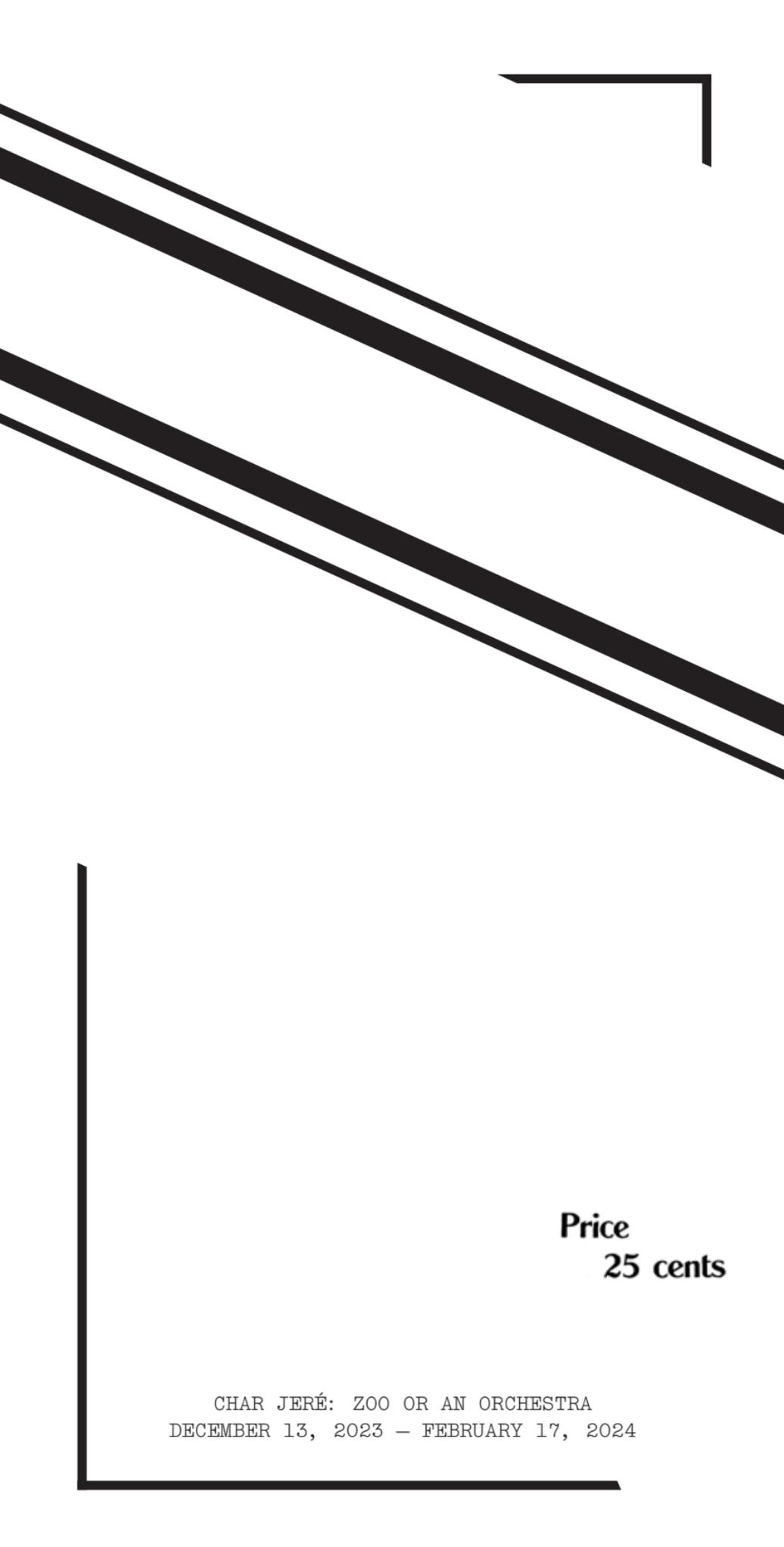


A black fractal shape, resembling a map of the world, is centered on a white background. The shape is highly irregular and jagged, with many small protrusions and indentations, characteristic of a fractal. The text "The World Research Lab" is overlaid in white, centered horizontally and vertically within the black shape.

