

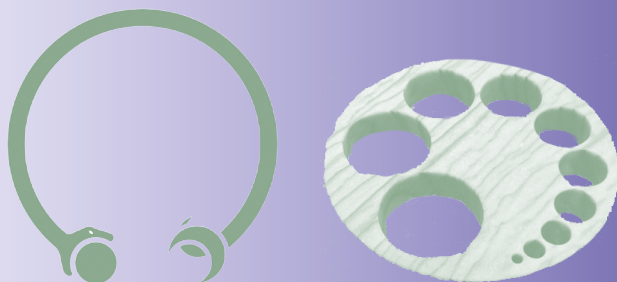
THE BIRTHKEEPER ALTAR

7.09 - 14.12.23

Artists Lea Guldditte Hestelund, Nanna Lysholt,
Olga Ravn & Tabita Rezaire

Curated with *AMAKABA*

Collega, Flensborggade 57, 1669 Copenhagen V (DK)



THE BIRTHKEEPER ALTAR

With the marginalization of the midwife, the process began by which women lost the control they had exercised over procreation, and were reduced to a passive role in child delivery (...) the community of women that had gathered around the bed of the future mother had to be first expelled from the delivery room, and midwives had to be placed under the surveillance of the doctor, or had to be recruited to police women. (Silvia Federici 2004: 89)

Two years ago, when I was planning the exhibition programme for **Collega**, I asked Tabita Rezaire — an artist who runs the **AMAKABA** art space in French Guiana — to co-curate a show representing **AMAKABA** and their work. Rezaire accepted the invitation but did not feel comfortable curating an exhibition. Instead, she proposed a framework for our collaboration. Rezaire suggested that we transform **Collega** into a doula centre for the duration of the exhibition. Since Rezaire had been my long-distance doula during my pregnancy, it felt appropriate to explore the concept of doula practice together.

The term “doula” has its origins in the ancient Greek word “doule” or servant-woman. In modern times it refers to a person who is trained to provide information, emotional support, and physical comfort to a mother before, during, and after childbirth. However, doulas can also be trained to assist with various life transitions, including death, gender transition, first period, and menopause. In recent years, there has been an increase in the utilisation of doulas during childbirth in Denmark, mostly among the privileged few. This rise in popularity can be attributed to ongoing budget cuts faced by Danish hospitals since 2002, with doulas stepping in to do the care work that the hospital system is sometimes unable to deliver.

As the philosopher Silvia Federici highlighted, childbirth experienced a power shift in 16th century Europe. In the Danish context, reproductive health issues such as birth control, abortion, and childbirth were traditionally overseen by “kloge koner” or wise women. However, with the introduction of the *Danske Lov* — the Danish statute book of 1683 — these practices underwent significant changes. Abortion, the abandonment of

newborns, and giving birth without the assistance of an authorised midwife were criminalised. Local midwives were tasked with inspecting the breasts of unmarried women to check for milk in cases of infant abandonment.¹ The punishment for such acts was decapitation, with the head of the condemned woman to be displayed on a pole in public space after her execution. This shift in the role of midwives contrasted with the previous practices and beliefs of traditional healers, who were increasingly stigmatised and condemned as witches for using or sharing their knowledge.²

For *The Birthkeeper Altar*, we invited artist and doula **Nanna Lysholt** to host a workshop programme. Additionally, we invited artist **Lea Guldditte Hestelund** and author **Olga Ravn** to collaborate on an installation, presented alongside a video by **AMAKABA**.

Nanna Lysholt has been exploring themes of birth and motherhood since 2013 through her art project *Dear Daughter* (2013–2023), a series of voice-based live performances and audio-video installations. In recent years she has merged her artistic practice with doula practice, and the exhibition will feature some of Lysholt's doula remedies — tools for acupuncture, calming scents, and ecoprinted textile — in a joint sculpture *Kore (Maman)* (2023). As part of her workshop program, Lysholt has invited Marta Orbis, a midwife and doula colleague. Orbis, having learned the rebozo practices from traditional Mexican midwives introduced rebozo practices to Danish doulas and midwives, with rebozo eventually being used by the Danish hospital system.

“Rebozo” is a Spanish term used to describe a shawl or scarf and encompasses various ancient techniques in which the shawl is used as an extension of the hands. It can be used to carry a baby, as a bag, or as a massage tool. During childbirth, it serves as an extension of the birth helper's hands to perform massage techniques before and during pregnancy, as well as during labour. It can also be used as a tool to assist in a “closing ceremony” after a birth. For her workshop program, Lysholt has created plant-dyed, eco-printed rebozos that will be used by Lysholt and Orbis to perform elements of a postpartum ceremony. This ceremony, known as the “closing of the bones” represents the transition from the openness of the body and soul after birth to the return to a core connection.

