

20181227_slowdown_20181227_128

Wed, 9/30 10:13AM 5:00

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

loving, humankind, wanda, installation, work, communal, heaved, truly breathtaking, spindly, age, media, sharpie pens, hand, erasure, slowdown, materialize, coleman, hesitates, brown, snippy



00:06

I'm us Poet Laureate Tracy k Smith, and this is the slow down.



00:16

This autumn, I visited the courier Museum of Art in Manchester, New Hampshire, where I was able to take in a truly breathtaking handdrawn installation. The enormous panoramic work entitled hauling depicts adults and children laboring to move massive bundles made up of just about every old and new tool you can imagine. The tools are bound by ropes heaved onto shoulders, hoisted onto rudimentary carts, or just plain dragged across the ground. You get the sense of the weight, the onus of the task, but it's a communal gesture, everyone seems to be lending a hand. The artwork itself is also a communal gesture. The artist Ethan Moreau created Halling with six other artists who drew it directly onto gallery walls using more than 1000 Sharpie pens. Standing there, at the center of the room, I got a feeling of time, of all the many ages during which humankind has struggled to make its mark upon the earth. Interestingly, come spring, the gallery walls will be painted over this piano to effort itself will go the way of so much else that humankind has done. Thinking about morose installation, and its inevitable erasure made me happy. I felt the sense that whatever we are working for, we need not work alone. Today's poem by the late great Los Angeles poet Wanda Coleman, reminds me of the work ahead. It's a poem about race, about loving beyond fear, and without hesitation. I admire the speaker's directness and her simultaneous willingness to take her time. I especially appreciate her hope that making an offering of love can make things happen, that it can do the slow but lasting work of liberating others from fear. A talk with my grandson, age six, by Wanda Coleman. There's a cosmic storm whenever he's in my orbit. five races at war outside time, trapped

in one spindly, high toned body, knobby elbows and knees. The rigorously loving teachings of mom and dad take root. Despite media engineering and peer pressure's the snippy cuttings, mouthy sniping and cheeky wit that will soon attend his adolescent defenses have yet to materialize? Right now, he knows not to prevaricate. And so, that fall morning, when I call him to me for an ancestral chat, to take him into my lap. He hesitates. Don't be afraid. I say. He takes a few eager skips, that turn into squirms when I grab him and Hold him tight. Situated in my softness, he relaxes some, but stares at my hands and consternation. This is what happens. I think when the eyes go against the heart. You're all mixed up, aren't you? Yes. Your mother belongs to me. What's my name? What do you call me? Grandma? You don't want to like me? Do you? Yes. Because I'm Brown.



04:18

He's silent.



04:20

Is it because I'm Brown? Yes.



04:24

Well, that's okay. I'm going to be brown forever. Is it okay if I like you? Yes. Then I hug him and let go. Wondering if that's enough to set him free. The slowdown is a production of American Public Media, in partnership with the Library of Congress and the Poetry Foundation.