

**NYU
SKIRBALL**



MILO RAU
ANTIGONE IN THE AMAZON
SEPTEMBER 27-28
NORTH AMERICAN PREMIERE

CREDITS

With

Frederico Araujo, Pablo Casella, Sara De Bosschere, Arne De Tremerie

On Screen

Kay Sara, Gracinha Donato, Célia Maracajá, Choir of Militants of Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais sem Terra (MST), and as Tiresias: **Ailton Krenak**

Text

Milo Rau & Ensemble

Concept & Direction

Milo Rau

Dramaturgy

Giacomo Bisordi

Dramaturgical Collaboration

Douglas Estevam, Martha Kiss Perrone

Assistant Dramaturgy

Kaatje De Geest, Carmen Hornbostel

Music Composition

Elia Rediger, Pablo Casella

Set Design

Anton Lukas

Costume Design

Gabriela Cherubini, Jo De Visscher, Anton Lukas

Light Design

Dennis Diels

Video Design

Moritz Von Dungern

Video Recording

Fernando Nogari

Video Editing

Joris Vertenten

Collaboration Concept, Research & Dramaturgy

Eva-Maria Bertschy

Production

NTGent

Coproduction

The International Institute of Political Murder (Iipm), Festival d’Avignon, Romaeuropa Festival, Factory International (Manchester), La Villette (Paris), Tandem - Scène Nationale (Arras Douai), Künstlerhaus Mousonturm (Frankfurt), Equinoxe Scène Nationale (Châteauroux), Wiener Festwochen

In collaboration with **Movimento Dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST)**

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Thanks to

Carolina Bufolin

INTERVIEW WITH MILO RAU

Why adapt Sophocles’s “Antigone” in a contemporary context and transpose it to the state of Pará in Brazil?

Brazilian playwright Douglas Estevam, now cultural director for the Landless Workers’ Movement (MST), once worked for Augusto Boal, a major figure in Brazilian theatre. Augusto often collaborated with the MST, one of the largest social movements in the world. And during one of my tours in 2019, they asked us to work with them. We chose *Antigone*, which tackles the question of modern and rational civilisation attacking traditional civilisation. With *Antigone*, Sophocles wrote a play with a crystal-clear narrative, which can be adapted in many different ways. In February 2020, MST activists in Amazonia, in the far North of Brazil, organised a workshop with about a hundred people. One group would shoot films, another would work as the chorus. There’s a great tradition of choral work over there. We started rewriting the tragedy with many collaborators: farmers, activists, young people, old people, feminists, experts, professors, and indigenous activists. We got caught in a multifaceted movement bubbling with ideas, especially about the questions of women, land, or religion. Then the Covid pandemic struck before we could create the play, and we had to wait until early 2023 to resume working on this project. As a reaction to the 1996 massacre of nineteen landless farmers by military police, activists started occupying land on which they still live today. We designed the scenography on that plantation, which has since received legal status. We therefore worked on the road where the massacre took place, and in the rainforest.

Your “21st-century political Antigone,” a figure of the unequal struggle against exactions in Amazonia, also becomes, thanks to Kay Sara’s performance, a symbol of artistic resistance.

Kay Sara has come a long way over the past ten years. She started as an activist and became more and more of an actress. With the poetry of the texts she performed, the presence of her body on the stage, the exposure she got on tour, she realised that to act as an actress meant being an activist in a different way. Her filmed performances are very popular, she’s become a sort of “star,” an emblematic figure for the indigenous movement. Her speech “This madness has to stop,” taken from our *Antigone*, was broadcast widely and has led to young people wanting to become Kay Sara, just like others want to be Greta Thunberg.* She’s become a role model. And that’s very important in her relationship to Antigone, all too often shown as a lonely character, an almost autistic or Romantic figure, entirely absorbed by her love for her brother, as is the case in Jean Anouilh’s play. But I think there’s a lot of rationality in Antigone, who’s a thoughtful, complex person. I often say that the ancient Greeks invented

*Kay Sara’s speech, “This madness must stop with which she was to open the 2020 Wiener Festwochen. Posted online due to the Covid pandemic as the opener of Milo Rau’s “School of Resistance”, it has since been translated and published in a dozen languages.

tragedy to banish it from life, in order to find a way, a path outside of antagonism. The characters of Antigone and Creon show us different paths we could follow, even though the play always unfolds in a tragic manner. The Landless Workers’ Movement immediately wondered, during rehearsals, why the end of the tragedy featured so many suicides. They didn’t see it as an option, because for them, the struggle must continue. So we removed them from the story, which was a way to make the play ours. Writer Anne Carson, who also translated Sophocles’s text beautifully twice, speaks very eloquently of this form of reappropriation of the text.

What about the character of Creon? How did you shape him?

In Creon’s speeches, we find a lot of what former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro could say, very reactionary statements. But there’s also a more modern rhetoric, an attempt to deny antagonisms, the language of tolerance, the greenwashing of capitalism.

