

Nick Mauss has developed a multifaceted body of work spanning ceramics, drawings, paintings on mirrors and textiles, as well as exhibition displays and architectures, choreographies and costumes. His practice also draws on the work of other artists through writing and research, organizing exhibitions and performances, and creating presentations in which authorship moves in and out of focus. His 2018 solo show "Transmissions" at the Whitney Museum in New York, for example, examined the myriad connections between art and Modernist ballet from the 1930s to '50s, featuring original collaborative choreography that was performed in the exhibition spaces. "Bizarre Silks, Private Imaginings and Narrative Facts, etc." (2020) at Kunsthalle Basel, meanwhile, assembled works by other artists with a special focus on the conventions of display, such as wall text, exhibition design, and scenography, creating a network of relationships that spoke to the presence of fact and fantasy in artistic practices.



LMF: I would like to start discussing your work from the outside in, partly because ideas about what is extrinsic and intrinsic are so important to the materiality of your artistic practice. You saw Auguste Rodin's *Study for a Dressing Gown for Balzac* (1897) in Paris recently; it was the centerpiece of an exhibition at the Musée Rodin, examining the artist's process in creating a sculpture of the writer. What are your thoughts on this drapery for a body without the body, because it structurally contains manifold ideas about lines, fabric, publicity, privacy, gestures, and the pressures and temperatures that a body exerts on fabric, and so on?

NM: The body and its erotics are often very central in my work, even if there is no body—that is, a literal absence of the figure. I've made pieces that are constructed around this absence, such as a set of transparent overalls recreated from a 1930s folklore ballet about a gas station attendant, suspended in mid-air; or a trompe l'oeil antechamber in stitched velvet appliqué whose purpose is to theatricalize the transitional space between other spaces. Just recently, I staged in Tom Burr's studio/archive a sound-based performance of Jean Genet's 1948 ballet, *Adame Miroir*, with no performing bodies, only a voice reading Genet's description of the dance's décor

(left) Installation view of **NICK MAUSS's** "Transmissions" at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 2018, featuring Quenton Stuckey, Brandon Collwes, Kristina Bermudez, and works by Carl Van Vechten and George Platt Lynes. Photo by Ron Amstutz. Courtesy the artist.

(top) **NICK MAUSS, *For Now*, 2012, aluminum leaf and gesso on board. Photo by Jayun Deng. Copyright the artist. Courtesy Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris.**

and denouement. In my drawings, too, figures are often absent or blank.

It's really only becoming apparent to me in talking to you, this use of a figure's trace or "shell" as a kind of open placeholder. I mention erotics because I don't want this absent body to be overdetermined by a sense of total loss. A lot of my work derives from a fixation on gesture—a hand on a railing, a deflected glance, one's passage over a threshold—by which the logic of the exhibition and the way one moves through it is made into a consequence of this otherwise neglected detail. I think the viewer inhabits that space, ordered by gesture, quite intuitively. With Genet's ballet, the audience quite literally become the dance as they move among Tom's sculptures and listen to Genet narrate the struggle between a sailor, his reflection coming to life, and death.

I like your observation about the dual function of the extrinsic and intrinsic in my work, which highlights the importance of framing, and of trying to locate or dissolve the frame. This porousness raises the question of category, and what it means to consider differently what is subject to attention. Regarding Marine Kisiel and Isabelle Collet's show revolving around Rodin's robe, it was an important object-lesson, and perhaps my favorite kind—one in which I was confronted with something I thought I already knew or understood, only to see that I don't know it at all. The exhibition essentially disrobed the Balzac monument in order to reveal the complex processes and controversies that shaped the sculpture as we know it. Taking the mirage of a historical object and unraveling it in reverse is something I relate to. At the most basic level, the act of dressing a public monument in a morning robe marks a break in traditions of representation, of publicness. But other "messy" lived aspects informed the process of this sculpture's realization, involving many tensions around holding the bodies of citizens to a certain standard.

I like your insistence on the erotics acting as a kind of counterweight to the feeling of loss. In some of your recent pieces, the subject often turns away from us somehow: *Shift* (2025), for example, comprises ink and acrylic line paintings on paper hanging underneath a white voile curtain, which depict fragmentary figures. In one drawing, a lone character has wavy lines close to his hand that make it seem as though he is smoking, and his face is obscured with a kind of scribble. Another drawing depicts a mass of bodies that seem to overlap with one another, making it hard to tell where one person begins and another ends. There are multiple ways in which these figures recede from the viewer—the smokes and scrimms and glances all seem to refract off of one another. This is accentuated when the work is reflected in a mirror elsewhere in the room, along with another series of mirror paintings that you made using a reverse painting technique.

