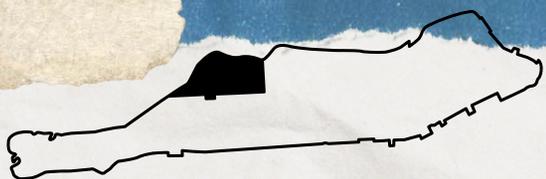


RADICAL PRESERVATION: LIVING MEMORY IN HARLEM

African Kine × Tree of Hope
Exploring how color, light, sound and texture keep
Harlem's memory alive after physical erasure.

By: Natalia Guerrero & Rosa Cortes





memory

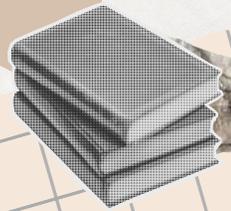
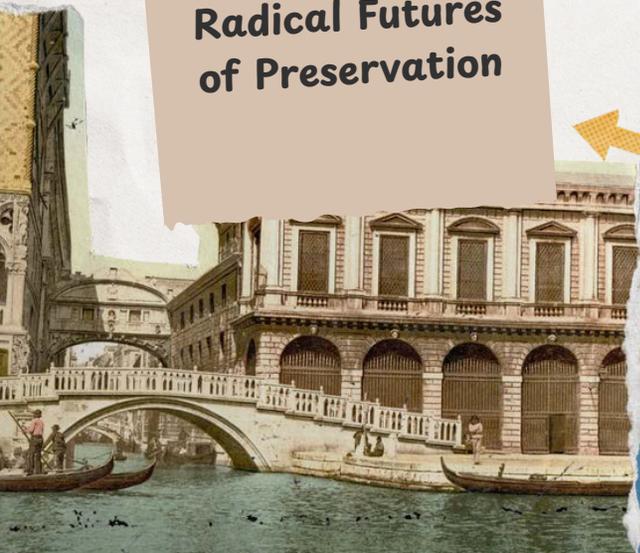
A Living
Landmark

