

THE KITCHEN

NEW YORK CITY'S CENTER
FOR EXPERIMENTAL ART
AND THE AVANT-GARDE
SINCE 1971

For Immediate Release
January 22, 2024

THE KITCHEN PRESENTS SACHA YANOW: *UNCLE!*, FEBRUARY 22–MARCH 2

Yanow Performs a Ritual Portrait of Intergenerational Loneliness and Longing that Draws from Jewish and Queer Performance Traditions

The Kitchen presents the world premiere of **Sacha Yanow's *Uncle!***, an evening-length solo performance reimagining the cultural tradition of the Purimspiel—the comic dramatization of the Book of Esther, performed in celebration of the Jewish holiday Purim. The show uses language, light, sound, and movement to refract and recombine aspects of personal and cultural histories into a multilayered story. Sacha Yanow: *Uncle!* is organized by **Alison Burstein**, Curator, and is presented February 22–24 and February 29–March 2 at 7:30pm at The Kitchen at Westbeth (163B Bank Street, 4th Floor Loft). ([Tickets](#): Sliding scale, \$5-15.) A recording of the performance will be available to be viewed during Purim, from sundown on March 23 through sundown on March 24 (Free with RSVP, reservations forthcoming in March).

Uncle! is Yanow's last work in a trio of solo performances based on familial archetypes, including the father (*Dad Band*, 2015) and the grandmother (*Cherie Dre*, 2018). These embodied renderings mine the artist's family history as an entry point to address broader social issues. In *Uncle!*, Yanow draws from Jewish incantation, Yiddish theater, and drag and experimental performance to present a narrative that weaves together material from three sources: Purim, their personal experience, and their maternal uncle's career working as a pulmonologist during the initial decade of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. A driving current in the piece is Yanow's search for a wolf—an as-yet-unknown kind of monster who exists in the interstices of the histories they explore. The mystery of this entity winds throughout the performance, with Yanow shapeshifting in and out of a diasporic werewolf ancestor figure named Uncle Mordechai as they mine connections between the central tales and the looming specter.

Toggling the thin line between humor and grief, *Uncle!* offers a ritual portrait of intergenerational loneliness and longing that calls attention to links between experiences across time and contexts. In adapting the form of the Purimspiel to new ends, Yanow reframes the narrative of Purim, prompting us to consider its significance today in relation to anti-Zionist and queer lineages of care and resilience.

The siting of *Uncle!*'s premiere within The Kitchen's loft at Westbeth Artist Housing illuminates the relevance of the artist's deep ties to the rich histories of both institutions. Yanow has a sustained relationship with The

THE KITCHEN

NEW YORK CITY'S CENTER
FOR EXPERIMENTAL ART
AND THE AVANT-GARDE
SINCE 1971

Kitchen and credits it as a space that is responsible for “exploding [their] ideas about what performance can be after growing up as a child actor in traditional theater.” They first worked at The Kitchen as an intern before going on to serve as Director of Operations for seven years. Through this involvement, they formed close connections with countless artists whose work they have supported and contributed to in various roles over the years. *Uncle!* marks Yanow’s return to the institution for the first time as an artist presenting their own work. Yanow’s personal background with The Kitchen runs in parallel with a familial connection to Westbeth via the history of Congregation Beit Simchat Torah (CBST), a LGBTQ synagogue founded in 1973 that was based within the Westbeth building complex from 1976–2016. Yanow’s uncle is a long-term member of the synagogue, and he brought them to their first High Holiday services there as an adult. Tapping into Westbeth’s position as a complex that houses vibrant traditions of both spiritual and artistic practices, this presentation of *Uncle!* highlights the performance’s place within a genre-spanning genealogy of customs that create space for collective gathering, reflection, celebration, and mourning.

Yanow has been developing *Uncle!* since 2019, having performed early sketches of the work at institutions including MoMA PS1 and the Jewish Museum. To realize the full-scale production, Yanow invited creative collaborators **Nemuna Ceesay**, **Lu Coy**, **Samantha Estrella**, **Azalea Fairley**, **Alejandro Fajardo**, **Luca Huatuco**, **Cate McCrea**, and **Isaac Silber** to expand the story through collective dialogue and experimentation.

