

THE WORKSHOP

# ARTIST SALON



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# PROGRAM FLOW

**OPENING  
REMARKS**

Kendell Pinkney,  
Founding Artistic Director  
The Workshop

**THE BLEWISH  
DYBBUK**

Rebecca S'manga Frank

**YES, AND...**

Nemuna Ceesay  
William DeMeritt

**MOTHER/ROAD**

Avi Amon

***10 MINUTE INTERMISSION***

**PANEL  
DISCUSSION**

The Artists

# MEMORY

Memory is a strange thing. On the most basic level, it is the glue that binds everything. After all, if you can't access memory, how can you tell a story, sing your favorite song, make a cherished family recipe? Sure, it is possible to do all of these things with the help of books or sheet music, but that distinctly places the tools of memory outside of the body. Without the stickiness of lived memory, a story becomes a collection of events, a favorite song becomes a nice melody, and a beloved family recipe becomes just food. On a deeper level, memory is the key element that knits together a person's experiences. When personal memory works as expected, it is unremarkable. But when memory fails, or is challenged by other narratives, the results can be moving, funny, or even unsettling. In short, memory matters.

An equally important part of the "memory process" is embracing the fact that memory is not simply about recalling things past. It is also a process of figuring out what to do with that memory here and now. Over the past year, I and the inaugural fellows of The Workshop have "made memories" through sharing art, community, stories, experiences, meals, and much more. All throughout that process we asked what Jewish collective memory - the texts, traditions, and culture of our forebears - could offer to our creative processes. The result has been sublime and surprising, to say the least.

Tonight you will experience selections from three works-in-progress that deal with "memory" in unique ways. While all the pieces are true works-in-progress, they clearly display distinct points of view. Whether it is through playing with the inherited material culture of the immigration experience (*MOTHER/ROAD*), adapting a sacred memorial Yiddish theater and Black lives (*The Blewish Dybbuk*), or lampooning the absurdities inherent to, well, all MFA programs (*yes, and...*), the particularity of "Jewish memory" is deeply rooted in the work of our presenting fellows. And we are excited to share these "memories" with you tonight.

-KENDELL PINKNEY

# HIGHLIGHTS

**THE BLEWISH DYBBUK** The Blewish Dybbuk Project is about reclaiming an old, classic, mystical Yiddish play in a Black Jewish woman's body. A main theme is Possession, as explored through a Black, female "host"-body, whose grief mixed with longing, opens her up as a channel for her entire community's grappling with justice, identity, and love. We are questioning what is real and what is supernatural, what is "good" and what is "evil." Typically the Dybbuk "a dead soul" is seen as evil. In the Blewish Dybbuk Project, this soul has been miscast, seen as evil on the outside, but is a profoundly good soul. Though the possession (and all possession) is on trial here, this type has hugely positive notes. It is an "Ibbur", lesser known than its evil "Dybbuk" counterpart. The spirit is a messenger of prophetic wisdom trying to get the message to the world, specifically in this play, it is the "spirit" of Elijah McClain, the 23 year old Black man who was murdered by the police in 2019.

Director & Dramaturg: Kareem Lucas

Music: Austin Purnell

Performers: Marcus Jones, Nemuna Ceesay, Austin Purnell, Rebecca S'manga Frank

**YES, AND...** Nemuna and Bill are two Black Jews that went to top tier acting programs (A.C.T. and Yale) and had a wonderful time – most of the time. Going to grad school for acting is filled with transcendence, beauty, and vulnerability, yes...AND (see what we did there?) it's also completely insane and very absurd. This is a teaser of the very human humans who populate our mockumentary style TV Series that brings normal people into the world of weirdos (who might just have the secret to saving humanity).

**MOTHER/ROAD** What is the space between an experience and our memory of the same? How is it shaped by what we hold to be true, and what maps the borders when those beliefs diverge? MOTHER/ROAD is an in-process sonic exploration of memory, home, and the unique tension between the joy and loss of the immigrant experience. Using my Mother's journey from Istanbul to the U.S. as the nexus between past and future generations, this piece seeks to dissect what things we carry with us; what fragments of identity we barely remember; and the weight of what is left behind. You'll experience small experiments and vignettes from what will become a much larger multimedia installation and album.

# WHO WE ARE

The Workshop is North America's premier arts fellowship centering the work of JOCISM (Jews of Color, Jewish-Indigenous, Sephardi & Mizrahi) artists & culture-makers.

Conceived and founded by theatre-artist and rabbi, Kendell Pinkney, The Workshop seeks to interrogate and expand ideas of Jewish art by providing unparalleled career support and incubation for wildly talented artists. Over the course of a year, fellows receive artistic mentorship, financial support, research support, and access to performance and residency space. Additionally, fellows learn together regularly, build community with each other and partner organizations, and present their work at seasonal performances across New York City.



Inaugural Cohort of fellows (Clockwise from center): Avi Amon, Nemuna Ceesay, Rebecca S'manga Frank, Daniel Terna, Lilach Orenstein, Benji Kahn, William DeMeritt, & Artistic Director, Kendell Pinkney

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