The Birthkeeper Altar space is designed by **Olga Ravn** and **Lea Guldditte Hestelund**. The two artist's collaboration began with Hestelund's

solo exhibition at Overgaden in 2018, which referenced carriers such as a womb, or a bag — with Ravn's science fiction novel, *The Employees* (2018), which was published for the exhibition. Ravn is an author whose novel *My Work* (2020) explores postpartum depression and the liminal space surrounding childbirth. In addition to her writing, Ravn is a visual artist, often working with textiles. For *The Birthkeeper Altar*, Ravn is presenting *Curtain Between Now and Then* (2023) hand-dyed silk textiles using madder root, a plant dye source that has been used for over 4,000 years, as well as weld flower, known for its calming properties. Similarly, Hestelund has been exploring themes of birth and motherhood in her practice, most recently in her exhibition *Hissy Fit* (2022), which showcased a series of safety wear designed to protect broken bodies. In addition to Ravn's fabric, Hestelund has designed *CDT (cervical dilation table)* (2023) that takes inspiration from a chart used for birth education. Hestelund has also created wall carriers *Hang I, II, III* (2023) for folding mattresses and coat hangers for visitors participating in workshops and exhibition guests.

AMAKABA is represented in the space with the 56 minute video work *L'art de Naitre* (2022). This video explores the wisdom of birth through the experiences of four traditional midwives who, from their respective traditions, have provided support and care during the initiation of motherhood. These women include Mrs Yapara from the indigenous Lokono tradition, Odette Majokko and Noria Majokko from the Maroon Saramaka tradition, and Mrs Myriam Kerrel from the Creole tradition. The video serves as a glimpse into **AMAKABA's** research process and Tabita Rezaire's journey as a doula, influenced by her grandmother and great-grandmother, both of whom were midwives.

Coincidentally, while I was deep in research for *The Birthkeeper Altar*, I was asked by my childhood friend Camilla to be present at the birth of her child. The experience left me with a deep sense of gratitude for those who commit to assisting and supporting birthing people — doulas, midwives, nurses, doctors, friends and co-parents. *The Birthkeeper Altar* at **Collega** seeks to celebrate them and bring attention to the historical and cultural context surrounding childbirth.

Lotte Løvholm, **Collega**

AMAKABA is a vision for collective healing in the Amazonian forest of French Guiana. Initiated by artist and doula Tabita Rezaire, it is a place for the arts and sciences of earth, the body and the sky. **AMAKABA** is part of a global movement that advocates for conscious births and focuses on training doulas and building a network of birth workers and traditional midwives in French Guiana.

Collega focuses on co-curation as practice, and each exhibition is curated in collaboration with a collective or an institution abroad. **Collega** is supported by Bikuben Foundation, The Danish Arts Foundation, Beckett-Fonden, Augustinus Fonden, William Demant & Rådet for Visuel Kunst.

¹ Christina Lysbjerg Mogensen: "Danske Lov 1638" on danmarkshistorien.dk, Aarhus Universitet, March 10, 2021 <https://danmarkshistorien.dk/vis/materiale/danske-lov-1638>.

² Marie Kølbaek Iversen, Neo-worlds: Transformative Agency through Fright, Rite, and Myth, 2023: 30-31. Doctoral thesis, Oslo National Academy of the Arts.

NANNA LYSHOLT HANSEN RHAPSODIES* OF INANNA**

*

A rhapsody is an impassioned speech or sentiment.

A rhapsody is also part of an epic poem that is suitable for reciting.

A rhapsody is also a musical piece noted for its improvisational nature and irregular form.

A rhapsody is a musical composition free in structure and highly emotional in character

A rhapsody is an expression of ecstatic enthusiasm

A rhapsody is an epic poem or part of an epic recited by a rhapsodist

A rhapsody is a literary work composed in an intense or exalted style

Rhapsody is rapturous delight or ecstasy

A rhapsody is obsolete

The word rhapsody comes from the Greek word rhapsodios, which means a person who recites epic poems, and whose root is rhaptein, meaning to stitch, to sew together and oïdē song.

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Inanna is the Sumerian goddess of love, fertility, warfare and political power, and inclusion. Inanna is the Cyborg Mother Goddess incarnated in Nanna Lysholt's voice-based performance project Dear Daughter/Sen_sing_InannaInanna (2019–2023).