In the play, it connects to the idea that Antigone could find a compromise to bury her brother and marry Creon’s son, to continue the lineage of power. She’s smart enough to refuse, she knows that there’s something dangerous in this idea of continuity. This system is broken. It’s the same thing as saying that an eco-friendly company can experience exponential growth while remaining green. But we shouldn’t forget that Antigone is the daughter of Oedipus, a hero guilty of parricide and incest: she’s part of that same family of men, there’s no alternative. We have to understand all that and try to find a form of cohabitation outside of extreme antagonism. That’s the lesson I’m trying to learn from this hybrid project, between professional and non-professional actors, activists, the mixing of Brazilian and European influences, the use of video live on stage, the words of Sophocles mixed with new writings. All of that combined with actual situations.

You set up political and social actions in parallel with the play “Orestes in Mosul” and the film “The New Gospel,” the first two parts of your trilogy about ancient myths. What is this new opus going to bring along?

In the continuity of *Orestes in Mosul*, we opened a cinema school with the City Theatre Gent, where I serve as director. It’s a partnership with UNESCO. Since then, nine films have already been completed. For *The New Gospel*, we conducted a project to regularise undocumented labourers and set up a distribution network of tomatoes harvested in a fair way by those same farm labourers. Here, we’re working on a large campaign called Punish Nutella with the Landless Workers’ Movement. The brand uses palm oil produced in the state of Pará (where we’re creating our *Antigone*), where human rights are regularly violated (expropriations, forest fires, deforestation). We’re campaigning against the use of that oil which has been deceptively rebranded as eco-responsible, and whose “certified” appellation is accepted by Europe even as its production and exploitation encourages deforestation. In addition to that campaign, our project also includes an exhibition, two music videos, and a documentary film

about the creation. It’s another aspect of my work, where we try to create “micro-ecologies,” a way of designing a project not only as a simple play but to create around it an entire parallel economy within the capitalist system, to produce, sell, and consume differently. What we want to do is to continue, past the first performances, to use the tools of artistic creation to build long-lasting virtuous circles of production and distribution. The idea behind “micro-ecology” is to occupy capitalism, like MST occupies the land. With *Antigone*, we’re using Greek tragedy to imagine a new reading — we occupy the classics, we rewrite them. To what was already there we add new knowledge, new relationships, maybe some new practical philosophy. I’m first and foremost a director; theatre and film remain at the centre, but I try to connect with NGOs, activists, lawyers, movements, and producers. Activism can be seen as targeted and ephemeral, but we have to try to set up alternative and longer-lasting networks. Thanks to those “micro-ecologies,” consumers and simple citizens, when they leave the theatre, must find themselves equipped with simple and practical tools that allow them to participate in this different way of doing, of living. It’s important to me to “criticise” the way theatre is made, to analyse the process in order to be able to transform it. We live in a globalised society, invaded by a few European and Mediterranean myths. It’s an immutable fact, a nature we cannot fight. You have to work with this nature and its extremes. We have to find a way to live better for the eight billion people on the planet, to change our conception of consumption, to build different relationships — but also, we have to find an alternative, brand new way to make theatre.

Interview conducted by Malika Baaziz for the Festival D’Avignon presentation of “Antigone in the Amazon” and translated to English by Gaël Schmidt-Cléach.

GO BEYOND THE STAGE

Discover more about *Antigone in the Amazon* and the production’s additional cultural and historical contexts with additional interviews online essays, articles, reading lists, and many other resources.



Scan for online resources and dramaturgical insights into this production.

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NYU SKIRBALL FUNDING

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NEXT @ NYU SKIRBALL

Miet Warlop: One Song

October 3-5 | US Premiere

Hailed by *The New York Times* as one of the "Top European Productions of 2022," *One Song*, the latest work by the acclaimed multidisciplinary artist Miet Warlop, makes its highly anticipated U.S. premiere.

Marlène Saldana and Jonathan Drillet: Showgirl

October 18 & 19 | North American Premiere

A trashy American musical, an absurd cabaret, a techno oratorio of gender stereotypes: Marlène Saldana immerses herself in the unbridled mental universe of the heroine of Paul Verhoeven's cult film to turn glitz and glitter into an antidote to violence and emptiness.

Builders Association: Atlas Drugged

October 25-27 | World Premiere

Just in time for the election, Ayn Rand's Benzedrine rants meet artificial intelligence in *Atlas Drugged*, the Builders newest technologically infused mindbender.

Netta Yerushalmy: Movement

November 1 & 2 | NYC Premiere

Netta Yerushalmy weaves a quilt of borrowed material that stretches the idea of pluralism until it almost snaps.

The Civilians: Sex Variants

November 14-24 | World Premiere

The Civilians examine the intimate lives of Depression-era queers in this kaleidoscopic musical fantasia adapted from the 1941 text *Sex Variants*, a "medical study" of LGBT+ sexuality. Featuring original songs by Martha Redbone, Stephen Trask, and the late Michael Friedman.

Nature Theater of Oklahoma: No President

December 5-7 | North American Premiere

Nature Theater of Oklahoma makes a long-awaited return to NYC with a furious, over-the-top, tightly choreographed political grotesque that draws from everything on offer — all to a reordered recording of Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker*.



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