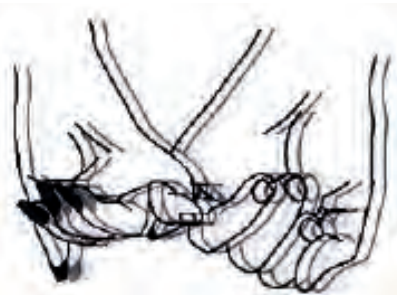


# RECIPES FOR DIFFICULT FRIENDSHIPS



## *Adeola Enigbokan & Carlos Medellin*

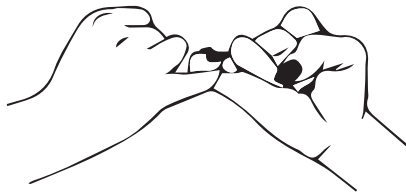
*"...as the proverb says, men cannot know each other until they have "eaten salt together"; nor can they admit each other into friendship or be friends till each has been found lovable and trusted by each...for a wish for friendship may arise quickly, but friendship does not."*

*- Aristotle, The Nichomachean Ethics, Book VIII*

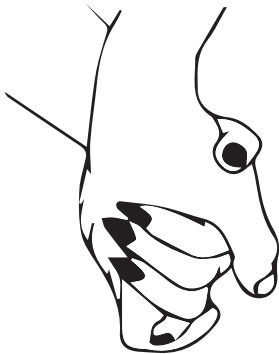
We encountered each other nine years ago on the way from New York to Moscow, Carlos the architect and Adeola the psychologist. It was not immediately clear that we would be friends. Being strangers living together in a strange place made us relate from our common understandings. Empathy was built on everyday dialogs and experiences. We needed each other. At a time in the city when being openly gay became a crime, and being black could get a person killed, our daily practices



became crucial. As strangers, we came up with our own recipes to understand our differences and to understand the city and make ourselves understood. Walking together, exploring, cooking, eating, shopping, working, and resting: these spatial practices became rituals of love and survival that slowly opened the city to us. Eventually, the city enveloped us in the magic of friendship. We “ate salt together” in Moscow.



Difficult friendships are born out of difficult situations and often defined by social differences; they are conflictual relationships necessary for survival. These friendships could be between teacher and student, boss and employee, privileged do-gooder and urban poor, architect and client. To design these relationships successfully is a kind of magic.



Magic, in our work, is found in everyday life, through creating and following recipes that bring into the world material effects that would not otherwise “naturally” have been there. It means engaging the unexplainable, happenstance elements of the everyday world by activating bodily instinct and intuition to navigate the environment. Magic is finding a feeling—of connectedness to the earth, animals, and other people for example—where it seems such a feeling should not exist. Like cooking, magic is a handicraft, or manual skill, which must be learned through apprenticeship or trial and error. Magic requires facing the unknown.

Based on our experiences living and working in Moscow and Bogota, we provide recipes and incantations for designing spatial relationships of trust, i.e. “friendships,” in difficult circumstances, between unlikely characters.

**Objects:**

*open spaces for the expression of strong emotion*

**Events:**

*increase levels of intrinsic motivation*

**Movements:**

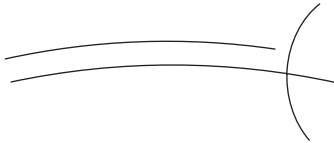
*where creative ways to relate are more likely to emerge*

*The creation of spaces through difficult friendships is magic, bringing empathy and understanding. The magic can often take the form of small victories: little changes in the environment and how one experiences it.*

## Making Friends in Moscow

*Adeola*

In Moscow, it was difficult for me to trust Carlos because of my sense that he could not empathize with my experience walking the streets as a black woman. Abuse, name-calling, monkey noises or jungle references, sometimes even physical threats, were all part of my daily life in the city. Carlos did not experience this, though he witnessed these things at times. He did not share this experience, because even though he is gay, he chose to hide his gayness in public, to “pass,” while leaving me isolated. I never blamed Carlos for this choice, but it fundamentally meant to me that he had chosen the side of the people who permitted my daily abuse. His witnessing was never neutral.



Carlos and I, like many people, struggle with trusting each other. When we share ideas or work together, we run into differences that emerge from our varying histories.

