

THE SHED Press Release

THE **BLOOMBERG** BUILDING
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The Shed Announces the World Premiere of NOVEMBER

A Public Broadcast
Directed by Phillip Youmans
Written by Claudia Rankine
Stage Direction by Taibi Magar

Commissioned and Produced by The Shed, Co-Produced by Tribeca Studios

To Stream for Free on TheShed.org for One Week Only, November 1 through 7



The cast of *November* left to right: Tiffany Rachelle Stewart, April Matthis, Zora Howard, Crystal Dickinson, and Melanie Nicholls-King. Photo: Phillip Youmans.

Thursday, October 22, 2020—The Shed today announced the world premiere of *November*, a new film that pairs an examination of white male privilege in the United States with images of Black joy, freedom, and beauty. Directed by **Phillip Youmans**, winner of the 2019 Tribeca Film Festival Founders Award, *November* is written by acclaimed poet and playwright **Claudia Rankine** with stage direction by Obie Award-winner **Taibi Magar**. The film, commissioned and produced by The Shed, and co-produced in partnership with Tribeca Studios, will debut on [TheShed.org](https://www.theshed.org) on Sunday, November 1 at 8 pm, two days before the presidential election, and will stream for free for one week only, through November 7.

Rankine adapted her Shed-commissioned play, *Help*, for this new film. The stage play had just entered preview performances in March 2020 when The Shed closed temporarily to help stop the spread of COVID-19.

“In my original stage play, I looked to confront, address, and have conversations with white men regarding white dominance and their white privilege. This line of inquiry was my attempt to understand how we arrived at 2016 with a white nationalist in the White House,” said writer Claudia Rankine. “As a Black woman negotiating an onslaught of Black death held within our democracy, the questions of the play became: ‘What would it mean to walk toward the one who won’t see, holding the disturbance of that reality, and swerve into it, not away from? What would it mean to walk toward the one who doesn’t see you and swerve into, not away from, the rough air...?’ Now, in this film, under the creative direction of Phillip Youmans, these five actresses bring that conversation to life on screen.”

November is an artistic response to Rankine’s original stage play that has been reimaged into this film. It centers on the Narrator, portrayed by **Zora Howard, Tiffany Rachelle Stewart, Crystal Dickinson, April Matthis, Melanie Nicholls-King** who present Rankine’s real-life conversations with white men she encounters in transitional spaces like airports. Filmed live on stage in The Shed’s McCourt, the Narrator discusses how our civic and social structures are dominated by white men as the work sets out to create a shared sense of reality. As Rankine asks, “A reality in which there is agreement not in how to respond but in what we see is happening. If it is raining, can we all agree it is raining?” Vignettes of Black life shot on location around New York City complement this reckoning.

“When on October 1 Governor Cuomo approved the first phase of reopening New York’s flexible arts venues, we committed ourselves to safely bring back our workforce to create, rehearse, and present *November*, the filmed adaptation of *Help*, before the election—all within four weeks,” said **Alex Poots**, Artistic Director and CEO of The Shed. “Our primary goal with this production of *November* is for members of our community to come together, ahead of the presidential election, to take a first step towards reenergizing our devastated industry of live performance so that we can contribute to the national discussion on our democracy.”

Filmed as an urgent response in the final weeks leading up to the 2020 election, *November* follows months of compounded quarantine, grief, protest, and emergency that have sharpened the necessity of the play’s conversations about race, speaking to the nation as we select our next president.

“Making this film has been a transformative, fulfilling experience through and through. With *November*, I sought images, vignettes of Black joy that hold direct conversations with and—in other ways a juxtaposition to—the realities explored in the work. Withal, *November* is a piece that insists on our humanity as Black people. I hope that it will open hearts, alter perspectives, and create agents of progressive change,” said director Phillip Youmans. “Big love to Claudia Rankine, Taibi Magar, Jane Rosenthal, Alex Poots, and everyone at The Shed. And big love to my DP Cory Fraiman-Lott and producer Ayesha Nadarajah. It’s been a real honor working with you all working on this very special piece.”

“It is a genuine honor to be able to immerse myself once again in Claudia’s incredible writing. Her work is a generous act of precision and urgency, exactly what we need at this moment,” said stage director Taibi Magar. “The way that Phillip’s work is supporting this urgency has also been a true gift to watch.”

