Memorial For Enslaved Persons
Concept Statement:

The twenty foot tall stainless steel sculpture created by Ayokunle Odeleye is designed to honor the contributions and commemorate the resting place of enslaved persons in the Lake Cumberland area of Somerset Kentucky. The sculpture was installed on the campus of Somerset Community College on July 9th, 2019.

The physical form of the linear sculpture is inspired by ancient African decorative boat paddle designs. Mounted at the top of the paddle is an image of a bird sitting in a bowl shaped vessel. The boat paddle symbolically refers to water, an important element in the spiritual belief system of people from the continent of Africa who's descendants were enslaved in Somerset Kentucky. In many African spiritual systems water is associated with the creation of life and the phenomena of death. Water was believed to be a medium for the transition from the world of the living to the realm of the dead and vice-versa. Crossing over a body of water in a boat using a paddle was believed to be part of the deceased journey into the next life.
The bowl vessel sitting on top of the paddle is designed to catch water and through an internal tube allow the water to flow down the interior of the paddle and out over the base of the sculpture where names of enslaved persons are engraved.

There are four cut out negative spaces on each side of the paddle and one at the bottom. These spaces symbolically reference the number nine, the number associated with death and the world of "The Ancestors" in traditional African spiritual belief systems.

The bird form at the top of the sculpture is inspired by the Sankofa bird from West Africa. This bird, with it's head looking back over it's body, symbolizes and validates community and individual efforts to go back and reclaim ones culture and history. It is used here to recognize and applaud efforts of the Somerset community in identifying historical information related to enslaved person's graves at Lake Cumberland.