I'm interested in how you observe the attitudes of the figures I draw—both in relation to one another, and to the viewer—as a waning, recession, or a refractive, spatially scattered way of interacting. I should point out that I'm always caught off guard by the assumption that the figures in my work are male, because I don't see them as specifically gendered—if anything, their pathos and

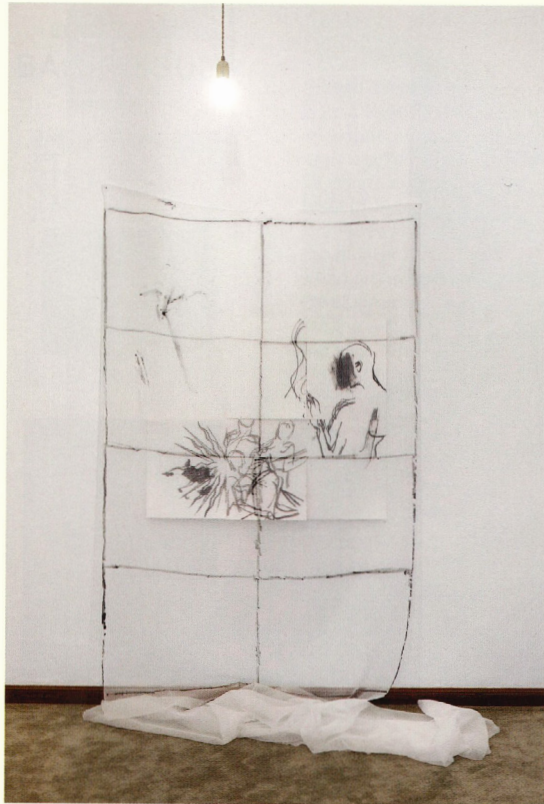
gestures are often based on feminine figures drawn from histories of painting, fashion, and performance. You are right; they can appear elusive, inchoate. I fixate on pose and gesture, as I said, rather than on the description of an individual person. I privilege "this space between the cuts," to cite filmmaker Shirley Clarke, and I use these intervals of contact or disappearance as a thread throughout the space. And then there is an inner fragmentation, or parataxis, when a work is composed of adjoining panels of glass or ceramic that don't necessarily cohere visually.

Shift is a preparatory drawing for a work on glass. I begin by pinning up drawings and transparent or semi-transparent overlays in my studio, then I arrange these layers for a long time, moving them around, adding new drawings, or drawing over old ones, hiding others, or pinning another length of voile over them. I need to lose familiarity with a drawing—with the initial feeling and temporality of it—before I can really see it. So in this layered space, I look at all these traces constantly, live with them, and also forget them. I try to arrive at a delayed or tangled legibility. Maybe that is where the sense of trying to "catch" the figures comes from; in some way, I am also trying to catch them as I arrive at them over time. But I've only recently begun showing this aspect of the process. The drawings have a very different materiality from the glass, of course, and a more fleeting form of presence, so they say something important about how drawing, touch, space, movement, and fragility relate. There is also a kind of "generation loss" built into my process, where I draw and redraw certain gestures or ornaments, or pull them through so many medial transfers that they become eroded.

I wanted to ask about your use of textiles in your compositions. A favorite quote of mine is from Lisa Robertson's 2020 novel *The Baudelaire Fractal*, describing a young woman's search for something called a "sense textile": "Reading, listing, I wanted to escape the violent sociology of beauty to experience aesthetics as an even redistribution of the senses across the most banal parts of dailiness. I wanted to write it all down, everything inchoate: light, dust, textile, pigment, sentences. Beauty would be the lust for the complex, unspoken surface of the present. I sought a sense-textile, which would flourish outside the humiliating economy of servitude that names us."

I think of the "daily" and "inchoate" with respect to what happens "between the cuts" here and the particular surfaces of your work—often corroded, blurred, among "light, dust, textile, pigment, sentences" etc. Maybe it even speaks to my misreading of the subject's gender—the "humiliating economy of servitude that names us"! Do you have a specific history with or relationship to textiles?

It was my interest in ornament that led me to textiles. I was trying to learn things I wasn't seeing in art school, so I had to set out and make my own history, which was more related to material culture, interiors, and private spaces that fulfilled an important social and cultural function. But I was mainly going straight after all the things I was told should not be taken seriously: the theatrical, the decorative, the minor. I wanted to revel in these things



(top) Installation view of **NICK MAUSS's** *Shift*, 2025, ink and acrylic on paper and organza, dimensions variable. Photo by Andrea Rossetti. Copyright the artist. Courtesy Emanuela Campoli, Milan.



(right) **NICK MAUSS**, *Untitled*, 2024, engobe and glaze on stoneware, dimensions variable. Photo by Jiayun Deng. Copyright the artist. Courtesy Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris.

(right) Installation view of **NICK MAUSS's** "Designing Dreams: a Celebration of Léon Bakst" at the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco, 2016–17. Copyright and courtesy the artist.