Another thing that makes my friendship with Carlos difficult is that as an architect, he has occupied and accepted a deeply masculine role, and a “white” role: i.e. he has at times rested in the cover provided by presenting as white and male and “straight,” as a “brilliant architect.” According to the directory of African American Architects, in the United States, it seems that only around 470 black women are currently licensed as architects.<sup>1</sup> Architecture never really presented itself as an attractive discipline to me, though I have always been acutely aware of my body, and its place in the design of urban space. I chose instead to become an environmental psychologist to better explore the relationships between bodies and space, inspired by the inroads made by women in that discipline. My doctoral program in Environmental Psychology at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York was co-founded by a woman, Professor Leanne Rivlin, who received respect and credit as a co-founder of the discipline from the beginning.

1. Mann, D. & Grant, B. “The Directory of African American Architects.” University of Cincinnati. 2020. <https://blackarch.uc.edu>

I have never been able to pass as a representative of disembodied universal knowledge, and in the world, I appear as myself, not the adopted “protogée” of some important father figure. However, as fish out of the water, flopping around the city of Moscow, Carlos and I found ourselves drawn together: to understand ourselves and our practices through the city’s unique spatiality.

## *Carlos*

For Adeola and myself, Moscow was very different from what we knew as citizens of the Americas. Our understandings of the city were very different at that time, despite exploring it side by side. The life stories that defined us at the moment, determined by our circumstances of class, race, sexual preference, and gender, put us in different positions. Relying on my looks and politeness, I could “pass” in the “normality” of the Moscow rules. I avoided expressing my sexuality to fit in the established order. That situation demonstrated the great differences that separated us, often materializing in an inability to empathize with each other. For Adeola, my attitudes were subject to strong judgements, while for me, this was a process of self-discovery and recognition of whom I wanted to be. Many times, we were unable to recognize the places we were coming from, ending up becoming only spectators of what we faced individually in Moscow.

However, walking Moscow brought us closer together: it made us need each other while allowing us to explore our many individual stories that connected us. We gave support to each other not only by going through the happenings we lived in the city, but also by

understanding how that process was shaping us as individual researchers.

Adeola developed a concept to explain how social separations she felt in Moscow were mainly driven by the dynamic of defining individuals based on their race, class, and gender. Titled *The City of Islands Within Islands*, her research described a city made up of closed social circles. Belonging to any of those circles meant looking in a certain way or behaving within certain standards. On the other hand, as a gay man just coming out, I wanted to explore the sexual geography of Moscow. It was a self-reflective process in understanding the opportunities to express sexuality and fulfill needs within a landscape that seemed mainly defined by male chauvinist desires. I developed a concept I named paracities to describe how sexual desires that fall outside of “normality” are rejected and conceived of as parasites, forced to exist in the shadows and in parallel worlds that are both constructed as physical (sex clubs, saunas, brothels, etc.) and digital (dating apps, online dating services, etc.) spaces.

This research helped us work through the facts that made it difficult for us to fit in and make friends in Moscow.


## *Together, Adeola & Carlos*

After a year in Moscow, Carlos went back home to Bogotá, and Adeola to New York. When we got the call to work on a guide to Moscow for future researchers at the Strelka Institute for Media Architecture and Design, we took the project as an opportunity to reflect on the places and routes that helped us forge our friendship.

Figure 1. Facade of the restorative justice center, *La Casita*, including 2019 addition of graphic identity and public signage.

Moscow Rules documents the daily practices that helped us find our way in the city. It shows the framework, the places, and encounters where we crossed the difficult lines that divided us and made living in Moscow a struggle. Walking was our recipe for knowing the city in an intimate way. As an architect and an environmental psychologist, walking was the way to construct a shared reality and use multiple senses to discover new experiences. As visitors, it was a mode of perception, a creative practice that made our bodies move together to join the images and sounds from which the urban environment is constructed. As strangers, it was our way to relate, our special moments to talk, and what helped us to know each other, our fears, our interests, and our desires.

## Making Justice in Bogotá



*“Friendship seems too to hold states together, and lawgivers to care more for it than for justice; for unanimity seems to be something like friendship, and this they aim at most of all, and expel faction as their worst enemy; and when men are friends they have no need of justice, while when they are just they need friendship as well, and the truest form of justice is thought to be a friendly quality.”*

- Aristotle, *The Nichomachean Ethics*, Book VIII

### Carlos

*“Making friends at a restorative justice program!”*

When I returned to Colombia, the concepts Adeola and I developed to address social divisions helped me understand Bogotá in a way I had not been able to see before. The stories that shaped our friendship in Moscow made me change my perspective about my city.