Radical
Preservation:
Memory as
Resistance

Why it Matters:
Radical Futures
of Preservation

map

The Aesthetic of
Memory: Texture,
Sound, Light,
Rhythm



COLLECTIVE THEMES

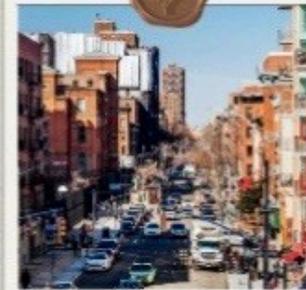
RADICAL PRESERVATION THROUGH AESTHETICS OF MEMORY



- Intangible Heritage



- Layered Memory

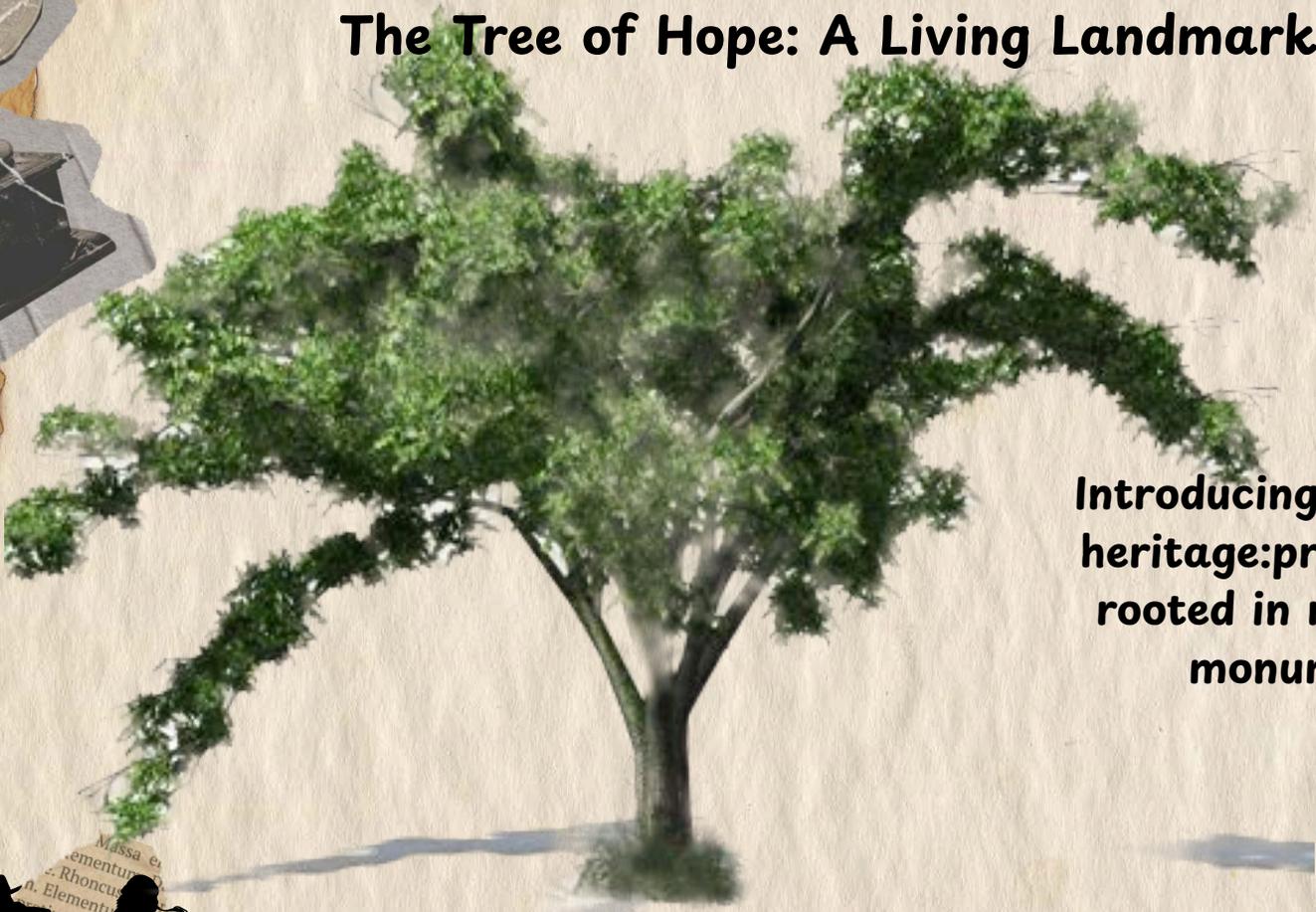


- Sensory Preservation





The Tree of Hope: A Living Landmark



Introducing intangible heritage: preservation rooted in ritual, not monuments





What was the Tree of Hope

The Tree of Hope was an elm tree located on 7th Avenue near the Lafayette Theatre during the Harlem Renaissance.

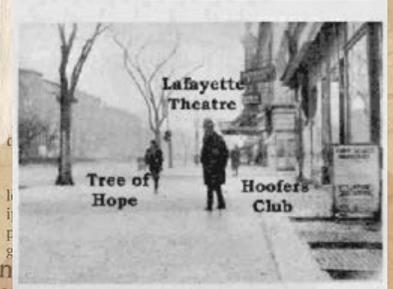
- It became a symbol of luck, dreams, and opportunity for Black performers and Harlem residents.
- People would touch the tree before auditions or performances, believing it brought spiritual protection and success.
- When the city cut it down in the 1930s during road expansion, Harlem fought to save a piece of it, which became the famous Tree of Hope stump still used at the Apollo Theater today.
- The tree embodies intangible Black history that lives on not through buildings, but through rituals, gestures, and community memory.



Negroes in New York's Harlem wish at "The Tree of Hope," named by Percy Verwayne, Harlem actor. The tree's stump was removed to its present site at 131st St., 7th Ave., by Bill Robinson, Negro dancer

is why radical preservation must protect practices and meanings, not just physical structures.

on Miller: Created the "Tree of Hope III" sculpture in Harlem, which is at Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard and 131st Street. The sculpture was dedicated in 1972 and is made of painted steel.



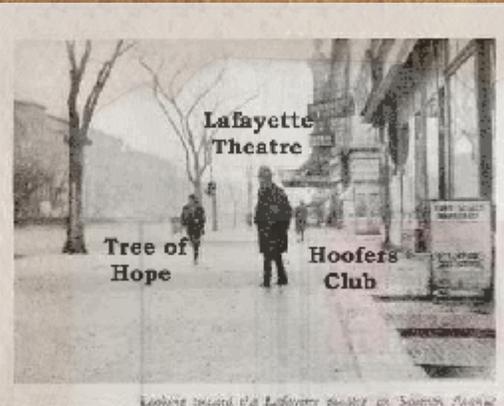
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Looking toward the Lafayette theatre in Harlem



Negroes in New York's Harlem wash at "The Tree of Hope," named by Percy Verwayen, Harlem actor. The tree's stump was removed to its present site at 121st St., 7th Ave., by Bill Robinson, Negro dancer

PART OF
SECTION 7
60 Feet to the East



147



ALL RESTRICTIONS
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HOW DOES MEMORY SHAPE SPACE?