The World Research Lab



Price
25 cents

CHAR JERÉ: ZOO OR AN ORCHESTRA
DECEMBER 13, 2023 – FEBRUARY 17, 2024

UNSEEN KNOWNs SEEN NOW
HOW TO RECOVER HIDDEN RECOLLECTIONS
FROM THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS

WORDS AND IMAGES BY EMMY PARKER

This guide explores the concept of using AI image-making tools to recover lost memories from the collective unconscious. Whether exploring personal or shared histories, this step-by-step process plugs into artificial intelligence to unlock ancestral intelligence in order to reenvision hidden recollections and reassemble fragments of an erased past.

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STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

1. Choose an AI Image-Making Tool

There are many to choose from, but please note that AI has been primarily designed, trained, and maintained by white men. Therefore, any AI image is a collaboration between your imagination, the source images you choose, and the white man hive mind (WMHM) that developed the algorithms deciphering your prompts. For this reason, pay special attention to Step 8.

2. Define the Memory or Theme

Clearly outline the memory or theme you wish to recover. Whether it's a personal experience, historical event, or cultural moment, having a clear focus enhances the effectiveness of the memory-recovery process. For example, I am digging up my buried and embodied memories of Black women in electronic music. The history of our involvement has been snuffed out by the myth of white-man genius made heavy by names like Kraftwerk, Moog, Cage, Reich, Eno, Moroder, etc. AI is assisting me

to excavate bits and pieces of Yolanda Reynolds, Nona Hendryx, Yvonne Turner, Angela Winbush, Stacey Hale, Patrice Rushen—the list goes on, but I can't see the names as we fly further back. There are Black women in and around the studios of Francis Bebey and William Onyeabor, but their faces are blurred out. “They” say Vladimir Ussachevsky “championed women,” so there were probably Black women in and around the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center, also Mills College, and with Olly Wilson when he planted the seeds for the Technology in Music and Related Arts Department at Oberlin in 1967, but they are muffled, blurry, and even more distant. And even before that, Leon Theremin worked with the American Negro Ballet and married Lavinia Williams, a Black prima ballerina. And yet no information, records, or history of Black women's work in electronic music gets through the amnesia. The deep nothingness assigned to Black women in the electronic-music canon is deadening, violent, and it has murdered my memories of Black women and synthesizers. This project does not revise history, it re-alives it: shoveling dirt off those that were buried alive. Now I see my ancestors with my own eyes, receiving their insight, picking up what they're putting down, and I can sit and visit with them for a spell.

3. Gather Source Imagery

Collect relevant images that are tangentially related to the memory or theme. These could be personal photos, historical images, or representations of the cultural context surrounding the memory. I chose images of Black women performers from the 1960s, early analog synthesizers, and the first electronic-music studios in academic institutions.

4. Upload Source Imagery

Use your chosen AI tool to upload and blend the selected source imagery. Experiment with the tool's settings to create a base image that captures the essence of the memory or theme.

5. Iterative Adjustments

Fine-tune the image by making iterative adjustments. Experiment with features like color balance, saturation, and composition to evoke the emotions associated with the memory. You will notice with each iteration that Black women are

Anglicized by AI (aka the WMHM) over time, so it's important to continuously feed it reference images of the Black women in your memories. Doing so will stave off WMHM's propensity to iterate toward body thinning and lengthening, nose shaving and pointing, ever-lightening skin beige-ing.

6. Introduce Symbolism

Incorporate symbolic elements that resonate with the memory or theme. This could involve adding specific objects, colors, or shapes that hold significance in the context of the collective memory. I added archival images of the RCA Mark II Synthesizer, The Original New Timbral Orchestra Synthesizer (TONTTO), and the electronic music studios at TIMARA, CPEMC, and CCM at Mills College. I also add images of New Hope Baptist Church in Newark, where Dionne and DeeDee Warwick and Cissy Houston sang in the choir, and First Church of Deliverance in Chicago, where the Hammond B3 Organ was first introduced to gospel music.

7. Explore Abstract Representations

Consider experimenting with abstract representations. Allow the AI tool to generate variations that might not directly resemble the source imagery but capture the essence or emotion connected to the memory; how does it feel in your body to re-see and re-know this self-excavated history? What is the kinesthetic quality? Be aware of the WMHM influence on these “abstract representations.” Does the quality truly resonate with you?

8. Reflect and Refine

Take moments to reflect on the evolving image. Consider how well it aligns with the collective memory and the emotions associated with it. Does it light up the same part of your brain as when a wise family member hums guidance that tickles your ear bones, or does it feel false, empty, and corrupted by the WMHM—i.e. does it make you feel the same as when people talk about “Afrofuturism,” disconnected from your intersubjective reality and the ongoingness of your identity? Refine the image based on your reflections.