In Colombia, everyday friendliness and politeness are not enough to cross the social classes and inequality that define our interactions. Bogotá, my hometown, is divided socio-economically to such an extreme that its geography is defined between north and south; the northern part of the city being wealthy, while the south is economically depressed. This situation brings about a kind of violence through objectification of the inhabi-

tants, creating a collective narrative that labels individuals and defines how one can be in the city. In the words of Paulo Freire in his book *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, “A dehumanization ... is not a given destiny but the result of an unjust order.”<sup>2</sup>

Northerners are colloquially called “*gente bien*,” or “good people.” In this constructed narrative, they are granted an unquestionable role that allows them to blame and judge without being judged themselves. It might explain why in Bogotá it is not easy to have unpredictable social encounters, and subsequently, why it is difficult to build friendships that can cross strong social divisions. In fact, there’s a considerable absence of spaces where different life stories can be shared in order to raise a collective empathy.

This concern about justice and friendship was clearly shown to me in 2016, when the Restorative Justice (RJ) program for young people in Bogotá was established by the city’s government. It was born out of the recognition of the lack of opportunities and the stigmatization of lower-income communities primarily located in the southern part of the city. Appearing as an opportunity for exploration, RJ could affect the entire criminal system and open space to rethink the way justice and judgment are conceived in Bogotá. With this agenda, *La Casita*, the headquarters of the RJ program, was located in the center of the city, in an accessible and common ground where the division between north and south is blurred.

Along with my colleague Nicolás Paris, an artist whose work deals with informal education and art as an archival medium to chronicle collective agreements, we aimed to design *La Casita*



as a restorative space. To begin, we sought to understand how restorative justice happens in Bogotá: what restorative rituals exist, how it was implemented by judges, how it was put into practice by social workers, and how it was experienced by the users of the program.

At an eye opening reconciliation session at *La Casita*, a victim shared her narrative of a traumatic event. In a tense moment of rage, she expressed a need for the offenders to take responsibility for their actions. The offenders expressed that in the moment of the crime, they no longer conceived of the victim as a subject, but as an object from which something could be obtained, giving us a clear understanding of the dynamics of objectification in this event. Cristina, the director of *La Casita*, who was sitting next to me, explained how the stories we were hearing addressed a core dynamic in the

criminal process: judgment. If I am a judge, I judge based on the law. If I am a victim, I judge from the pain or the damage caused. If I am society, I judge based on normative values. In every case, the offenders are the only ones who are judged. The director told me how surprised and proud she was with herself when a few months ago she was robbed: in the moment, instead of wanting to chase or punish, she worried about the situation that led the young offender to act in this way.

The meeting gave us a clear understanding of how restorative victim-offender dialogues can make development of impossible friendships possible. It was also proof of how strong social divisions (in this case, two offenders from the south and the victim, judges, psychosocial workers, and myself from the north) make it impossible to transgress from a “friendly” environment to a more just one.

*Witnessing these stories made it clear that the project needed to focus on building a place from testimonies. These interactions can be tiny victories that address the tension between users and professionals, caused by the frustration and lack of trust in the system, and between each other, that prevent real friendships from arising. La Casita could provide interventions that raise empathy and help us cross the dividing lines. It should be space aimed to soften our emotional states.*



## The Environment as a Protocol:

This design project took the shape of an architecture of narratives, that is to say, flexible and dynamic designs that create embraceable scenarios for intimate, personal reflections and for acknowledging responsibility. The designs materialized in a recipe for a series of objects and events that engage with the space, presenting personal stories that could end up connecting community members through a common narrative.





**I) Pedagogical Objects and Testimonial Collectors: Three tools to construct narratives through tracing, speaking, and projecting videos. They are also objects designed to gather and display testimonies.**



**II) Flexible spaces: Theatrical scenarios made out of curtains, to be transformed by the user while providing specific environmental qualities or shapes needed for different activities.**



**III) Brand and website: A branding and communication platform to generate identity to the program, remembrance, and to archive and make accessible to anybody the stories gathered at La Casita.**

**IV) Mobile space: A multi-use transformable artifact to bring conversations about justice to public space.**

This environment is a protocol in itself, set out to rethink these spaces as rituals for transformation. Alternative practices that could create the right environments for friendship become tools to transgress naturalized violence, dehumanization, and segregation. After the space started to be used, some of the offenders expressed that they like *La Casita* because it became a place where they were able to make friends.