- Can food, performance, and ritual act as archives?
- How do fragments and traces evoke place?
- What is preserved when the structure is gone?

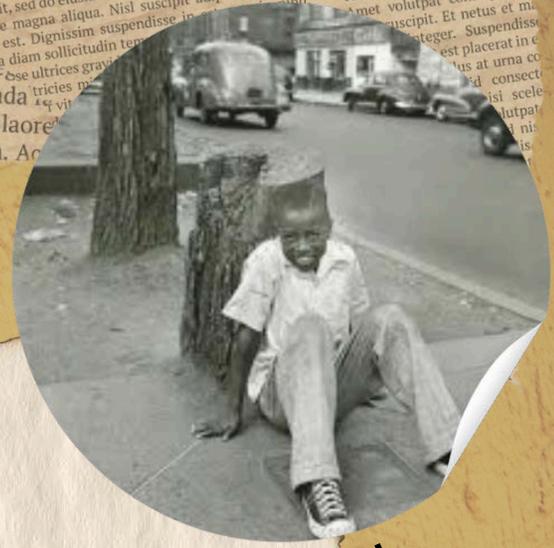


Harlem

What is at Stake?

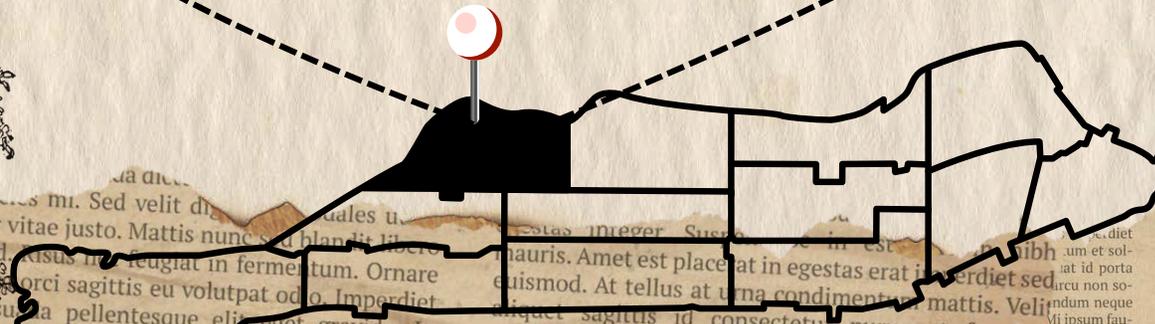
- The erasure of Black cultural memory from Harlem's public spaces
- The risk of losing intangible histories when physical sites are destroyed or displaced
- The disconnect between community memory and official preservation practices
- The need for preservation methods that survive gentrification and displacement





What is the proposal?

- A 3D “Living Memory Kit”: a portable, interactive object that generates new collective memory sites anywhere
- The kit uses small artifacts symbolizing the Tree of Hope & Africa Kine to spark community remembrance
- A practice-based method: chalk marking, tying ribbons, placing symbolic objects, lighting candles
- A strategy to activate memory in everyday spaces, not just museums or monuments



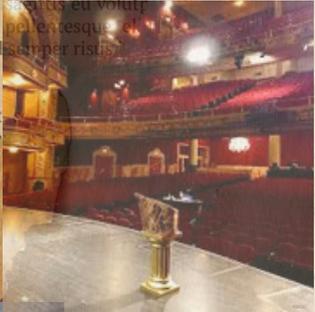


How is this a Radical Preservation Method?

- It rejects monuments and instead centers participation and repeatable actions
- Memory is decentralized it can happen on benches, fire hydrants, sidewalks, lamp posts
- It treats personal objects (shoelace, ribbon, matches, chalk) as preservation tools
- It turns ordinary street corners into temporary memorials
- It preserves cultural history through living practices instead of static replicas