9. Generate Collages or Sequences

Create collages or sequences of images to depict the memory from different perspectives or moments

in time. This step can provide a more comprehensive representation of the recovered memory and help build the resonant circuitry of your ongoingness.

10. Save and Document

Save the final images and document the process. Consider keeping a journal or notes about the memory-recovery journey, including insights gained and emotional responses evoked. Are new narratives and patterns activated when you see yourself in an image you've never seen yourself in before? Does the new image of the near past allow you to stretch the imagining of what's possible in the near future? Can AI image-making tools recover collective memory, assist in reparative processes and the healing of trauma, and unveil hidden recollections that contribute to a richer understanding of personal and shared histories? And can the WMHM be redeemed through our continued efforts to make good use of the master's tool?

To see more of UNSEEN KNOWNNS, follow @cicely_degrasse_tyson on Instagram.







JACE CLAYTON IN CONVERSATION WITH CJ SALAPARE

On November 13, 2023, artist and writer Jace Clayton (also known DJ/rupture) and curator CJ Salapare sat down for a candid conversation in Manhattan—an encounter set into motion by the artist Char Jeré.

Jace Clayton

When I walk into Char's studio, I feel I'm in the presence of a highly particular maximalist ontology. I encounter all these things with juicy, unruly materiality in various states of becoming and unbecoming. A lot of their work overflows ordinary temporal boundaries, like the seed bomb/fire hydrant objects—cardboard, newspaper, and other materials with seeds embedded covering the outside and inside; lively objects meant to decay, meant to cause rebirth. If a fancy-pants collector walked in, they would say, "Wait, this is cardboard and mud and Vaseline." Things are understood as unstable, which ties into an alternative temporality—anything but stasis.

CJ Salapare

Char has called the exhibition *Zoo or an Orchestra*, which I think gets at ideas of instability and multidimensionality but also gives a sense of being at the knife's edge of something, a potential toward order that then blurs or bleeds into a kind of disorder.

It's funny: I met Char at Molasses Books, a place where they work in Bushwick that's a bookstore, coffee shop, and bar. People can spend time there in many ways—drinking a beer at 11 am, having a coffee at 11 pm. A different take on "alternative temporality," if you will.

Char and I joke that lost souls go sit at the bar there—like me. We began having meandering conversations, beginning with small talk, then zigzagging into things both profound and profane, matters that were personal but also deeply public and political, sort of everything under the sun. All the while Char is standing there engaging in multiple conversations at once. People would inevitably eavesdrop and feel compelled to chime in, so the place often becomes this fulsome congregation.

That's one way that I understand the line between the two terms in the title, zoo and an orchestra. You don't know what's going to be symphonic and what's going to be just chaos.

Jace Clayton

That title makes me think of the uselessness of freedom as a category. In the zoo, you enact your freedom, but you're still in the cage—your habitat appears natural but has been completely externally determined. Whereas the orchestra is the totalitarian aesthetic formation par excellence. There's a sole conductor, the patriarch, whose directions you follow as you play back the fixed score. The modicum of freedom here derives from compliance, from not having to take responsibility, from performing your assigned role really well.

As a sonic metaphor, the title pits the zoo's anarchic all-voices-on-their-own-at-once against the symphony, where all voices are mere components of the composer's voice. To sidestep this chaos/order binary, we can foreground interdependence.

CJ Salapare

Whenever a system or a regime of value is imposed on us, one way to resist is by generating your own set of values, or at least poking holes in the conferred ones. I can understand whether something is considered valuable on the basis of my own volition, my own thought.

Value, in Char's hands, is neither fixed nor regulatory, but always in the making—not just from the standpoint of the singular but from the messy vantages of the many, the multitude. Materials have agency; ideas can be catalytic; strangers (at a bar) can end up as friends. To "give up" control is actually propulsive—a way of handling that feels supremely educational, which is also a current in Char's work.

In the *Periodic Table of Black Revolutionaries* (2019–), for example, Char imagines a new bedrock of existence: not elements but key Black people—historical and present-day—who have formed their own worlds or universes, assembled by Char into a welcome crowd or company.¹ What's interesting is that I encountered it first at Molasses: Char pointed out a framed edition of it that hangs by the window, presiding over the books and people who come and go.

Jace Clayton

The first thing I ever saw by Char was the *Periodic Table of Black Revolutionaries*, and I thought, this could go in so many different places. It could actually be a curriculum for schoolkids.