About Sacha Yanow

Sacha Yanow (they/them) is a Lenapehoking/NYC based performance artist and actor. Their solo practice is rooted in theater, queer performance, and radical Jewish tradition, using humor and physicality to explore themes of gender, aging, loss, and diaspora. Yanow’s work has been presented by venues including MoMA PS1, Danspace Project, Joe’s Pub, and the New Museum in NYC; PICA’s TBA Festival/Cooley Gallery at Reed College in Portland; and Festival Theaterformen in Hanover, Germany. They have received residency support from Baryshnikov Arts Center, Denniston Hill, LIFT Festival UK, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, MASS MoCA, and Yaddo among others. Yanow served as Director of Art Matters Foundation for twelve years, and previously worked at The Kitchen as Director of Operations. They currently act as a creative consultant for fellow artists and organizations, and are a member of Jewish Voice for Peace. They received a BA from Sarah Lawrence College and are a graduate of the William Esper Studio Actor Training Program.

About the Creative Team

Nemuna Ceesay (Director) (she/her) is a director, actor, and educator based in New York. She is thrilled to be making her debut at The Kitchen with *Uncle!*. Select directing credits: Playwrights Horizons (*Amusements*), Clubbed Thumb (22/23 New Play Directing Fellow; *Reply All*), Atlantic Theatre School (*Metamorphoses*; *Twelve Ophelias*), Associate Director of the Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award winning musical *A Strange Loop* on Broadway. Select acting credits: Shakespeare Theatre Company (*Here There Are Blueberries*), The Shed

THE KITCHEN

NEW YORK CITY'S CENTER
FOR EXPERIMENTAL ART
AND THE AVANT-GARDE
SINCE 1971

(*Straight Line Crazy*), Two River Theater (*Three Sisters*), CalShakes (*A Raisin in the Sun; The Comedy of Errors*), Joe's Pub (*The Unfortunates*), PlayMakers Rep (*Tartuffe; The Christians*), The Public Theatre (*What to Send Up When It Goes Down*), Oregon Shakespeare Festival (2015/16 seasons). Select TV credits: *Bull, Broad City, Instinct, Younger, FBI, and Prodigal Son*. Nemuna is the founder and Creative Director of an all BIPOC training program called The Blueprint. MFA in Acting from American Conservatory Theater. Follow her on Instagram @_nemuna_, visit her website at www.nemunarcceesay.com, and learn more about The Blueprint at www.theblueprintartist.com.

Lu Coy (Musician/Composer) (they/them) is a queer mixed media artist and musician of Mexican and Ashkenazi Jewish heritage based in Los Angeles, California. Known for their mastery of woodwinds, elegant use of electronics, and agile vocals, Coy embraces modern technologies and compositional techniques, while mining inspiration from ancient texts, stories, and musical traditions. Notably, Coy is an avid performer of Ashkenazi, Sephardi, and various Latin American musical traditions, singing regularly in Spanish, Yiddish, and Ladino. They have been featured prominently in contemporary theatrical and operatic works by Anna Luisa Petrisko, Egg & Spoon Theatre Company, and Four Larks Opera company. As a recording artist, Coy's winds and vocals can be found on records by artists such as Eyvind Kang, San Cha, Avey Tare, and Blonde Redhead. They hold degrees in music performance and composition from the Boston Conservatory of Music and California Institute of the Arts and have taught for various institutions such as The Hammer Museum, California Institute of the Arts, and Plaza de la Raza. In November 2023 their newest composition, "Song of the Two Moons," was commissioned and premiered by the Getty Research Institute in celebration of the launch of the Getty's Digital Florentine Codex project.

samantha estrella (Associate Director) (she/her) is a director seeking the transformative abundance that love ethic within storytelling brings. Practicing critical consciousness and reminders of relationality, she hopes to supply and/or be surrounded by artistry that awakens us to love's position as an all-possible, tangible, eternal, force of nature. Past and present environments of collaboration include Atlantic Theatre Company, NAMT, National Black Theatre, KGM Productions, Watermark Productions, and more. Estrella is a recent alum of Wingspace Theatrical Design's Mentorship as well as of the Mercury Store's first Directing Technique Intensive. She is currently assisting two beloved centers of art, CLASSIX and playwright/dramaturg/cultural worker Nissy Aya. She holds a BFA from University of Michigan in Theater Direction.

