

RETURN TO THE FOREST

Some background information: Sue Buckmaster (director) and Gregory Maqoma (choreographer) had previously collaborated in 2021 on Theatre-Rites' The Global Playground for Manchester International Festival. Their creative connection resulted in a beautiful weaving of dance and puppetry and they continued to talk and discuss future work.

Every Theatre-Rites devising process begins with an object.

As part of their creative conversations about Return to the Forest, Sue asked Gregory to introduce her to a precious object and he brought an Ishoba from South Africa, made by his brother Langa who is a Healer, to the first week of research and development in London.

After spending a week playing and researching with the Ishoba, Return to the Forest found its key concept. The company decided to identify 5 precious objects which would normally be seen in a museum, and ask each object where they had been or where they would like to be. The cultural influences within the Creative team helped identify these objects and each one took us back to nature - and to the Forest. We then explored through dance, puppetry, mask, craft and music, how we could express those stories of return and ancestral wisdom.

The Objects on Display in the Museum



An Ishoba

An ancestral stick/ceremonial wand commonly carried and used by traditional healers or Sangomas in South Africa. The Ishoba represents ancestral spirits, wisdom, guidance and power. Our Ishoba is made of horse hair with symbolic beading decoration in the likeness of the one Gregory's brother uses for healing purposes with herbs. Similar items are used by various masquerade figures around the world.



Mask

Inspired by the Gelede masks which are traditionally wooden headdresses from the Yoruba people of Nigeria and Benin. The mask is worn atop the head during festivals to honour the spiritual power of women. Visual artist Bunmi Agosto and designer and maker Alison Duddle worked with Sue Buckmaster to create the first Gelede mask that you see in the museum; further masks were made in this image as seen on Mother Earth during the performance.



Part of an Ancient Map

A circular part of an ancient map of the forests of Ecuador, part of the Amazon.

Made by Naomi Oppenheim



A Carved Calabash

Also known as a gourd, a calabash is a vine which is grown into fruit. These are found in Tropical Africa, South America and some parts of Asia and are grown for consumption, as a container or as a musical instrument. Originally introduced by a South American percussionist to Theatre-Rites in 2005 and chosen by Frank Moon, one of our Composers and Xolisile, our performer/musician, to include in our museum.



A Knotted Rope String in a Bell Jar

Inspired by the sacred knotting method of Chinese red thread and the significance of red thread in Japanese Mythology. Made by Designer Jean Chan in reference to her own Chinese heritage.

“I am so proud that Theatre-Rites has reached its 30th year. As our name suggests, we create theatrical rituals that celebrate connectivity between children and adults, community and individuality, and humans and nature. Now more than ever, it is essential to emphasise the importance of creativity in our lives. We have always fought for children’s right to experience art of the highest quality, and it has not always been easy. Nothing gives me more hope than seeing a child respond to our work, knowing it has taken months of creativity from some of the best practising artists. Making and experiencing art nurtures all that is beneficial to us; it is not a luxury, but something children know they need and adults need reminding of. Return to the Forest is a perfect example of Theatre-Rites’ practice, and I am delighted that it is at the heart of our anniversary year”. **Sue Buckmaster Director**

“Return to the Forest, created with Theatre-Rites and Sue Buckmaster opens a space for audiences to engage not only with culture, but with heritage and the deeper question of what still matters in the world. It is a shared journey into the forest to discover, to renew, and to learn”. **Gregory Maqoma Choreographer**