An exciting aspect of Char's work is how it traverses the gallery but doesn't end there, because it is actively engaged with other spaces and paradigms. For example, *Community Distillation* (2023): it's an installation-event in the form of a DIY science lab, complete with beakers and flasks. People are invited to bring herbs, plants—or book pages!—and Char slowly distills essential oils out of the mixture, which participants get to take home. The grassroots gathering works via concentration and dispersal, from science into sense memory. The essence of the matter—what it smells like—depends on who brings what.

This ties into the humor in Char's work, which exists alongside its seriousness. If you want to change the world, you have to have a good sense of the absurd. That's fundamental to Char's World Research Lab (WRL)—it's a little bit tongue-in-cheek but it's also completely serious.²

“This is not science fiction, as that would require an imagination, and at this point I have none. Zero,” says the narrator of *When a Pitcher Plant Invites You to Dinner* (2021), a WRL video. “One day you're researching, the next day you're drawing conclusions. By the end of the month you've become the research.”

That, to me—rendered with Char's lo-fi, VHS-tape aesthetic and sound design—sums up the postrationalist world-building process at hand. What if we were to really rethink what information is? Might it start by folding so-called waste and noise back into the calculus? How do we value or share information once gathered? What happens to the world if the categories that make it legible get scrambled? Are scientists cooler than artists? What the hell is research, anyway?

You don't need to be a wretched tech overlord to dare to say, “I'm going to change the world.” By its sheer existence and circulation, an artist's work rubs up against the existing order, and the friction that the encounter generates is an energy source. The ideas will spread. Char's work reminds me that world building requires internal

consistency (with plenty of room for paradox) but is actually agnostic about scale. You just start and keep going.

CJ Salapare

One way that Char thinks through the building of alternative forms of knowledge is via the library. They used to work in a library and did a degree in data analytics and visualization. A library is a place that's completely organized but where you can also let yourself roam free. In this repository for knowledge, you either follow a specific predetermined path or you let yourself run wild; either way, you chart your own intellectual course. Bringing the library into the mix alongside these two other frames—the zoo, the orchestra, or the library—seems really generative.

Jace Clayton

When I think of public libraries, especially in New York, it's a mix of the studious and the completely on edge. Someone's there for Renaissance poetry. Someone's there to shower in the bathroom as best as they can. It's no accident that this range of uses happens in a place dedicated to making knowledge accessible. But the classification systems always shape our agency. Knowledge and desire don't just flow. They get channeled. Char addresses this quite directly with their works that deal with Dorothy Porter Wesley, the pioneering Black librarian who invented a new classification system because the dominant Dewey Decimal System shelved all books by Black authors under one of two numbers: 325, colonization, or 326, slavery.

Char has a number of sculptures built from books that have piping coming out of them, with touch-responsive DIY circuits that make sound. A book is already filled with language and therefore sounds, but Char pulls that to the surface in this very hands-on way to make materials speak. Immediately, you're thinking, “How should I engage with this? Is it meant to be read or touched or played like a noise instrument?” In other words: What barriers do we need to remove so that people can feel that they can interact with something? What happens if you discard the protective layers of expertise, so that it radiates this epistemological sphere around it that can modulate social engagement?

I remember first seeing some of these book objects. I'd think, “Oh, that's sad. Totally trashed this book. It's become unreadable. This is no longer

in circulation in the library.” I’m not sure if they ever realized it, but Char had an idea for damaging or altering books and then putting them back into Columbia’s library system. I love artist-made distribution networks, which that book recirculation piece suggests. You don’t just have to make *things*, you can make points of access. Or sites of decomposition: last year Char was spending a lot of time in the ceramics studio, creating these furnace/kiln objects. When I asked them what they were for, they said, “To burn shit down.”

CJ Salapare

Can something, a book or even generally speaking, ever be fully destroyed? There’s a certain kind of recycling, or repurposing, or just re-enlivening and exhuming of materials that happens in Char’s work. Do the materials have histories or memories?

Jace Clayton

Some artists tend to be metaphorical; I think of Char’s work as metabolic. There’s a sense of transformation, digestion. You’re right, something actually can’t be destroyed; it can be repurposed, it can be taken in and out of circulation. But the way Char does it, it’s fun.

Broadly speaking, in the art world, people like a simple rhetorical framework. “This artist is X, Y, and Z. This art is about A, B, and C. OK great, I get it.” Whenever you present more than that, whenever you create complexity within that, whenever you give your audience so many things that whatever they’re going to pay attention to is going to create its own narrative path through this dense field of installation—if an audience member is up for it, they’re in for a treat. Those in search of a hot take might not get what they want. But the longer one stays, the more rewarding it’s going to be.