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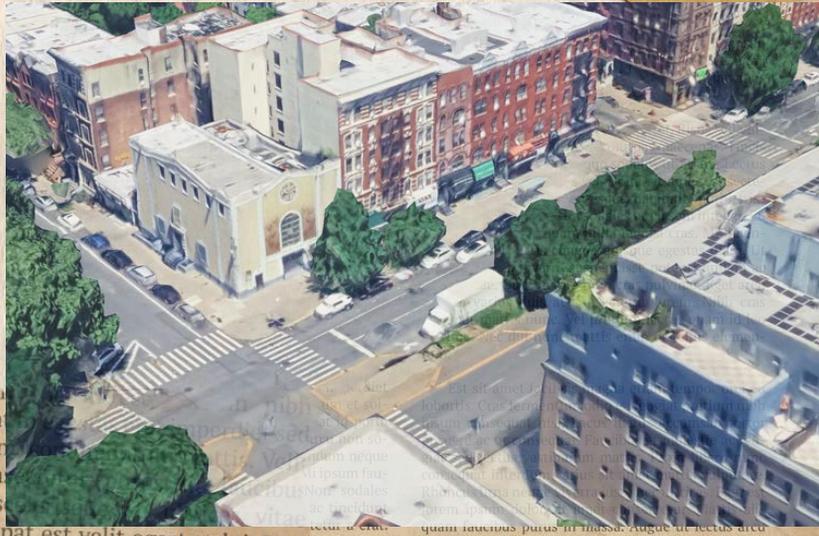
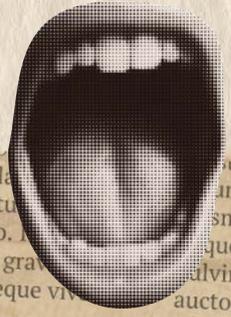
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Is it an object or a design proposal?



My proposal is both an object and a practice.
The object is the Living Memory Kit a small box of meaningful items.
The design is the method how these items create new memory sites
across Harlem.



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SHARED HYPOTHESIS: MEMORY MAPPING

Layering stories, sounds, colors, and rituals
over erased spaces.

Aesthetic as preservation, using form, color,
and light to keep history alive.



CULTURAL PRESERVATION THROUGH TASTE

Preserving Harlem's living heritage through shared meals, flavor, and community. Each dish tells a story, of migration, identity, and the soulful connection between people and place.





RADICAL PRESERVATION = LIVING AESTHETICS

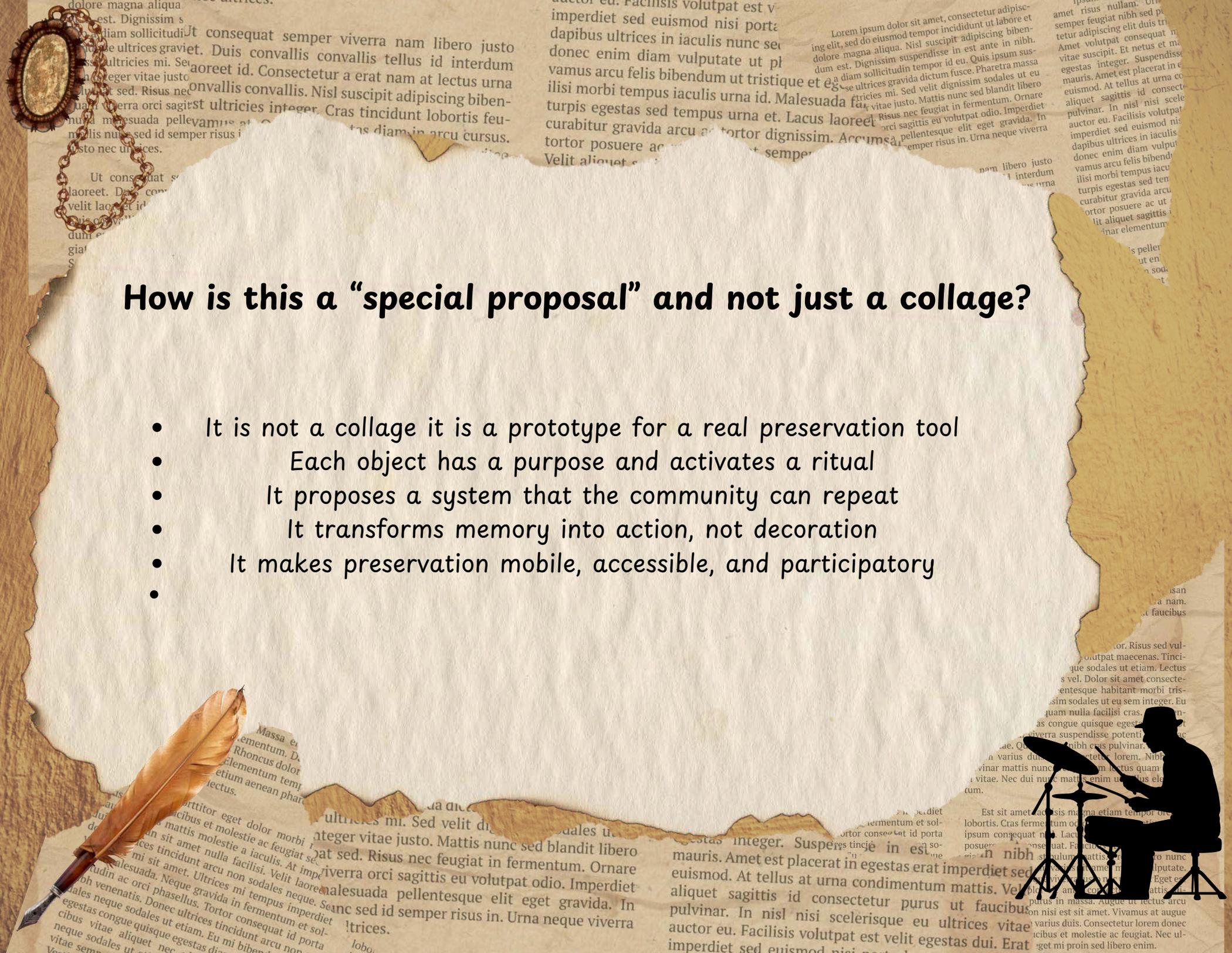
Saving emotions, not just objects.
Preserving Harlem's heritage through sensory
and visual experience.