Upon first look, this last story made the project seem like a total success. However, despite being inspired by the results, when thinking about the aim to create a space that could let relationships cross strong social divisions and establish difficult friendships, a new question was raised: Why is it that friendships arose primarily between offenders, if restorative justice spaces like these are supposed to be connect offenders with victims, relatives, judges, and professionals?

In the process of discussing this article, Adeola asked me something that made me understand the answer:

- *Carlos, where are your testimonies, your confessions placed in that design?*
- *Where are the testimonies of the psychosocial workers, of the victims, the judges and directors?*
- *Are those recognitions also shaping La Casita as a place of reconciliation and reparation?*

My answer was:

- *They are not there.*

Despite our good intentions by implementing a participatory and horizontal design process, the reality is that only the offenders were judged, while nobody else had reflected on their responsibility in the construction of the conflictive contexts where these teenagers live. Upon this reflection, it seemed obvious why the offenders were the only ones able to rethink their role in the situation and to establish difficult friendships that crossed the social stigmatization that has always been internalized by them.

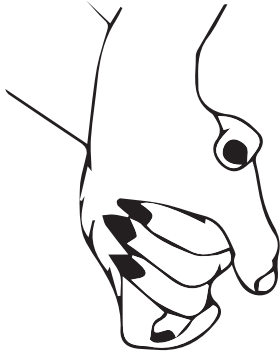
I thought that for this place to become a tool to transgress division and violence, we needed to design a space that facilitates encounters between victims and offenders. Now I understand that *La Casita* cannot be such unless it becomes a place for friendships to grow. The design process is key, and we need to rethink the roles that each of us plays when we decide to stand on either side of the judging lines.

3. *"La Letra De 'El Violador Eres Tú,' El Himno Feminista Que Se Extiende Po El Mundo." El País. Ediciones El País S.L., December 8, 2019*

Below: *La letra de "El violador eres tu", el himno feminista que se extiende por el mundo, El Pais, 8 Dec 2019. Translation by the Authors.*

## Adeola

*"Making friends at a public protest for women's rights!"*



On Monday November 25, 2019, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, dozens of women descended in Bogotá, on the supreme court building, and on the Ministry for women and gender justice, in a flash mob protest organized by the Chilean feminist group, Lastesis. The performance, comprised of a chant and accompanying dance, was called "Un violador en tu camino" ("A rapist in your path"),

### A rapist in your path

The patriarchy is a judge  
that judges us for being born  
and our punishment  
is the violence you don't see.  
The patriarchy is a judge  
that judges us for being born  
and our punishment  
is the violence that you do see.  
It's femicide.  
Impunity for my killer.  
It's disappearance.  
It's rape.  
And the fault wasn't mine,  
not where I was, not how I dressed  
And the fault wasn't mine,  
not where I was, not how I dressed  
And the fault wasn't mine,  
not where I was, not how I dressed  
And the fault wasn't mine,  
not where I was, not how I dressed  
The rapist was you.  
The rapist is you.  
It's the cops,  
The judges,  
The state,  
The president.  
The oppressive state is a sexist rapist.  
The oppressive state is a sexist rapist.  
The rapist is you  
The rapist is you  
"Sleep calmly, innocent girl  
Without worrying about the bandit,  
Over your dreams smiling and sweet,  
watches your loving policeman."  
The rapist is you  
The rapist is you

### Un violador en tu camino

El patriarcado es un juez  
que nos juzga por nacer,  
y nuestro castigo  
es la violencia que no ves.  
El patriarcado es un juez  
que nos juzga por nacer,  
y nuestro castigo  
es la violencia que ya ves.  
Es feminicidio.  
Impunidad para mi asesino.  
Es la desaparición.  
Es la violación.  
Y la culpa no era mía,  
ni dónde estaba ni cómo vestía.  
Y la culpa no era mía,  
ni dónde estaba ni cómo vestía.  
Y la culpa no era mía,  
ni dónde estaba ni cómo vestía.  
Y la culpa no era mía,  
ni dónde estaba ni cómo vestía.  
El violador eres tú.  
El violador eres tú.  
Son los pacos,  
los jueces,  
el Estado,  
el presidente.  
El Estado opresor es un macho violador.  
El Estado opresor es un macho violador.  
El violador eres tú.  
El violador eres tú.  
Duerme tranquila, niña inocente,  
sin preocuparte del bandolero,  
que por tu sueño dulce y sonriente  
vela tu amante carabinero.  
El violador eres tú.  
El violador eres tú.