Lots of Char’s works are set to go off on timers, which adds an element of surprise, the eruption of a different type of presence that can be really effective in the gallery. And many of the works are full of sound, which always charges spaces in an interesting way. When I met Char at their Columbia thesis exhibition at the Wallach Art Gallery, there was this amazing moment. We were sitting in front of *Nightmares of Being Straight* (2023), the showpiece, which is four hairdresser chairs made out of reclaimed Apple computer boxes, adorned with low-cost, sidewalk-sale type items, electronics, paintings, collaged assemblages, seed-bomb mud.

And there was this quiet noise, a rough drone, made by a plastic record with Char’s hairs (hair as soundwave) embedded in it spinning under some kind of photosensitive circuitry.

Fifteen minutes into our conversation, the window shades on the gallery automatically raised up. And because Char’s electronics were photosensitive, the drone’s pitch did this corresponding swoop upward. It rose and was transformed. The effect was fantastic. What was initially a sound I was listening to had receded into the background. Then suddenly it’s in the foreground, changing in reaction to this “smart building” window shade opening. The piece became much wider because it was audibly interacting with various influences and actors. I realized the extent to which *Nightmare’s* audio-visual aspects were environmentally sited, and understood that network of modulation to be part of the piece.

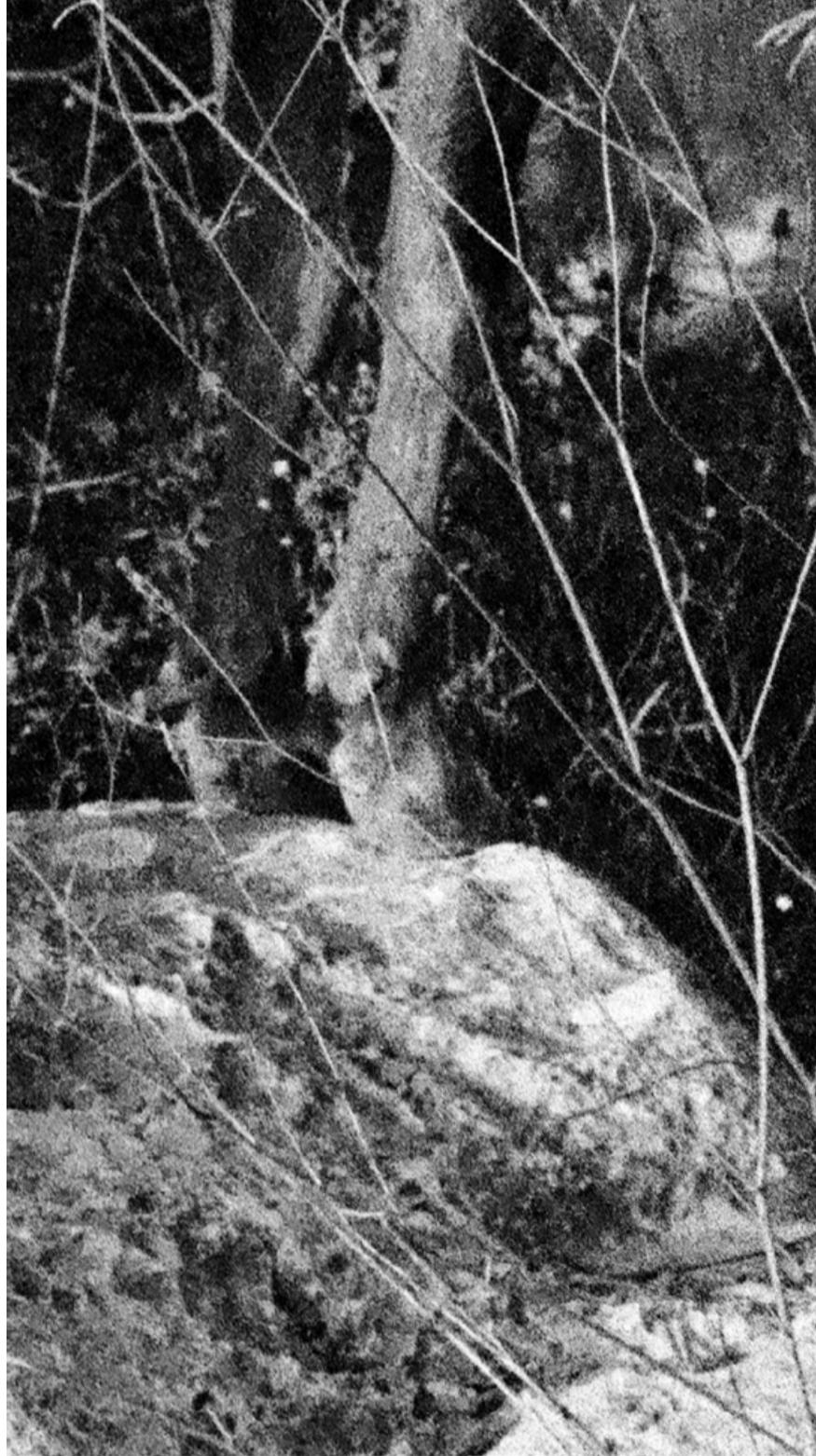
CJ Salapare

Fortuitous meanderings, unexpected turns become moments of revelation or delight or connection. There are echoes between how you describe the work existing in space and the way I am describing Char existing in a different kind of space, whether that’s sociality, society, or something in between.

Whether Char is the mastermind of it all, the conductor of symphonies known and unknown, remains to be seen. But in their work there’s an openness to contingencies, setting the stage so that things can come to light rather than being constricted or kept at bay. There’s a lot of ambiguity, especially as to which things are meant to be touched and played with. You sense your inner cop, and become aware of the potential pleasure once you start disobeying.

1. *Periodic Table of Black Revolutionaries* is an ongoing project that highlights the work of powerful Black women and queer people who have shaped the world. In *Periodic Table of Black Revolutionaries (Weathering)* (2022), one manifestation of the piece, LEDs convey the real-time weather data of each person’s birthplace, updating every three minutes. This code comes from METAR maps, an application used by pilots to assist in flight planning and weather forecasting.