(bottom) Installation view of **NICK MAUSS's** *Amorphous Projection*, 2025, reverse-painted glass, mirrored, acrylic, charcoal, and ink on paper, Mylar, organza, and satin devoré, dimensions variable. Copyright the artist. Courtesy 303 Gallery, New York.



that were deemed so offensive, but also understand what exactly made them so offensive. In textiles, I found repositories of ornament, technique, and invention containing a wider and less controlled sense of culture than the hierarchies of visual art. And textiles are bodily, intimate, fragile, perishable in a way that counters the false promise of art's permanence. I started introducing fabric techniques into my work to create contrasts and demand a different sort of attention from the viewer. For example, an early show I curated opened with a purse made out of a silk designed by the painter Raoul Dufy—none of the other works on view had anything to do with Dufy, or with fashion per se, but the purse functioned as a kind of signpost for how to look at the exhibition.

What I find so moving about the way Robertson writes about textiles is the implicit acknowledgement that we all have a particular relationship to them—that relationship is unavoidable, almost like a technique of the body. My mother trained as a seamstress and taught me how to sew. I used to draw fabric patterns as a job. There are all sorts of banal ways in which we all connect with fabric and the affects it holds. When I've written "about" fashion it was not thanks to any particular expertise, but because I wanted to take the work seriously, and I had to invent a way to bring language to it. Similarly, when I use fabric, I start from a place of not having the language for it, but then it becomes a support or develops into an exhibition scenography. In preparation for the 2016–17 exhibition "Designing Dreams: a Celebration of Léon Bakst" at the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco, I looked closely at Ballets Russes dance costumes and realized that much of their patterning had been made by spraying through intricate stencils, which gave them a surprisingly contemporary look. I subsequently stenciled the entire museum and made huge lengths of fabric sprayed with ornaments derived from Bakst's own fabric designs. Recently, I've become more deeply involved in fashion history (one day I would love to teach a history of modern art from the pages of *Vogue*) because it branches into art and performance histories in such unexpected ways.

Your engagement with the practices of others has become a core part of your own artistic methodology. Has the way that you think about research or curating changed over time? Do you have a sense of how these histories flow into the tactile areas of your own artmaking?

To teach art history from the pages of *Vogue* is simply to use another frame and, in doing so, show how arbitrary the standard frame is. I try to flip, as you say, what is intrinsic and what is extrinsic. When I began making work, I was very concerned with acknowledging, if not foregrounding, how what I make exists in relation to other artists and histories. Not on the level of reference, but more so in that every artist is tethered—and indebted—to so many strands, and has to invent their own genealogy. That is the space into which I invite the viewer, along with other artists and their works. I've found different ways to keep this process constantly active, and changing, and sometimes it becomes very material, at other times it remains immaterial, perhaps "just" producing new knowledge, or a new reading. The risk is that my authorship becomes subsumed, but what I like the most is

when there is a simultaneously active and receding sense of my presence in relation to the ensembles I construct with other artists, histories, performers, and contexts. If anything has changed, I would say that the performative dimension has intensified, especially in exhibitions I curate, as well as in the work I make. I trust that if I have an intense engagement with a text I'm working on, or a certain process I set in motion as part of an exhibition, that this will ultimately surface in how I arrive at making something, and vice versa. It's not a stable causal relationship, it's a process with its own (anti-formulaic, inefficient) momentum.

