Welcome to the work-in-process showing of axes, herbs, and satchels devised by the Anthropologists.

Please be advised that this showing contains descriptions, depictions, and language surrounding maternal mortality, racism toward the Black birthing body, infant mortality, graphic descriptions of birth and various medical procedures. If you need to step out, please be aware of your exits and take care of your health.

Synopsis

The Anthropologists’ new devised play axes, herbs and satchels is a celebration of traditional knowledge held in the Black birth worker community, the history of doulas and midwives, and a potent examination of maternal mortality. This work-in-process-showing draws on a rich history of research materials, including first hand accounts, medical texts, ethnological research, and primary sources.

This evening’s performance will culminate in an intimate conversation with anthropologist-in-residence, Dr Haile Eshe Cole reflecting on the intersections of art and anthropology.

Team
Co-Directors: Sandie Luna and Melissa Moschitto

Assistant Director: Jayda Jones

Devising Ensemble: Jalissa Fulton, Miranda Hall-Jiménez, Asha John, Jayda Jones, Sandie Luna and Devyn Wray

Contributing Writers: Devyn Wray, Melissa Moschitto and Sandie Luna

Stage Manager: Mars Neri

ASL Interpretation: Sarah Vieira and Avery Gordon of Inclusive Communication Services

Anthropologist-in-Residence: Dr. Haile Eshe Cole

Producer: Mariah Freda

Assistant Producer: Miranda Hall-Jiménez

Press and Marketing: Avery Rudd

Technical Support: Philip Trevino

Mission & Method

The Anthropologists is dedicated to the collaborative creation of investigative theatre that inspires action. Fusing research, expressive movement, and rigorous dramaturgy, we create dynamic plays rooted in social inquiry. We use theatre to engage with challenging questions, to re-contextualize the present and reimagine our collective future. Learn more at www.theanthropologists.org

The PROCESS

WE ARE HERE

Provocation

Research

Investigation

Scripting

Production

Festivals, full productions and touring

the seed: a story, a question

source material, found text, cultural artifacts, etc.

Interacting with source material in the rehearsal studio to generate content

Intensive workshops designed to create a blueprint for storytelling.
Notes

JAYDA JONES, Assistant Director
The part of our process that sticks out to me most would be the first devising lab. We received a five-minute prompt to simulate birth in a hospital, and then at home. The space was so alive and the creative generosity flowed. Without hesitation, each group jumped into adding sound, lighting, and set pieces without words to create cohesive, chilling, and inspiring stories that catapulted us into an engaging and creatively rich collaborative process. That was the moment I understood investigative theater’s power to build communities and shed light on those forgotten.

SANDIE LUNA, Co-Director
My lemonade story: After the traumatic experiences I endured during my first pregnancy, I became a volunteer doula with a focus on reproductive justice. Helping other birthing bodies (particularly BIPOC ones) during such a vulnerable time, has been salve to my spirit. This project is personal because it carefully explores why birthing in a Black body in the US can be so scary and dangerous, despite all of our resources.

MELISSA MOSCHITTO, Co-Director
Whether it’s the intuition of a mother or an artist, the tug of these stories felt undeniable. It seemed inevitable that The Anthropologists would next need to turn our practice of creative inquiry to a crisis that has stolen innumerable lives, yet one that has solutions if we commit to listening to and learning from those most impacted and knowledgeable: Black women and Black birth workers. This project also marks an evolution in our research-based practice, thanks to the American Anthropological Association establishing our collaboration with a cultural anthropologist, Dr. Haile Eshe Cole. Most of all, I am grateful to this dynamic ensemble for trusting the process and taking risks, and for boldly sharing this first iteration with you tonight.

Bios

Asha John (she/her) is a Brooklyn-based actress, dancer, model and arts administrator. In 2020, Asha graduated with her master’s in Educational Theatre for Colleges and Communities from New York University and wants to pursue her doctorate in Theater Studies in the future. Asha has worked as a teaching artist, bringing her love of step, theater, dance, and math to the students in New York City. She has also worked in management roles with numerous community-based organizations, using the arts to advocate for all underserved communities. Asha has always had an innate love for the performing arts; in 2009 her passion was solidified when she was cast in her first off-Broadway production of When the Clouds Cover the Sun, at The Producer’s Club. Since then, she has been cast in numerous productions for stage and film, including classics like Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet and Antony and Cleopatra.
Devynity Wray (she/her) is a writer, performer and visual artist whose work leans in to celebrate her heritage and experience as a Black woman from Queens, NY. As a writer, Wray earned her chops on New York’s slam poetry scene making the Nuyorican Poet’s Café her first stomping ground. She holds a B.A. in Africana Studies from Hunter College and an M.F.A. in Visual Art from Lesley University in Cambridge, MA. Wray vacillates between disciplines in anticipation of the greatest creative expression. She’s a vibe.

Jalissa Fulton (she/her) is a NYC based actress. Recently, she has come aboard the Creative Team for The Anthropologists ‘Doula Project’, and collaborates as a Workshop Co-Facilitator. She received her BA in Theatre at the University of South Carolina and MFA at the Actors Studio Drama School at Pace University. One of Jalissa’s favorite voice over productions was in A Christmas Carol for Standby for Places Podcast. She can be heard on Spotify and/or Apple Podcast voicing characters: Belle, Broker #2, & Charity Solicitor #2, and more. Some of her all-time favorite theatre credits include Catherine in Proof and Chorus 3 in The Anthropologists: NO PANTS IN TUCSON.