2. Launched in 2020, World Research Lab (WRL) is a kind of portal or knowledge center that doubles as a website, video repository, and space of discourse. It brings together Jeré’s lo-fi videos combining data and statistics with nostalgic pop reference; bio-data sonification echoes throughout the same digital space as clips and remixes of musicians like Patti LaBelle. WRL encompasses narratives from charting the decline of Black farms across the US to compiling a library vortex that recounts the ruminations of Toni Morrison, Malcolm X, and others on human-rights struggles.



MY CHILD (STOMACH)

Because it is in your nature that your heart wants for what is mysterious to it, and you wish to know the unknowable; past, present, and future. And because what you wish to know is known only to god herself, who in her godly vengeance denied us a prophet or a true mantis. So because it is your nature to want to know what is coming to you, I fixed the following list of practical notes. My intention is that we have our own prayer; only for that reason I put this together. So you can use it to avoid the idolatry of confusion, muteness, and vanity. My hope is that you won't end up looking where you should not look for answers that are not given to you.



FIND YOUR WORDS (FINGERS)

First you must reveal your question to yourself, and make it be clear and articulated in the most precise form. This will be your effort to understand what your wish or question is fully and completely. Some choose to put pen to paper and lay down their questions in writing and then read them. Reading out loud makes a good impression.



PICK A DAY (LEFT EYE)

The first, third, seventh, twelfth, thirteenth, seventeenth, and twenty-sixth of the month are all bad days. Do not pray on the day before or after the full moon. The good days of the week are Sunday, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Other days are neither good nor bad.

LOOK UP (RIGHT EYE)

With great humility, submit your mind. The attention here is on the necessity of mercy. You are preparing to engender fate, to ask about the order of things, to address your situation. In this age of no oblation, mercy is how we survive. Choose a spot in your interior to focus on; a scratch on a kettle that is on the stove or the place near the ceiling where paint is coming off the wall. If you have a window where there is a sky, you can use that if you like.



SAY THIS (THROAT)

With my mind and spirit I turn to you, as you gave them to me for reasons that I do not know. I swear that I am nothing but my body and the life in it. Give me the courage to be able to stand my own ignorance; give me more time to bare what I am, which is my body and the life in it and nothing else. (No house, no clothes, no wife, no job, no money, no game, no award, no trophy, no position, no victory, no merchandise, no knowledge, no guilt.)



THEN NOW (NOSTRILS)

The cause of all causes and knowledge of all that is knowable can ring in your ear or open your chest. Go about your business as soon as you can.



Char Jeré: *Zoo or an Orchestra* is presented at Artists Space, December 13, 2023–February 17, 2024.

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