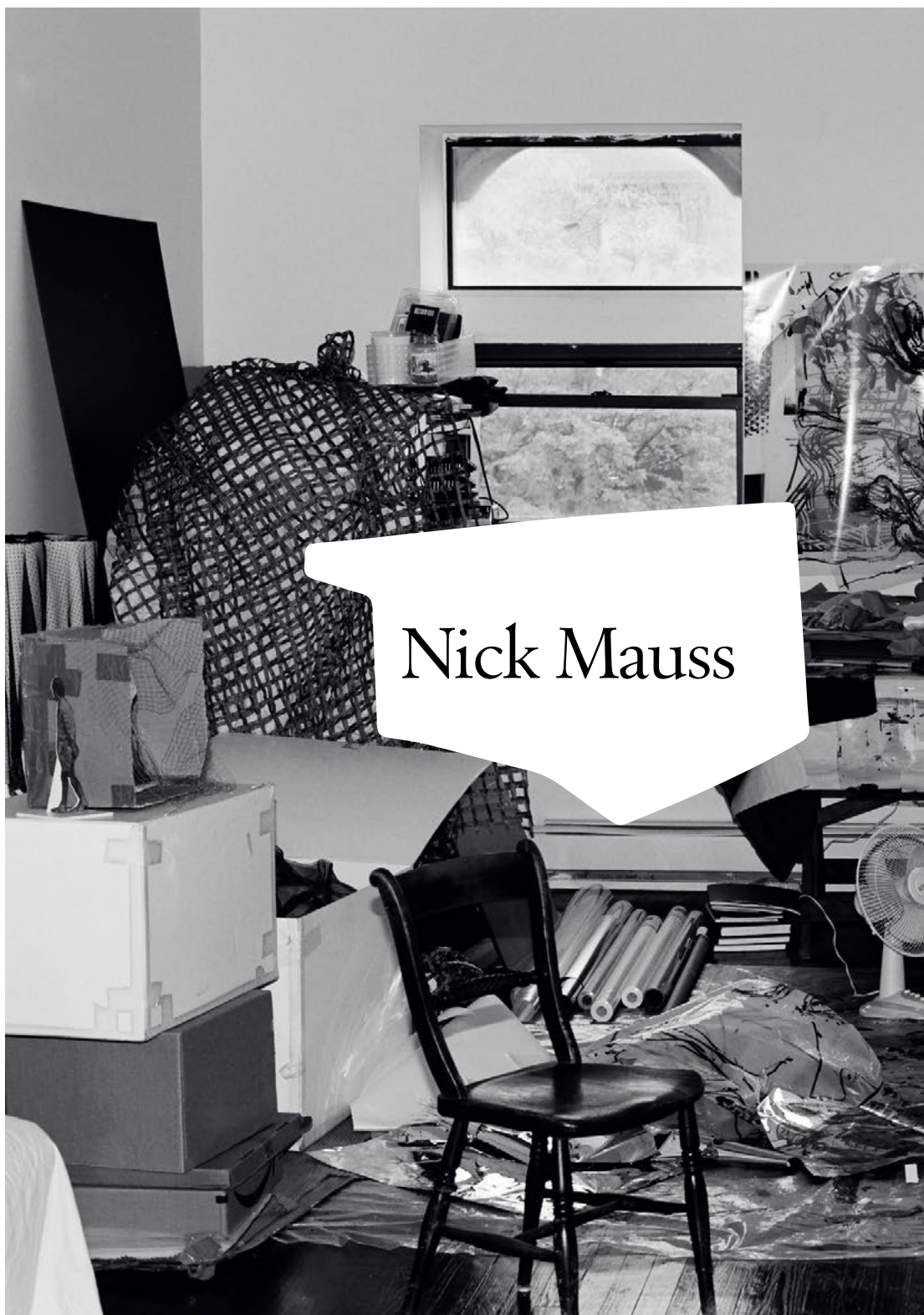
In terms of research, I always knew it was important to look in the wrong places. And doing research, for me, is quite emotional. I think about it as looking very carefully, very closely at something—so closely that it starts to appear as itself again, and all the clichés fall away. Of course, my reading of an object or practice is far from objective, and what I choose to pay attention to is very specific, but I just mean to say that the point of the research, more than uncovering something, is to show a very particular form of respect. In my curatorial projects, I think about space and distance, but I am also thinking about a kind of ethics of display, wondering how an object wants to be shown, how to give it its full complexity, and how a viewer can be led to that place.

Nick Mauss has developed intimate ways of working with materials such as ceramic, textile, and reverse-painted glass to catalyze both cognitive and bodily shifts in the viewer. Integrating histories of performance and staging in his studio practice, he proposes new relations between spectator, performer, artwork, and institution. He has held solo exhibitions across the world, including at Kunsthalle Basel; the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York; and Fundação de Serralves, Porto, among others.

Laura McLean-Ferris is a New York-born writer and curator based in Paris. Her work has appeared in *4Columns*, *Artforum*, *ArtReview*, *Bookforum*, *Frïeze*, *Flash Art International*, and *Mousse*, among other publications. Formerly, she was chief curator at the Swiss Institute, New York, where she organized numerous projects and exhibitions, including "Rosemary Mayer – Ways of Attaching" (2021).