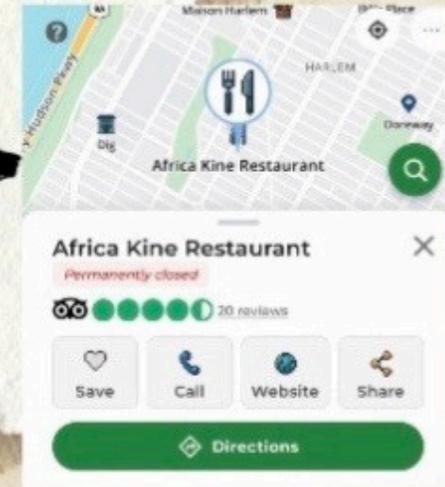
Where does it exist?

- It exists in the street, on corners, near benches, beside lamp posts, or at community gatherings
- It is designed to be placed, opened, and activated on site
- The site becomes temporary but meaningful echoing the Tree of Hope tradition of touching the stump for luck

How is this a “special proposal” and not just a collage?

- It is not a collage it is a prototype for a real preservation tool
- Each object has a purpose and activates a ritual
- It proposes a system that the community can repeat
- It transforms memory into action, not decoration
- It makes preservation mobile, accessible, and participatory
-





memory

mapping

An Interactive Exhibit

What does food remind you of?

A place.

A person.

A moment.

This exhibit within African Kine Restaurant uses spices, objects, photographs, and color to translate lived experience into physical form. Through written reflections and visitor-generated photographs, the installation becomes a growing archive that maps memory through use, time, and community.







Living Memory kit

LEGEND

1. Small tree figure
Represents: The Tree of Hope. 
2. Small bench
Represents: Everyday Harlem gathering spaces
3. Lamp post
Represents: Street visibility, night culture, Harlem life
4. Candle / tea light
Represents: Mourning, ritual, remembrance.
5. Two matches
Represents: Ignition, spark, beginning of memory activation
6. Stick (twig)
Represents: Remnants of the original tree; fragments of history
7. Acorn
Represents: Future growth, possibility, generational hope
8. Chalk
Represents: Public temporary marking; community expression
9. Plaid ribbon
Represents: Personal offering; handmade memory
10. Blue ribbon
Represents: Wishes, hope, healing. 
11. Shoelace
Represents: Footsteps, journey, migration, movement through Harlem
12. Dried rose
Represents: Beauty, loss, honoring what is gone
13. Leaf (dried)
Represents: Time passing, historical decay 
14. Key
Represents: access to memory, belonging, the "key" to Harlem's cultural identity, unlocking forgotten histories

SUMMARY

**PRESERVATION IS EMOTIONAL AND
COLLECTIVE.**

**THROUGH RITUALS, STORYTELLING, AND
AESTHETIC MEMORY MAPPING, HARLEM'S
COMMUNITIES SUSTAIN THEIR IDENTITY
EVEN AFTER LOSS.**

**TEXTURE, LIGHT, AND RHYTHM TRANSFORM
ERASURE INTO RESILIENCE.**