NOVEMBER CREATIVE TEAM

Phillip Youmans, Director
Claudia Rankine, Writer
Taibi Magar, Stage Director
Cory Fraiman-Lott, Director of Photography

Phillip Youmans

Phillip Youmans is a filmmaker from the 7th Ward of New Orleans. At 19, Youmans became the youngest and first African American director to win the Founders Award for Best Narrative Feature at the Tribeca Film Festival for his feature-length debut, *Burning Cane*, which he wrote, directed, shot, and edited during his final years of high school. Youmans is also the youngest director to ever have a feature film compete at the Tribeca Film Festival. Distributed by Ava DuVernay’s ARRAY Releasing, *Burning Cane* opened in select theaters on October 25, 2019, and was released on Netflix on November 6, 2019. Youmans was nominated for a Gotham Independent Film Award for Breakthrough Director and a Film Independent Spirit Award for his work on the film. He is on the 2020 Forbes “30 under 30” list in entertainment. Recently, he wrote, directed, and edited a short film for Hulu’s Black History Month titled *Imagine a Moon Colony*, about a Black family in Los Angeles in 1970 that imagines the year 2020 through a Black lens and creates abstract visuals based on their predictions.

Claudia Rankine

Claudia Rankine is the author of *Just Us: An American Conversation*, *Citizen: An American Lyric*, and four previous books, including *Don't Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric*. She wrote the plays *Help*, which premiered in March of 2020 at The Shed, and *The White Card*, which premiered in February 2018 (ArtsEmerson / American Repertory Theater) and was published by Graywolf Press in 2019. Rankine is also the editor of several anthologies, including *The Racial Imaginary: Writers on Race in the Life of the Mind*. In 2016, she co-founded The Racial Imaginary Institute (TRII). Among her numerous awards and honors, Rankine is the recipient of the Bobbitt National Prize for Poetry, the *Poets & Writers* Jackson Poetry Prize, and fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the Lannan Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, United States Artists, and the National Endowment for the Arts. She teaches at Yale University as the Frederick Iseman Professor of Poetry and lives in New Haven, Connecticut.

Taibi Magar

Taibi Magar is an Obie-winning director based in New York and a graduate of the Brown MFA program. Her New York credits include *Is God Is* (Soho Rep); *Underground Railroad Game* (Ars Nova); *Master* (The Foundry); and *Blue Ridge and The Great Leap* (Atlantic Theatre Company). Magar has directed regionally for A.R.T. (Boston), Seattle Rep, the Guthrie, Woolly Mammoth Theatre, Alley Theatre, and internationally for Hamburg Festival, Edinburgh Fringe, Soho Theatre, and Malthouse Theatre (Melbourne). Magar has also developed work with The Public Theater, New York Theatre Workshop, Playwrights Horizons, and Theatre for a New Audience. She has received a Stephen Sondheim Fellowship, an Oregon Shakespeare Festival Fellowship, a Public Theater Shakespeare Fellowship, and the SDC Breakout Award 2019. Upcoming work includes *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992* (The Signature Theatre) and *A Play for the Living in a Time of Extinction* (Baltimore Center Stage).

Zora Howard

Zora Howard is a Harlem-bred writer and performer. Plays include *STEW* (2020 Drama League nominee for Outstanding Play, Page 73 Productions), *AtGN*, *BUST*, *HANG TIME*, and *GOOD FAITH*. Her work has been developed with SPACE at Ryder Farm, Pipeline Theatre Company, Ojai Playwrights Conference, Seattle Repertory Theatre, Cape Cod Theatre Project, and others. In 2020, her feature film *Premature*, which she co-wrote and starred in, opened in theaters following its world premiere at the 2019 Sundance Film Festival. She is the 2020 – 21 Van Lier New Voices Fellow at the Lark. She received her BA from Yale University and MFA from the University of California, San Diego.