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study



Nick Mauss

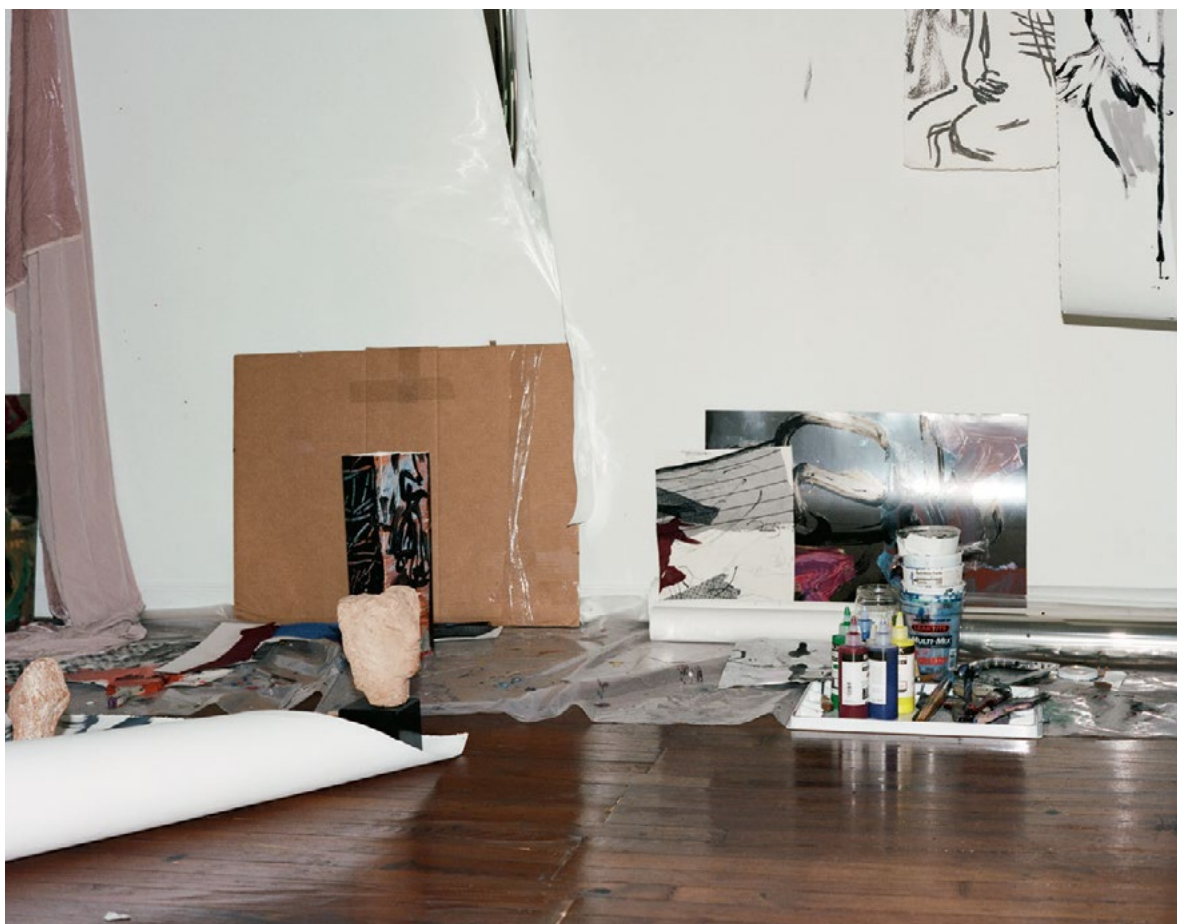
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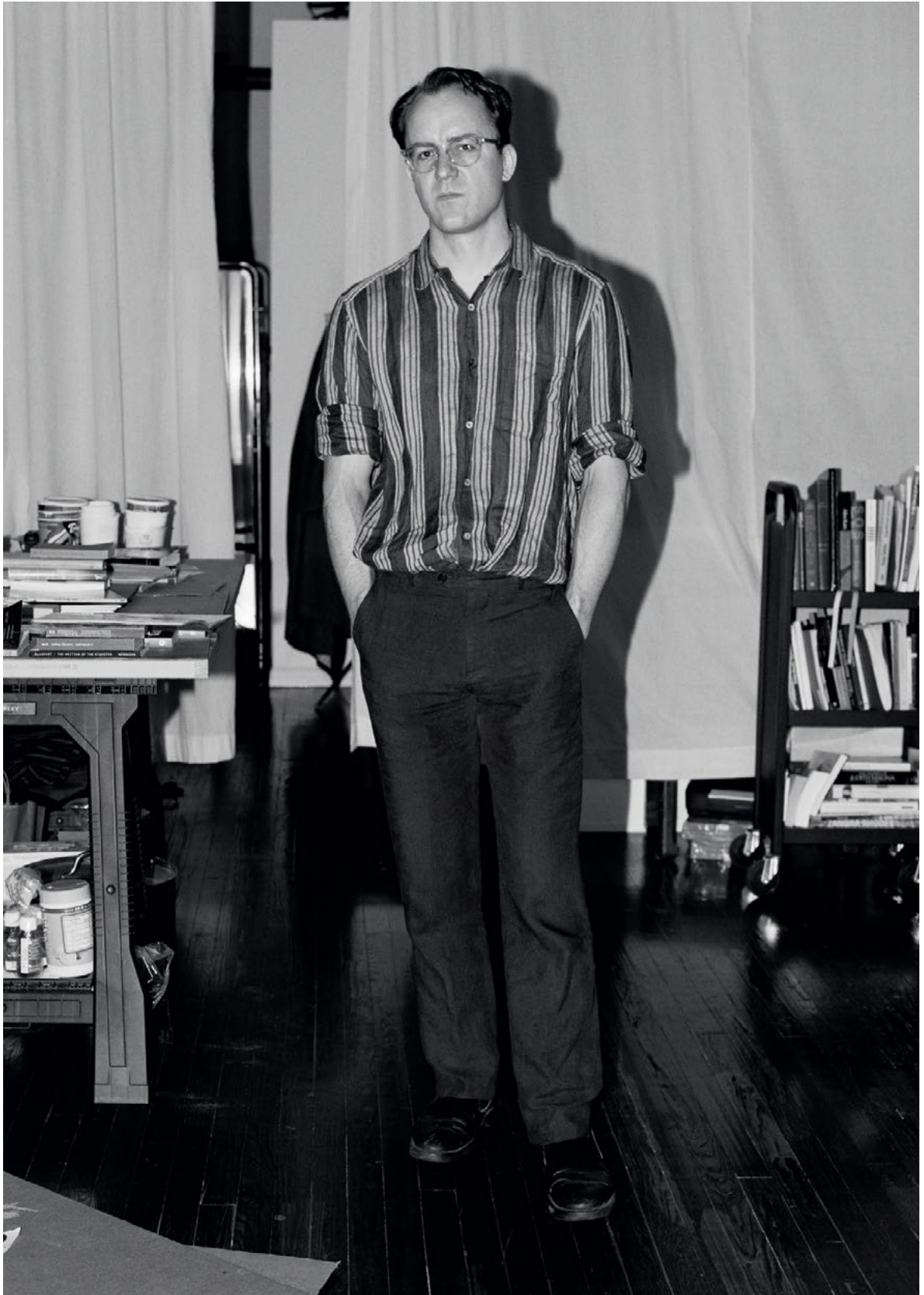
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double