and expressed the women's frustration at lack of punishment and accountability within patriarchal institutions for rape and sexual violence against women.<sup>3</sup>

Un violador en tu camino was only the latest in a string of protests started by women across Latin America in the summer of 2019. Most notably in Mexico, women in fifteen cities took to the streets to protest the unpunished rape of women by authority figures like policemen. On the 16th of August, Mexican women demonstrated across the country, documenting their protests on social media under the hashtag #NoMeCuidanMeViolan / #TheyDon'tProtectMeTheyRapeMe. The women decried Mexico's notoriety of permissiveness with the rape and murder of women. Protesters carried signs and chanted slogans like: "A mi me cuidan mis amigas, no la policia" / "My women-friends protect me, not the police" and "El estado no me cuida, me cuidan mis amigas" / "The state does not protect me, my women-friends protect me."

After the November flash mob in Chile, the video of the protests went viral and the song and dance were translated and replicated in cities throughout the Americas and Europe, in major cities like Bogota, Buenos Aires, Mexico City, London, Paris, Berlin, Madrid, and Barcelona. As the protest traveled, both the dance and the words were adjusted to reflect the particular concerns and context of the women performing them.

The song and dance are particularly notable for their explicit gesture of pointing out specific institutional representatives as rapists. The refrain "El violador eres tu" / "The rapist is you" is chanted while pointing towards a specific location, for example, the supreme court, places where women's voices are rarely heard, and

justice is rarely delivered. The song specifically identifies the police, the justice system, the state, and in some cases the president of the country as rapists who have gone unpunished for far too long. In its original version, the song quotes a stanza of the Chilean police anthem: Here, the singing policeman imagines his relationship with women as that of a fatherly protector watching over his sleeping charge, but in light of the women's protests, who name police as rapists, the lines take on a more sinister significance. The relationship is not a friendly one, neither in the policemen's fatherly version nor in the feminist protest version.

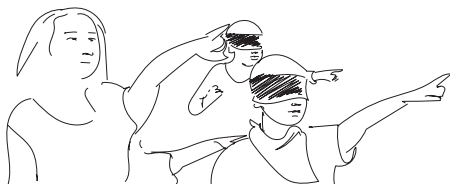
The performance has a specific spatiality. Women gather in public spaces, in the centers of their cities, standing in a phalanx or military-style formation, evenly spaced and stationary in front of the targeted buildings or public squares, mirroring the position that police take when confronting protesters. Their movements and dress are sometimes suggestive, emphasizing the point that rape is not caused by the "sexy" way a woman dresses or moves. Young women that I spoke with in Bogotá described a feeling of friendship, camaraderie, and exhilaration amongst participants in the performances. They experienced the group performances as "safe space." In fact, the version of Un violador en tu camino used in Bogotano performances borrows the line "El estado no me cuida, me cuidan mis amigas" / "The state does not protect me, my women-friends protect me" from the Mexican protests.

*“The choreography of the dance, and the way it is documented ...make it replicable and contagious. It is a magic recipe.”*

## **A Protocol of Movements:**

The choreography of the dance, and the way it is documented by photographers and videographers sympathetic to the cause, make it replicable and contagious. It is a magic recipe. Witnessing one live performance in Bogotá, I was immediately taken by the way the song calls spectators to participate by choosing a side: either you are pointing, or someone is pointing at you. There is no “fourth wall” in the performance, no spectators allowed. The intensity of this kind of interpellation is hard to avoid, for better or worse. During a moment of silence as the performance ended, one young man riding his bicycle fast along the square, his face covered with a skull mask, exclaimed: “*Yo soy el violador!*”, “I am the rapist!”

The young man’s yell, at once mocking and threatening, demonstrates the limits of friendship called upon in the song. The protest song requires solidarity between women in order to perform it, but the possibility of true friendship across gender lines remains unimaginable as long as rape and femicide go without justice. The performance points to the patriarchal institutions that protect rapists, calls out these institutions, and women empower themselves in the face of indifferent courts by invoking their friendships and ability to care for each other. But for the women protesting, the courts, the police, the justice system, and the president cannot be included in the circle of care and friendship as long as injustice reigns. Women cannot become friends with patriarchy. In the performance, the only gesture towards violating institutions is the pointing finger. Without friendship, there can be no justice, only judgment.