Tiffany Rachelle Stewart

Tiffany Rachelle Stewart's credits include Broadway: *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*. Off-Broadway: *Sugar In Our Wounds* (Manhattan Theatre Club), *Pericles* (The Public), *Julius Caesar* (TFANA), *Vagina Monologues* (Cherry Lane). Regional: *House That Will Not Stand* (Berkeley & Yale Repertories), *Winter's Tale* (The Alley), *Animal Farm* (Baltimore Center Stage/Milwaukee Repertory), *Vera Stark* (The Alliance), *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The African Co. Presents...* (Oregon Shakespeare), *Mud Row* (People's Light). TV/Film: *Law & Order: SVU*, *Black Rose*, *All My Children*, *Royal Pains*, and *Hotel Pennsylvania*. Awards include Best Actress in a Drama, NYTVF, (*Black Rose*) and Outstanding Ensemble, AUDELCO (*Sugar In Our Wounds*). Stewart holds an MFA in acting from Yale.

Crystal Dickinson

Crystal Dickinson's Broadway credits include the Tony Award-winning play *Clybourne Park* (Theater World Award Recipient) and *You Can't Take It With You*. She has also performed Off-Broadway at Lincoln Center, the Public Theater, Playwrights Horizons, the Signature Theater, and most recently, Theater for A New Audience. She has worked with Thomas Kail, Michael Greif, Scott Ellis, Bryan Cranston, Wendell Pierce, Pam Mackinnon, Lila Neugebauer, and Leigh Silverman. Film and Television credits include *I Origins*, *This Is Where I Leave You*, *The Good Wife*, *New Amsterdam*, a recurring role on Showtime's *The Chi*, and an upcoming appearance on ABC's *For Life*.

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April Matthis

April Matthis is an Obie Award-winning actor and company member of Elevator Repair Service. Credits include, Off-Broadway: *Toni Stone* (Roundabout); *Fairview*, *LEAR* (Soho Rep); *Signature Plays: Funnyhouse of a Negro* (Signature Theatre); *IOWA*, *Antlia Pneumatica* (Playwrights Horizons); and *On the Levee* (LCT3). With ERS: *The Sound & the Fury*; *Fondly*, *Collette Richland* (NYTW); *Measure for Measure* (The Public); *Everyone's Fine with Virginia Woolf* (Abrons Art Center); and *GATZ* (Perth Festival). Regional: *Little Bunny Foo Foo* (Actors Theater of Louisville) and *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Yale Rep). TV: *Instinct* (CBS), *New Amsterdam* (NBC). Film: *Black Card* (HBO, Showtime) and *Fugitive Dreams* (FantasiaFest, Austin Film Festival).

Melanie Nicholls-King

Melanie Nicholls-King is a Canadian American actress with Trini roots best known for playing Cheryl in the HBO series *The Wire*, Officer Noelle Williams in the ABC series *Rookie Blue*, and Hazel LaCroix in the beloved Netflix series *Anne with an E*. She can also be seen in all three series of the *Law & Order* franchise, *Orphan Black*, *The Week Of* with Adam Sandler and Chris Rock, *Star Trek: Discovery*, and *Little Fires Everywhere*, to name a few. She was also thrilled to be a part of the Playwrights Horizons-produced *Familiar*, written by Danaï Gurira, directed by Tony Award-winning director Rebecca Taichman, and featuring an incredible ensemble of actors. Upcoming projects include Showtime's *Your Honor* with Bryan Cranston.

Supporters

Support for *November* is provided by M&T Bank, Founding Bank of The Shed, and the Ford Foundation. The creation of new work at The Shed is generously supported by the Lizzie and Jonathan Tisch Commissioning Fund and the Shed Commissioners. The Shed is connected by Altice. Special thanks to co-producers Tribeca Studios and Jane Rosenthal.

From our Sponsor

M&T Bank is The Founding Bank of The Shed and has supported the organization since the beginning. M&T Bank was pleased to be the lead sponsor of the play *Help* which was postponed due to the Coronavirus pandemic, and is excited to now be the lead sponsor of *November*, a new film from the play *Help*.

About The Shed

The Shed is a new cultural institution of and for the 21st century. We produce and welcome innovative art and ideas, across all forms of creativity, to build a shared understanding of our rapidly changing world and a more equitable society. In our highly adaptable building on Manhattan's west side, The Shed brings together established and emerging artists to create new work in fields ranging from pop to classical music, painting to digital media, theater to literature, and sculpture to dance. We seek opportunities to collaborate with cultural peers and community organizations, work with like-minded partners, and provide unique spaces for private events. As an independent nonprofit that values invention, equity, and generosity, we are committed to advancing art forms, addressing the urgent issues of our time, and making our work impactful, sustainable, and relevant to the local community, the cultural sector, New York City, and beyond.