

HESSE FLATOW

Fawundu, Adama Delphine. "One Piece: Ancestral Whispers". *BOMB*, November 6, 2024. Online.

BOMB

ONE PIECE

One Piece: Ancestral Whispers

Envisioning an equitable and sustainable future for all.

BY ADAMA DELPHINE FAWUNDU

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Adama Delphine Fawundu, *Ancestral Whispers*, 2024. Lefferts Historic House, Brooklyn, New York. Photo by Obed Obwoye. Courtesy of the artist.

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Say their names: Anna, Ben, Betty, Bram, Caesar, Cato, Dick, Dinah, Dyna, Flora, Grace, Harry, Isabella, Isaac, Issack, Jack, Jenny, Mary, Mercy, Nan, Nero, Samuel, Susan, Tom, Yaft.

On Sunday, June 9, we gathered in a circle with my bare feet grounded on the green grass in the backyard of the Historic Lefferts House in Prospect Park, Brooklyn, New York. After the third time saying each name, I gently poured water from a jar filled with herbs, then burned sweet grass to bring in the good spirits and sage to keep away negative energy. Three is divine and a continuous cycle: body, mind, and spirit—knowledge, wisdom, understanding—birth, life, death—solid, liquid, gas.

From our lips we released a sonic energy in unison, saying the names of the known twenty-five people who were once enslaved at the Historic Lefferts House between its construction in 1783 and the abolition of slavery in New York in 1827. To pour libation. A connection and honor to those who came before us, to the earth, to the rhythm of the universe, to open the road for something better so that we may never experience this type of brutality again. I learned this ritual as a child, so on this day my eighty-year-old mother opened the space; in her rich Krio words, she explained the meaning of the ritual that we would collectively do.

When I was asked to be the first artist-in-residence at the Historic Lefferts House, I knew that I had to do something to honor the ancestors who were enslaved there. [Ancestral Whispers](#) (2024) is an altar; it is an honoring; it recognizes the humanity, wisdom, and intelligence of each person who witnessed the horrors of slavery inflicted by the Lefferts family. It also sheds light on the rich Indigenous ancestry that people of African descent come from, while paying homage to the Lenni-Lenape who were forcibly removed from their land.

I am confident that systems of colonialism and enslavement correlate with the drastic effects of climate change. Will we continue to collectively live in disorder and non-rhythmic, hierarchical violence? As an artist, it is important for me to tap into Indigenous intelligence in order to think about futures outside of the backwardness of a colonial construct. Perhaps when one stands within *Ancestral Whispers* there is an opportunity to meditate on the way in which Oya, the wind, dances with each textile; to feel immersed in waters; to

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imagine our oneness with the universe, Earth, and each other; and to actively think of new ways to obtain an equitable and sustainable future for us all.

[Adama Delphine Fawundu: Ancestral Whispers](#) can be visited at Lefferts Historic House in New York City on Saturdays and Sundays from 12:00 PM to 4:00 PM until December 1.

Adama Delphine Fawundu is a photographer and interdisciplinary artist born in Brooklyn, New York, the ancestral space of the Lenni-Lanape. She is a descendant of the Mende, Krim, and Bubi peoples. Her distinct visual language centers around themes of Indigenization and ancestral memory. Fawundu co-published the critically acclaimed book *MFON: Women Photographers of the African Diaspora*. Her awards include a 2024 Guggenheim Fellowship, the Catchlight Fellowship, Anonymous Was A Woman Award, New York Foundation for the Arts Photography Fellowship, and the Rema Hort Mann Artist Grant, among others; and she is a 2022 Outwin Boochever Portrait Competition finalist. Fawundu was commissioned by the Park Avenue Armory to participate in *100 Years / 100 Women Project / The Women's Suffrage NYC Centennial Consortium* (2019–2021). Her works are in the permanent collections of the Brooklyn Museum of Art, Princeton University Museum, Bryn Mawr College, Montclair Art Museum, Petrucci Family Foundation of African American Art, Brooklyn Historical Society, Norton Museum of Art, David C. Driskell Art Collection, and a number of private collections. She is an assistant professor of visual arts at Columbia University.