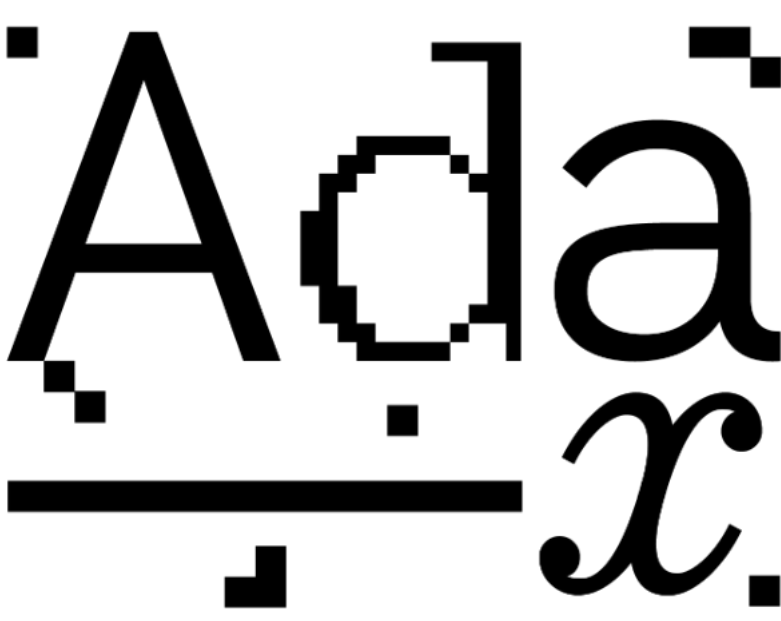


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This is the last part our three-week newsletter series publishing [\*a harlem nocturne: we stayed awake through the night, this dream was too good to sleep on\*](#) by nènè myriam konaté and Josephine Denis, as well as a new entry in [From Our Files](#), an ongoing project of DIY experiments for families.