## Conclusions:

*“Two recipes for making difficult friendships work.”*

### *Adeola*

Our voices are unique. They do not have to resonate in unison. There are other forms of harmony, and we can find those by walking together, side by side, listening to our foot-falls on the pavement. Our differences must be acknowledged, along with the privileges and exclusions that come with them. Let’s not forget that what makes friendship difficult in the first place is the lack of trust. I cannot trust

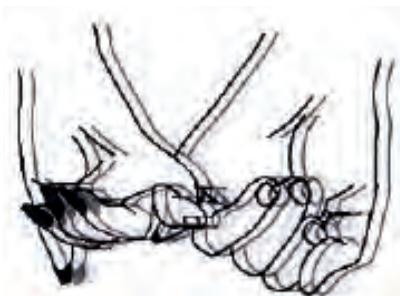
you to the extent that you reside with and take advantage of the privileges that come with your position on the other side of the divide. If you are passing, I cannot trust you. I may love you, but I might not trust you. Sometimes, it seems like we have the same goals. But similar ambitions should not be confused with empathy or affinity. Shared ambitions can soon turn into a competition, “friendly” or otherwise.

Friendship requires more than shared goals. Friendship requires shared struggle and shared joy—shared stories that do not subsume my voice into yours. And what do we have to gain from making friends? Well, the experience of justice and peace.

## *Carlos*

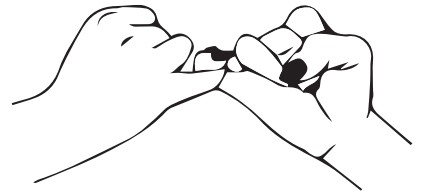
Justice and friendship are practices: neither one of them are spontaneous. Either for starting them or maintaining them, a specific context needs to be shaped: encounters, beliefs, and methods. Both require us to act over and over with shared purposes and to engage again and again with how to treat each other. One and the other needs work, as they require facing social orders that define us as individuals and that often divide us as a community. However, justice and friendship are not the same: actually, a difficult friendship might occur in the constant search for justice, when justice becomes judgments. If there is no mutual effort to see and let yourself be seen, judgment becomes a tool of control that sow lines of division. Judgment means granting roles to the other and wishing to control situations to have someone in the way you want and in the place you want.

I offer this ritual as a way to cross the limits that divide us. It is meant to explore how, as people, we are linked together in ways that make difficult friendships possible. We are linked simply through our humanity that is often hidden by lines drawn by those unjust orders. This protocol is to set up a space where the desire to understand each other becomes an act of reconciliation.



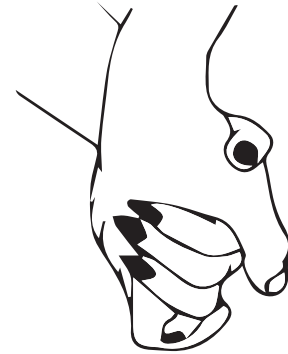


I) *Write the limits: Describe the conflictive definitions that guide your current perspectives and interactions within a specific conflict you have with someone.*



II) *Draw the orders: With lines construct geometries where you can position yourself (in/out) in relation to the other. These are the borders that divide.*

III) *Tell your crimes: From the placement where you positioned yourself, confess the judgments you have thrown on the other, and the choices you have made to belong to the place where you are.*



IV) *Give up your placement: Project yourself to a new position where you can negotiate and rethink your acts.*

V) *During this process eat salt: Recognize what the flavor really tastes like.*

*And remember, where there is friendship there is justice.*



**DM:** And then I tried to think of myself, way back when, my ancestral self—my nomadic self—that if I woke up one morning and saw all the birds leaving, I think I would go along with them.

NOMAD is the 46th home of artist Dominique Moody. The NOMAD is Narrative Odyssey Manifesting Artistic Dreams. It is an assemblage sculpture, by an assemblage artist with a career spanning over forty years. It is a functional mobile dwelling by a non-architect. As a storytelling vehicle, it is evidence of and testament to Black homeownership, Black migration and mobility, and Black ancestral memory in placemaking. As a Tiny Home comfortably within and without the movement, it is solar-powered with nearly zero footprint.

The NOMAD has been shown—as well as inhabited—at the California African American Museum, the Watts Towers Arts Center, 18th Street Art Center, the Harrison House of Music Arts and Ecology, Zorthian Ranch, Prospect 4 Satellite at Xavier University, Side Street Projects, placed and in neighborhoods, high deserts, on beaches, by bayous, and in cities across the continental United States. As an artist, Dominique Moody is a prolific and visionary Black woman artist who has received numerous awards at the national level and is in the permanent collection of the California African American Museum.