DOULA WORKSHOP: VOICES BODIES WISDOM

Date: 11:00–15:00 Saturday 9 September and 16 September

Location: Collega, Flensborggade 57, 1669 Copenhagen V

Voices

Join artist Nanna Lysholt Hansen, midwife Marta Orbis, and Nammu Birth for a two day workshop focused on the power of voices, bodies, and wisdom in the context of birth and mothering. We will let our individual voices come together in rhapsody by listening and uttering collectively; by means of resonance, polyphony, dissonance, ambiguity, plurality, and embracement.

Through a series of exercises with the body, breathing, and use of voice, we will work with:

- Strengthening presence through listening.
- Grounding, responsiveness and intuition.
- Maintaining and centring focus.
- Vibrations and your personal, intuitive sound/voice in the “here and now”.
- Transformation of the voice into a language of word-medicine for empowering, healing and caring.

Bodies

The workshop will culminate in a live art performance where workshop participants will be assisting midwife Marta Orbis and artist Nanna Lysholt Hansen in performing a postpartum ceremony with a Cyborg Mother Goddess.

Wisdom

Prior to the workshop participants will receive Nanna Lysholt Hansen’s performance text *Matrixial Tongues: Dear Daughter/Sen_sing_Inannainanna*, which we will use in the workshop and performance.

Marta Orbis will demonstrate rebozo techniques and share knowledge of plant and textile technology in relation to carrying and caring.

Nanna Lysholt Hansen will present her functional sculptures with minerals, oils and herbs for pregnancy, birth and self-&(m)other-care.

Practicalities

- The two day workshop is intended for birth workers, but is open to anyone interested in birth and mothering.
- Bring a notebook and pen, sand/yellow/orange-coloured clothing.
- The workshop is free and is part of a larger research project on the voice, mothering and sustainability. The performance, and parts of the workshop, will be audio and video documented.
- Limited spots. Register using the contact details on next page if you want to join.

PERFORMANCE: SEN_SING_INANNAINANNA

Date: 13:00 Saturday 16 September

Time and location: Sydhavnstippen, link to location via collega.dk

In this sixth version of the performance *Dear Daughter/Sen_sing_Inannainanna (Russ, Shiva, Klein)* Nanna Lysholt Hansen collaborates with midwives and doulas to perform a collective mother care ceremony with the Cyborg Mother Goddess. The performance is open to everyone. For more information please visit nannalys-holthansen.com and nammubirth.dk.

BIRTH PREPARATION WORKSHOP FOR PREGNANT PEOPLE: NAMMU BIRTH VOICE

Date: 10:00–12.00/13:00–15:00 Saturday 23 September

Location: Collega, Flensborggade 57, 1669 Copenhagen V

Details

- Led by birth therapist Nanna Lysholt Hansen, owner of nammubirth.dk
- Exploration of the voice as a tool for pain relief and relaxation during childbirth
- Learning how sounds and sound meditation can alleviate pain and create a calming effect
- Focus on using the breath as an anchor during childbirth to maintain focus
- Exercises with the body, breathing, and voice to strengthen presence, release tension, and stay grounded
- Introduction and demonstration of Nammu Birth Tools — a tool, artwork and technique that uses acupuncture, aromatherapy, oxytocin stimulation, and massage techniques for pregnancy, birth, and postpartum care
- Price: DKK 100–400, with the possibility of payment in instalments, based on financial situation
- Open to pregnant people at any stage of pregnancy
- Limited spots available (6–8 participants), so prompt registration is recommended

REGISTRATION FOR DOULA & BIRTH PREPARATION WORKSHOPS:

- Email: nammubirth@gmail.com
- Phone: 60329184
- Website: nammubirth.dk

THE BIRTHKEEPER ALTAR

Collega

7 September – 14 December 2023

Curators: Tabita Rezaire, AMAKABA & Lotte Løvholm, Collega.

Artists: Lea Gulditte Hestelund, Nanna Lysholt, Olga Ravn & Tabita Rezaire.

Sub-editing: Nathaniel Budzinski

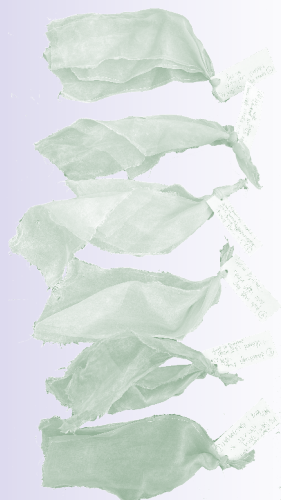
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Production assistance: Elif Temizkan, Director of Arts & Cultural Development, AMAKABA.

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