Azalea Fairley (Costume Design) (she/her) is a New Orleans-born, NYC-based costume designer. Selected Off Broadway and regional credits include *After Midnight* (Paper Mill Playhouse), *Shadow/Land* (Public Theater), *Eternal Life Pt1* (Wilma Theater, PA), *Clyde's* (George St Playhouse, NJ), *Detroit 67* (TheatreSquared, AR), *Blood Knot* (Flat Rock Playhouse, NC), *By the Way Meet Vera Stark* (Colorado Fine Arts Ctr), 10x10 Play Fest (Barrington Stage, MA), *Schoolgirls* (TheatreSquared, AR), *What Lies Beneath* (On Site Opera, NY), *TJ Loves Sally Forever* (Jack Theater, NY, NYT Critics Pick). Broadway assistant credits include *Hamilton* and *A Strange Loop* (2022 Tony Award Winner for Best Musical). Film credits include *The Rainbow Experiment* and *Paris in*

www.thekitchen.org

163B Bank Street, 4th Fl. Loft
New York, NY 10014

THE KITCHEN

NEW YORK CITY'S CENTER
FOR EXPERIMENTAL ART
AND THE AVANT-GARDE
SINCE 1971

Harlem. Nominations include the Audelco Awards, the Barrymore Awards, and the Henry Awards for outstanding costume design. Member of USA 829. Azalea-Fairley.com.

Alejandro Fajardo (Lighting Design) (he/him) is a Colombian lighting designer based in Lenapehoking/Brooklyn. Fajardo strongly believes that art, creativity, and imagination should be used to inspire our communities through the current crises we face and to build a new future that centers community care and growth. He really wants to know what you personally are doing to further this goal in your life. Really, let him know through his website. Fajardo works as a lighting and production designer for theater, opera, and dance. He has also designed escape rooms, a series of theatrical immersive games, site lighting for music festivals, and various New York Fashion Week shows. He is a lighting director for the Flamenco Festival and one of the associate lighting directors for Fall for Dance Festival at New York City Center. www.alejofaj.com.

Lluca Huatuco (Movement Design) (they/them) was born in Miami and began ballet training at Walnut Hill School for the Arts and later in the Professional Division at the Pacific Northwest Ballet in Seattle. At 20, they moved to Paris to work as a freelance dancer across Europe. When the global pandemic brought live performance to a halt, Huatuco began working as a dance and documentary filmmaker. In 2021, they co-founded the production company HUATUCO with their sister and collaborator. Since then, Huatuco has performed in New York, Paris, and Miami in spaces such as Center for Performance Research, Les Grandes Serres de Pantin, and Superblue. Their work is centered around the elevation of gender-variant experiences, shamanic futurism, and the celebration of indigeneity. They continue to collaborate and co-facilitate performances with many other Queer, Indigenous, and Jewish artists, and are releasing their first feature-length art documentary later this year. [@ancientbaddi3](https://www.instagram.com/ancientbaddi3)

Cate McCrea (Scenic Design) (she/her) is a scenographer specializing in collaborative development of new works. Her designs are inspired by and drawn from craft techniques, recycled materials, archival collections, and daydreams. You can find her at the library, or in the littoral zone. McCrea last collaborated with Sacha Yanow as the set designer for *Cheri Dre* at Danspace Project in 2018. Recent live performance design: *The Good John Proctor* (Bedlam), *Corsicana* (Playwrights Horizons, co-design with Lael Jellinek), *The Collision/The Martyrdom* (59E59). Other work at the Brick, New Ohio Theatre, the Tank; and with The Acting Company, Little Opera Theatre of New York, and the Drama League. McCrea is a member of the current cohort of Target Margin Institute fellows. She is a New Jersey native, a graduate of Williams College, and a proud member of USA 829.

