

HESSE FLATOW

Rosen, Miss. (2026, June 23). "Migration stories from across the African diaspora." Huck. Online.

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Text by [Miss Rosen](#)

Photography by [Adama Delphine Fawundu](#)



Praise House — Adama Delphine Fawundu’s new monograph explores evolutions of life, culture and family as African people have migrated and been moved forcefully across the world, from Brooklyn to Sierra Leone, to Saint Helena and South Carolina’s Sea Islands.

Growing up in [Crown Heights](#) during the 1980s and '90s, artist and educator [Adama Delphine Fawundu](#) remembers Brooklyn as the crossroads of the African diaspora. While Fawundu was born in America, her parents and siblings had made the journey from their native Sierra Leone, while her friends’ families hailed from all points south. They met on the playground and visited each others’ homes, enjoying cultures and cuisines of the diaspora. She had roti with Trini homies; djon djon, the black rice, with Haitian friends; chicken curry with Guyanese peeps; and grits with the [Alabama](#) family next door.

“Brooklyn was a safe haven, almost utopia. My friends would get together and make up dances. We would daydream and imagine what our lives would be like as adults,” Fawundu says. “We grew up like a family and that’s something that people brought with them too, those cultural values of community that you get down south, in the Caribbean, and in Africa. It’s transported here and exists in this circle we have. There was this connection you couldn’t quite put your finger on, but things were always very familiar. It’s not even anything you paid attention to – it was just an extremely diverse group of people that created their own culture together organically.”

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It's this very feeling Fawundu encountered in 1998 when she first walked into a praise house on Saint Helena Island, a sea island in Beaufort County, South Carolina. Home to the ancient Indian Hill Site, a spiritual home of indigenous life for centuries before colonisation, Saint Helena Island has become a major centre of Gullah Geechee culture. Descendants of enslaved West Africans from the "Rice Coast" including the Mende people of Sierra Leone, the Gullah of South Carolina and Geechee of Georgia and Florida preserved and remade their ancestral heritage in the music, literature, language, crafts, cuisine, and agricultural traditions to this very day.



Eschewing the trappings of organised religion, the praise house was a modest wooden structure used as a site for prayer, singing, and gathering together in community. It effortlessly embodied modernist ideals like "form follows function" and "less is more" by simply being attuned to the needs of those who it serves, including Fawundu, for whom it would become a guiding star. Over the past three decades, her photographic practice has explored ancestral memory as it is written in the sky and on the earth, reconnecting places, flora, fauna, objects, and spirits of the diaspora.

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Now, with the publication of *Praise House* (Archive Books), Fawundu crafts a panoramic look at stories of connection and communion woven through time and space. Printed in accordion format so that it unfolds like an ancient scroll, *Praise House* is a journey into the spaces between the notes that hold the universe's secrets in their silence. "I think about how Creole languages form using indigenous African syntax and words from the English language. It just happens – like jazz music," Fawundu says. "There's a rhythm that the body is moving with that could take anything and put it into that."

Praise House existed before it was conceptualised as a book, as an intuitive response to being exactly where she should. "These photos were made over the years of me going places for the first time, seeing something familiar and then making a photo of it," Fawundu says. "I trust my intuition as I move through this life, and that's what's informed my work as an artist. Something in my spirit is telling me, 'This has to be.' And not knowing what in the world, but that's how these photos were made. It's my journey."