Nick Mauss

Interview by Graham Hamilton

If you look close at the works in *Close-fitting Night*, Nick Mauss's new exhibition at Chantal Crousel in Paris, you see a lot of bodies. Most of the figures are in pairs, either leaning on or holding onto each other, but there might also be a lot of figures sitting, sketching or painting other figures—reflections. In the abundant show, every type of surface is accompanied by every type of mark. Some pieces of ceramic on satin achieve the luminosity of a screen; a moiré effect of the glazing and scoring suggests the backlit crystal of a phone. Don't we also scribble all day on tablets?

Mauss excels at detailing the richness of gestural histories. The multidisciplinary of the works in the show echo the broad reach of his practice, which encompasses curating, writing, sculpture, painting, and performance. In his new book, *Body Language: The Queer Staged Photographs of George Platt Lynes and PaJaMa*, written with the art historian Angela Miller, Mauss explores the legacy of George Platt Lynes, a photographer famous in his lifetime for his celebrity and fashion work, and known today for his queer nudes. Complicating the various flattenings of Platt Lynes' artistic output, Mauss likewise elaborates on a historical scene, pre-Stonewall queer culture whose ideas and expectations about identity and expression

were different from how we might sometimes conceive of them today.

While installing *Close-fitting Night*, his first solo show with the gallery, Mauss was gracious enough to answer some questions about all these things. G.H.

Question We've met before, at a dinner party at Matthew Lutz-Kinoy's studio. You recommended I go see Trajal Harrell's "*Köln Concert*," which I think was premiering in Paris. I did, I loved it. I cried. It began a relationship I have with Trajal's work where I try to go see it whenever and wherever I can. He's wonderful. This was just a friendly recommendation I'm sure, but it really gave me something. How much does your research practice have to do with pedagogy?

Answer Of course, I remember that evening, was that last fall? I'd recently arrived in Paris and was taking in as much of the Festival d'Automne as I could—you asked me if I'd seen anything good. And like you now, I try to see Trajal whenever I can, ever since I first saw his "*In the Mood for Frankie*" performed late at night at MoMA in a corridor next to the escalators in 2016. It was so unlike anything I had seen. He'd deliberately selected an awkward space, a strange hour to be in the museum, a very intimate audience, and together with Thibault Lac and Ondrej Vidlar, he created this incredibly emotional theater out of almost nothing: some

improvised gowns, a little water, music. Since then, I was lucky enough to participate in an exhibition with Trajal at Museum Ludwig where he premiered the "*Köln Concert*" as a solo work, which transformed into something else over the years, so what you saw in Paris was the ensemble version. I'm glad to hear that you were so moved by his work, by how much he gives, and I think your question is about generosity. I always strain against the term research because it implies a kind of separateness. We're all looking for things, we all have our distinct methods. I love working with other artists—collaboratively and in educational situations—but I don't assume that I have anything to teach. The best teachers I had drew me out of myself and pointed me towards practices that could potentially create an opening or a rupture for me.

Q I remember seeing your show *Transmissions* in 2018 at the Whitney Museum, but missing the performance. The whole thing felt a bit OFF, vacated. I was disappointed, I had missed it, something about the exhibit was and would remain incomplete to me. I am interested in how art works—especially performative ones, but also sculpture—are not always ON. What do you think of as the difference between art and performance art?

A That exhibition was built around the presence and

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absence of the performers, so in a way I like your response, that feeling of coming too late. I don't know if you noticed, but I included the poster for Sturtevant's *Rêlache* (1967), which conjures the earlier instance of Picabia/Satie's canceled 1924 ballet. I intentionally wanted there to be an "on"/"off" because we've

become so used to everything, including performance, being permanently "on," so there is no more sense of labor; everything is just available to us all the time, but perhaps the sense of vacancy that you mention could suggest how artworks also perform, viewers perform...