Isaac Silber (Sound Design) (he/him) is a multi-instrumentalist sound designer and recording engineer based in Brooklyn, New York. Some of his vibrations have been heard in places like Performance Space New York, The Kitchen, The Academy of Arts and Letters, Center for Performance Research, Montréal, arts interculturels, Nowadays, many West/Philly basements and bars, The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the ICA at

THE KITCHEN

NEW YORK CITY'S CENTER
FOR EXPERIMENTAL ART
AND THE AVANT-GARDE
SINCE 1971

VCU, CA2M, Madrid, New York Live Arts, The Museum of Pop Culture, and on the world wide web. Silber is currently in his fifth year of pursuing a PhD in Performance Studies at NYU.

Funding Support and Credits

Sacha Yanow: *Uncle!* is made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature and by Good Works Foundation. Thank you to Shandanken Projects, Westbeth Artists Housing, and Participant Inc. for providing in-kind development support.

The Kitchen's programs are made possible in part with support from The Kitchen's Board of Directors, The Kitchen Leadership Fund, and the Director's Council, as well as through generous support from The Amphion Foundation, Inc., Bloomberg Philanthropies, The Aaron Copland Fund for Music, The Cowles Charitable Trust, Joseph and Joan Cullman Foundation for the Arts, Inc., Howard Gilman Foundation, The Harkness Foundation for Dance, Marta Heflin Foundation, Lambent Foundation Fund, a fund of Tides Foundation, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Mertz Gilmore Foundation, Open Society Foundation, The Jerome Robbins Foundation, Ruth Foundation For The Arts, The Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels Foundation, Simons Foundation, and Teiger Foundation; The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts and in part by public funds from New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council and New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature.

About The Kitchen

Founded in 1971 as an artist-driven collective, The Kitchen today reaffirms and expands upon its originating vision as a dynamic cultural institution that centers artists, prioritizes people, and puts process first. Programming in a *kunsthalle* model that brings together live performances, exhibition-making, and public programming under one roof, The Kitchen empowers its audiences and communities to think creatively and radically about what it means to shape a multivalent and sustainable future in art. The Kitchen seeks to cultivate and hold space for wild thought, risky play, and innovative and experimental making, encouraging artists and cultural workers alike to defy boundaries and sending them into the world to remake art history and catalyze creative change.

Among the artists who have presented significant work at The Kitchen are Muhal Richard Abrams, Laurie Anderson, ANOHNI, Robert Ashley, Charles Atlas, Kevin Beasley, Beastie Boys, Gretchen Bender, Dara Birnbaum, Anthony Braxton, John Cage, Lucinda Childs, Julius Eastman, Philip Glass, Leslie Hewitt, Darius James, Joan Jonas, Bill T. Jones, Devin Kenny, Simone Leigh, Ralph Lemon, George Lewis, Robert Longo, Robert Mapplethorpe, Sarah Michelson, Tere O'Connor, Okwui Okpokwasili, Nam June Paik, Charlemagne Palestine,

THE KITCHEN

NEW YORK CITY'S CENTER
FOR EXPERIMENTAL ART
AND THE AVANT-GARDE
SINCE 1971

Sondra Perry, Vernon Reid, Arthur Russell, Cindy Sherman, Laurie Spiegel, Talking Heads, Greg Tate, Cecil Taylor, Urban Bush Women, Danh Vō, Lawrence Weiner, Anicka Yi, and many more.

Website: thekitchen.org

Instagram: [instagram.com/TheKitchen_NYC](https://www.instagram.com/TheKitchen_NYC)

Facebook: [facebook.com/TheKitchenNYC](https://www.facebook.com/TheKitchenNYC)

Press Contact: Blake Zidell at Blake Zidell & Associates: blake@blakezidell.com or 917.572.2493

www.thekitchen.org

163B Bank Street, 4th Fl. Loft
New York, NY 10014