over from those cities still stood, in spite of centuries of Patternist demolition efforts.

The disease of Clay's Ark, brought back hundreds of years before ... by the only starship ever to leave Earth and then return.
But the horse... “You have no mental controls on it at all?”... Gingerly, Teray felt the stallion out. Gingerly because animals, like mutes, were easily injured, easily killed.

Focusing on the Pattern now was like shifting to view another night sky within his own head... Teray, seemingly bodiless, only a point of light himself in this mental universe, discovered that he could change his point of view without seeming to move.
Coransee struck at Teray's head. For a confused instant, Teray thought he perceived a physical object flying at him. A fraction later, he knew what it was ... Coransee was unwittingly teaching him ... if only he could learn fast enough.

(Rayal) A long, wearying time,
Hurry and get here.
You have no idea how tired I am.
“He’s beautiful,” one voice said. “He looks completely Human.”
“Some of his features are only cosmetic, Lilith.”
“He is ... less Human than your daughters.”

“Shall I thank you for making him look this way —
for making him seem Human so I can love him?
... for a while.”

A lush landscape seems, at first, invitingly benign. Closer
study reveals hands that clasp an absent face; a humanoid head
from which strange sensory protrusions emerge. In the collaged
painting that anchors Hunter’s Xenogenesis series, we are flung
into the midst of the verdant spaceship that carries Lilith Iyapo.
Lilith is a human woman who has been saved from a desolate
Earth after nuclear war (triggered by humanity’s clash between
its intelligence and its hierarchical inclinations), but only so her
genetic material can be used by the alien Oankali race, with whom
humanity must forge an uneasy alliance. Through subsequent
generations and narrative sequels, Butler’s trilogy explores issues
of sexuality, gender, race, species, and biological determinism.
“What is it?” Lilith asked.
“Flesh. More like mine than yours. Different from mine, too, though. It’s... the ship.”

“You’re kidding, Your ship is alive?”
She started to follow him... There was enough strangeness to the trees and the sky to stop her from imagining that she was on Earth.
Two hands — holding, touching, kindling, shaping — appear from the lower left hand corner of each of Hunter's two Parables pieces. These hands, in their capacity to create, to shelter, and to respond to the world, remind us of the central tenets of Earthseed, the belief system cultivated by Butler's protagonist Lauren Olamina as she seeks to create new forms of community and resilience in an apocalyptic world. The hand of the artist, who shapes materials into new forms, new possibilities, is ever-present, too, and reinforced by the inclusion of elements of handwritten text, sketches, and annotations.
Octavia Butler (1947-2006) was an award-winning, glass-ceiling-breaking science fiction writer. Her short stories and novels are often presented from the perspective of marginalized protagonists. They explore issues of race, sex, species, and power, and ask probing questions about human nature.

Candace Hunter first read Butler’s work during her undergraduate years. As an artist navigating a place for herself in a white-dominated art world, Hunter has also found Butler’s self-affirmations resonant. Annotations on envelopes and incantations in journals, these self-affirmations appear throughout Butler’s archive (now at the Huntington Library in Los Angeles) and involve both envisioning the future, and charting a trajectory to enact it: So be it. See to it!

When I began writing science fiction, when I began reading, heck, I wasn’t in any of this stuff I read. The only black people you found were occasional characters... I wrote myself in, since I’m me and I’m here and I’m writing... Every story I create, creates me. I write to create myself.

— Octavia Butler