All the photographs, paintings, sculptures in *Transmissions* were the index of performances and spectatorial experiences we can no longer reconstruct. The movement sequences the dancers performed were created collaboratively in response to these artworks and documents, so there was a strong, but often almost



Nick Mauss photographed in Paris by *Mark Peckmezian*.

subliminal relation between everything in the space, particularly between the still and animated languages of pose, the behavior of the audience. When I was working on *Transmissions* I learned that Shirley Clarke, the director who made *Portrait of Jason*, had also made dance films in the 1950s (weirdly enough, there's really not that much moving image documentation of dance before the 1960s, most of what we have is photographs and dance criticism). Clarke said something so incredible: "Dance is what happens between the poses." And we used that as a way to take disparate images—paintings, sculptures, photographs—and bind them together through various dance idioms. Later I learned that a similar collage-to-movement technique was used by many of the Judson choreographers. For me the whole point of the exhibition was to level a distinction between art histories and performance histories, to show them as enmeshed, to take art objects from the Whitney's storage and re-situate them in the performance context that was intrinsic to them, even though it had been repressed by "official" art history.

Q Is there a difference between "your work" and the work you do organizing, curating, or writing about other people's work? I would imagine that you wouldn't separate the two.

A You're right, I don't want to separate, or tidy up what I do, it would feel like a justification.

I want to protect this space where I can follow the work as it happens, as it goes in and out of focus. This can cause problems for me, and I'm sure people would prefer a more medium-specific, dutiful practice. But so many others have given me license to fold multiple, even contradictory roles into an expansive idea of what it means to be an artist—Renee Greene, Cosima von Bonin, Louise Lawler, Ian White, Fred Wilson, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster... This might come back to your earlier question about pedagogy, but a lot of what I'm doing is almost a form of learning in public that carries new knowledge with it, at least I hope so. No one's work exists in a vacuum, and it's important to me, this insistent uncertainty about where my work ends and the work of another begins, anything else feels disingenuous.

Q I find drawing difficult. Honestly, I find it difficult in whatever medium I'm working in not to imagine a disapproving audience. Drawing is especially like this for me, because it feels so much like visualizing or externalizing thinking. Is drawing performative? Or what's performative about drawing?

A The image of a disapproving audience monitoring you as you work makes me think of an Ad Reinhardt cartoon—do you find that it animates what you do? Somehow I can read drawings very directly. I think it's their haptic dimension that transmits feeling, hesitation, an element of the unconscious, no matter

how controlled they are. My gateway drug was Warhol. When I started looking at his commercial drawings I felt like I could understand what he was doing, where he came from. Your question about the performativity of drawing is beautiful, and it certainly applies to him: i.e. the blotted line technique he developed to interfere with the elegance of his own hand. There was another important moment of discovery for me, not unrelated to Warhol, when I first saw Joseph Albers' photo collages—portraits of the same person, taken at intervals during a single sitting and then pasted on the same board, so the only thing that really makes it collage is the element of time creating difference.

I discovered Watteau's drawings shortly after, and these often feature the same head or hand in different dispositions on a single sheet, sometimes there's a little dog or a study of drapery thrown in that may have come much later. That's when I realized I could use time to compose a drawing, to alienate myself in this process by making multiple drawings on the same plane over time, to do something like Sherrie Levine's "*First Statement*," a kind of gentle interaction of all these texts and citations, with the sense that they are both familiar, latent, and utterly new.

Q Your use of mirrors as surfaces seems like a way to insinuate the viewer into the work, to remind them of their involvement—in art, in looking,





in being present. When and how did that begin for you? What's it like working so much in your own reflection?

A I've worked with reactive image supports for a long time, surfaces that incite some kind of awareness of the act of "regarding" on the part of the viewer, but I first made works on glass in 2014 when I was invited to participate in the Florine Stettheimer survey at the Lenbachhaus in Munich by curators Karin Althaus and Matthias Mühling. Stettheimer is a key figure for me, but I wasn't sure how I wanted to be present in a historical survey of an artist who means so much to me; I felt that I had

to find a way to address what happens in her work, to spatialize it. Something we haven't talked about is my tendency to lean very heavily into the kinds of aesthetics and techniques that might be decried as "decorative"—gravitating towards and even prioritizing the decorative arts has been a way for me to undermine certain rigidities, and this work comes out of a particular lineage of icon painting that was important to the German Expressionists but eventually found another application in Art Deco. You're absolutely right that this work is about the viewer, and the space of viewing collapsing into the work. It also

comes out of the way mirrors are deployed in the history of painting and cinema—you know, angry proclamations written in lipstick on a mirror, mirrors as messengers of suspense and oblique subtext. But to clarify, while I'm painting I'm not painting on mirrored glass, I don't have to confront my own reflection, luckily. I'm working on transparent glass that is mirrored later on in the process. This means that I have to paint in reverse, and also reverse color layers because I'm building up towards the underside of the glass, so to speak, because the painting is not *on* the mirror, but *inside* of it.