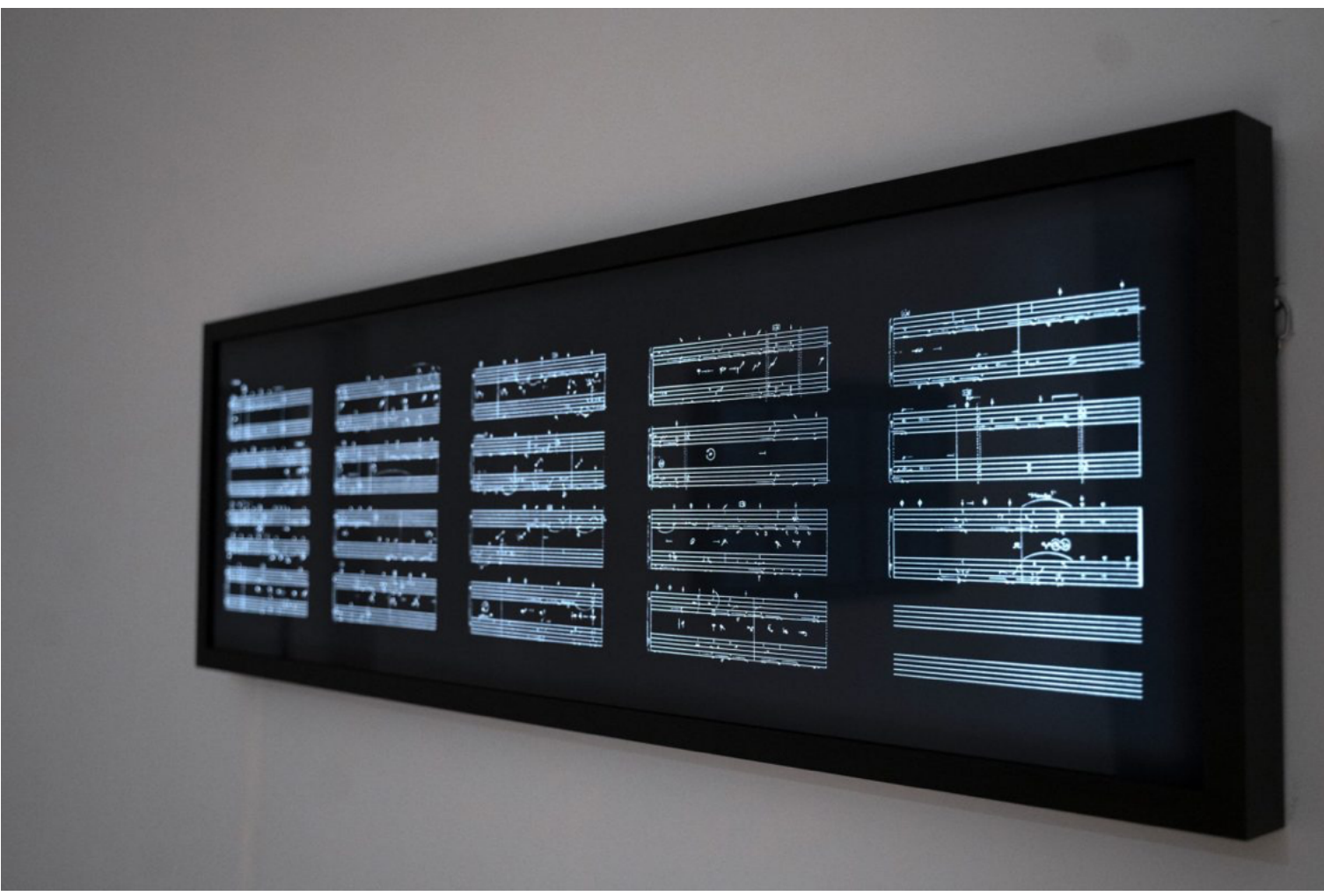


Photo credit: Vjosana Shkurti

***a harlem nocturne: we stayed awake through the night, this dream was too good to sleep on* | PART 3/3**  
**by Josephine Denis + nènè myriam konaté**

SUM OF THE PARTS: WHAT CAN BE NAMED

In 18 minutes, *Sum Of The Parts: What Can Be Named* is an incalculable offering. Deanna Bowen names her ancestors, incants who they loved, who carried and birthed ever-emergent patterns and realities. While some found eternal rest, their offspring (re)made the present, planting seeds for a more palpable future.

In the first few minutes of this recital, I expect to learn, but I do not expect to be moved. I sit straight, ready to almost robotically retain as many details of her lineage as I can. The video work appears to be a clinically precise auto-ethnography from which I can access a depth of knowledge about the artist. Yet her technical, rather than quixotic, retracing of her family's trajectory takes me on a journey spilling beyond the gallery space. Her uninterrupted flow of everyday intimacies and choices unknots myths of heredity. Bowen reminds us of the expansive (after)lives of roots, interlocking beneath the surface, creating conditions for breath. She is manifesting life itself, and does it solemnly; I release tears for the strength of what she creates and holds spiritually. Bowen is such an implacable visionary for digging her people out of the sunken obscure, and giving them a place to dwell within each and every of us that can receive this honouring.

With each passing minute and the mention of lives lived, losses become indelible markers of what was and what could have been. Insidious questions on the role of racial discrimination in this sequence of experiences attempt to derail us from receiving the accumulated fact of our existence. This diversion, which creates an inability to fully be present for this recounting reminds me of the pain that permeates hypothetical desires of a better life.

We are here to witness openings, shifts, and weavings. As we sit with the spectres of truncated and distorted family trees, we are tempted to sink into the soil they spring from, to whisper to their roots while listening for familiar sounds.

I have to give in to this incommensurable flood of affect and drop the pen. As we sit still, Bowen provides us with a specific example of the infinite magic, across time and place, which grounds Black legacies in constant rebuilding. It is a narrative without fantasy. Her steady voice delivers a communal actualization that holds us, fills us with wonderment. I cry to release vague fantasies and welcome the passing down of a specific life's twists and turns as a relay marathon, a disposition of sharing. We witness a meeting of lives that give way to Bowen in the moment in which she conjures her family into existence. A sublime simultaneity of life and death, and my fears are atoned in the practice of memory. Therein lies the healing practice.

The video stops, we understand it to be a beginning, offering no answers. A disorder from which we learn and to which we contribute. Trust that a process is underway; an exercise in the seed. A visit from our ghost kin and we let them pass.

[READ MORE](#)

From Our Files

DIY experiments for families

WEEK THREE : tracing

Like Deanna Bowen does in *A Harlem Nocturne*, collect, imagine, and map memories of your ancestors.

"Try making this map together with several people, either about someone you all knew, or about a shared ancestor. The map can become an archive of small, ordinary memories located in the places they happened, as well as big, important events in your history."

[FULL ACTIVITY](#)