

In Process with Shanice Mason & Jamison Curcio: The Black Woman As Blueprint

This piece is part of a series about BlackLight Summit, written by Ashayla Byrd, a BlackLight Summit Emerging Artist.

How dare the world forget that Black women and femmes are the blueprints for culture, innovation, sustainability and prosperity? The audacity! Of course, being a Black femme myself makes me biased. When I say “Black women and femmes,” I’m including our nonbinary and transgender siblings. That conversation sits at the intersection of Black, queer, feminist and gender theory, but I assume folks did not come here for that dissertation. When the dominant culture surrounding me is more focused on the subsequent erasure and belittling of people like me, it only makes sense for me to seek spaces determined to counter this notion. Folks are even pressed about how we choose to identify ourselves.

Enter Shanice Mason and Jamison Curcio: the co-creators, and dare I say, co-conspirators of “I have a secret to tell you...,” an exhibition-style movement experience that solely involves and wholly celebrates Black women and femmes. Shanice and Jamison, two 2023 BlackLight Summit Artists in Residence, assert that Black women and femmes are—and always have been—the “tools” our society needs for new awareness. This year’s BlackLight Summit expands on that sentiment. Two individually dedicated and insightful movement practitioners in their own rights, Shanice and Jamison were both already in the deep throes of other creative endeavors when Tariq D. O’Meally, BlackLight Summit’s founder, asked the two of them to collaborate. Jamison recalls that “capacity-wise, [she] wanted to make sure that [she] also had the time to dedicate to a partner, to a process, and then to the larger vision of something.”

Both Jamison and Shanice have collaborated with a wealth of artists at the local and national levels, but at times, being identified as a leader in the dance field comes with an unspoken weight added onto their shoulders. In their initial discussions, Shanice remembers doing a great deal of reflecting: “I think that we are these very strong women. What does that mean and how do we take up that space? How do we not apologize for being the people that we are?” Shanice and Jamison were committed to welcoming other Black women and femmes into the process; they were eager to connect with folks who felt the same pressures that they often do. “Who are those people in our community? How do we get to heal, rage, be soft, have joy together?” How can a space like this be cultivated in a world so adverse to these practices?

Prepare to enter into the world that Shanice and Jamison have built: a world in which Black women and femmes—the “architects,” as they call them—have the final say as to who can access them, how much access those selected might receive, and what offerings the architects might choose to share. A world of portal people—individuals granted full access to those offerings. A world of witnesses and witnessing. A world that disrupts the traditional expectation of static, passive audience viewership. A world in which Black women and femmes have full

agency over their bodies, their movement and their expressions. A world of secrets...some that you'll learn, and others that you'll simply have to miss.

Ashayla Byrd (she/they) is a DC-based dance artist and writer who is dedicated to amplifying the voices of BIPOC, LGBTQIA+ folks. Originally from Virginia Beach, Ashayla is eager to explore the richness of DC's dance and writing communities!