



The Association for Preservation Technology International
Technical Committee for Materials presents:

MATERIALS TALKS #13



“Glass Towers and Demon Rum”: Interpreting the Watts Tower’s Ornaments

Between 1921 and 1954, Italian immigrant Sabato (Sam) Rodia built an elaborate structure in his backyard in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles—three hundred-foot towers and numerous smaller sculptures, all made of concrete-covered steel embedded with tens of thousands of small objects such as shells, tile, and glass bottles. This presentation analyzes Rodia’s use of ornamentation, especially ceramic tile, for the ways that it expresses his artistic vision, relates to diasporic Italian vernacular building traditions, and acts as a palimpsest of early twentieth-century material culture in Southern California.

September 20

Webinar via Zoom
September 20, 2022
1:00 - 2:00 PM (EDT)

**REGISTER
NOW**

*Image: “Artwork at the
Watts Towers,” Carol M.
Highsmith, 2013,
Collection: Library of
Congress, Prints &
Photographs Division*

Presenter:

Emma R. Silverman, PhD, Lecturer, California State University, Sacramento

Emma Silverman, PhD is a public scholar with a background in art history; her expertise includes monuments and creative placemaking, craft and folk practices, and critical theories of race and gender. Dr. Silverman's current book project examines the racial politics of cultural heritage at the Watts Towers, a historic-cultural monument in Los Angeles. She currently teaches as a lecturer at CSU Sacramento and conducts research for the National Park Service.

Learning objectives:

1. Use terminology associated with vernacular building practices and self-taught art/architecture.
2. Use terminology associated with assemblages fabricated from an armature, concrete, mortar, ceramics, shells, glass, and other small objects.
3. Identify key trends in ceramic tile produced in Southern California in the early twentieth century.
4. Better understand the interpretive challenges posed by self-taught art and architecture.

1 AIA CES/1 PDH

Materials Talks are scheduled for one hour with a presentation followed by Q&A.

Materials Talks Committee co-chairs:

Kelly Ciociola

Judy Jacob

Becky Wong