Jayda Jones (she/her) is performer and assistant director on axes, herbs, and satchels. She is a multimedia storytelling artist and producer with current focuses in creative direction and dramaturgical performance. She recently directed a reading at THE TANK, helped devise axes, herbs, and satchels, and participated in a staging workshop for an opera. She received a B.A. in Theatre from Fordham University, where she directed two full-length productions, IS GOD IS by Aleshea Harris and JUMP by Charly Evon Simpson, as well as assistant directed and crewed many others. In her free time outside of theatre, Jayda enjoys film, graphic design, and editing. She has written and devised her own work, and dedicates her artistry to exploring the dreams and experiences of Black femme bodies while uplifting BIPOC voices.

Mariah Freda (she/her) is a theater-making actor with an MFA from The New School for Drama. She has appeared on many New York City stages, some tiny, some medium sized, a few underground. In 2012 she teamed up with The Anthropologists, officially joining as an Artistic Associate in 2016 and over the years has helped bring to life a bounty of plays. Mariah is a mother to two, small, spirited children who continue to inspire her to be better, learn better and know better. With The Anthropologists: No Pants In Tucson, Artemisia’s Intent, This Sinking Island, The Anthropologists Save the World!, No Man’s Land and Mahalla.

Mars Juno Bartolome Neri (they/them) is an artist and stage manager dedicated to supporting those who want to tell their personal stories and creating community through social justice oriented art through new plays or devised works. Their passion lies in community care and the joy that can be found through these collaborative storytelling processes. They’re devoted to doing work that brings unheard voices and untold stories to light. Previous collaborators include Leviathan Lab, Rattlestick Theater, Breaking the Binary Theatre, and Signature Theatre DC. www.marsjbneri.com

Melissa Moschitto (she/her) is a director, playwright and producer advancing the form of research-based investigative theatre and the Founding Artistic Director of The Anthropologists. Her
dynamic, kinetic work has been seen at HERE, The New Ohio, Dixon Place, and she has been an artist-in-residence at Abrons Arts Center. Favorite projects with The Anthropologists include No Pants In Tucson for which she received a 2020 NYC Women’s Fund Grant, Artemisia’s Intent (Winner of Best Solo Drama, Frigid 2018), No Man’s Land and Give Us Bread. Melissa cut her teeth in the physical theatre world as a directing apprentice to Ricardo Iniesta, director of Compania Atalaya in Sevilla, Spain, where she assisted with the World Premiere of Medea, La Extranjera (2004). She has trained with the Laban/Bartenieff Institute for Movement Studies, Liz Lerman’s Dance Exchange, SITI Company, the La Mama Umbria International Directors Symposium and the legendary Odin Teatret (Denmark). She has led devising workshops for Hofstra University, University of Vermont, University of Massachusetts at Amherst and University of Evansville. Melissa holds a B.A. in Theater from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. She is the mother of two dramatic children and resides and works in Upper Manhattan on the ancestral land of the Lenape.

Miranda Hall Jiménez (she/they) is a Afro-Latine actor, musician, and movement artist based in Brooklyn, New York. They graduated from The University of Maryland, College Park in 2020 with a B.A. in Theatre Performance and was a KCACF Irene Ryan Finalist. She has performed across the DMV with The Kennedy Center, The National Portrait Gallery, and We Happy Few. Since relocating to New York City, Miranda has performed and collaborated with Roundabout Theatre Company, New Georges, National Black Theatre, The Drama League and The Anthropologists. When not performing, catch Miranda dancing Brazilian Zouk in the East Village.

Sandie Luna (she/them) is an Afro-Latine immigrant artist, cultural leader, educator, doula and Mother. She is Executive Director at ID Studio Theater in the South Bronx, where she uses her background to advance and amplify the social and artistic development of immigrant communities. Sandie has taught at Stella Adler Acting Studio and is adjunct lecturer at SUNY, New Paltz’ Theater Arts and Latin American & Caribbean Studies Departments. Her experiences straddling cultures, identities and roles have deeply impacted her artistic and professional projects. As an actress, Sandie has performed in TV, radio, commercials, and theater productions for the English and Spanish markets, most notably performing five years Off Broadway in "Platanos and Collard Greens," working with LAByrinth Theater Company and working four years with local communities and NYC prison system populations through The Public Theater's Mobile Shakespeare Unit. After studying theater and sociology at Florida State University, she has trained at Atlantic Theater School, SITI Company, Pantheatre (Paris), The Puerto Rican Traveling Theater’s writers division, and Labyrinth Theater’s Master Class amongst others. She is mom to 6 and 8 year old dragons. Her traumatic experiences with NYC’s healthcare system during the birth of her first child led her to train as a birth doula with a focus on reproductive justice. She uses her training to volunteer to advocate for BIPOC birthing bodies and aid them through the birthing process. She currently lives, works and dreams in the Bronx where she most recently received a 2023 BRIO (Bronx Recognizes Its Own) Award for artistic excellence.
Acknowledgments

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ASL Interpretation sponsored by JF Builders

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And 16 amazingly anonymous givers!

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