Q Where and when does the mirroring happen? I find it so nice how mirrors and photography are linked through the chemical silver nitrate, which was originally used in both processes.

A I work with a glass artisan here in Paris who does all the mirroring. He creates unexpected effects with the silver nitrate, mysterious deposits and flares that remind me very much of photographic processes. A lot of my work happens in these half-invented processes that allude to image processing or “developing”, overexposing, or after-image—even my approach to ceramics has a photographic dimension. The question I keep returning to is: where does the image exist?

Q You said this amazing thing in your talk with Angela Miller at the Whitney about your new book *Body Language*, dispelling the notion that “aesthetic experience is connected to sexual object choice.” Can you elaborate on that? What is aesthetic experience outside of a type of libidinal desire or orientation, or desire in general?

A Amazing that you picked up on that! I did not mean to deny the erotic dimension of aesthetic experience. If anything, I think the core of my work has to do with what Susan Sontag termed “the erotics of art.” What I was responding to was how bizarre it is that there can be a category such as the “homoerotic” that might predetermine a viewing audience - I wanted to state that it’s a

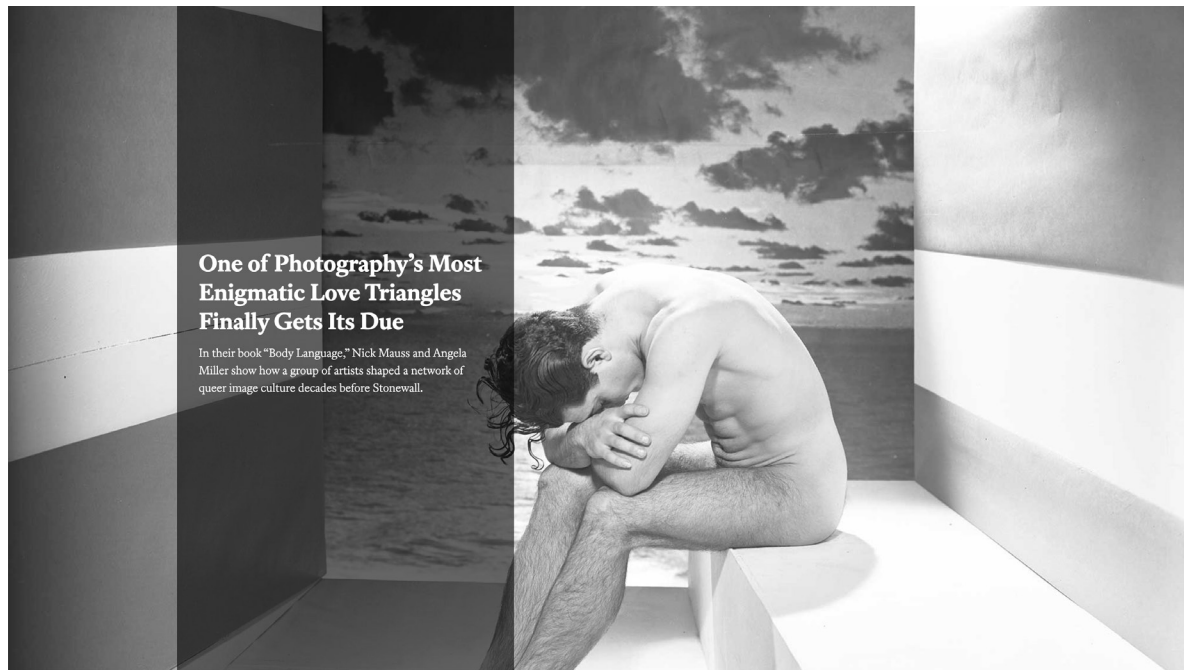
historically specific term that may no longer be useful with regard to a broader conception of art. This became obvious to me when I visited the collections of the Kinsey Institute, a sex research institute in Bloomington, Indiana founded in 1947 that has a wild art collection including works by Kenneth Anger, Jack Smith, pictures of Nijinsky and many other documents that don’t necessarily represent sex acts. I was reminded that everything has erotic potential, including the dynamics of fascination, perversion, and curiosity that are so crucial to aesthetic experience.

Q I was speaking with a friend and she suggested that interdisciplinary practices are particularly occupied with Modernism. How do you understand our continued involvement with Modernism, living and working there? Is it an object, or...?

A Henrik Olesen once told me I was a truly postmodern artist, which I didn’t fully understand, as I don’t know how any of us can live outside of our historic moment. I was educated in a theoretical structure that was very post-1960s, so I turned to modernism as a way to uncover what had come before, and to steer against the dogmas I was being immersed in—I looked for tools in earlier practices and ways of being. Modernism is where so many of our assumptions and prohibitions originate, that’s why I think I keep returning to it. In an exhibition like *Transmissions*, as well as

in others, I have tried to show modernism as intrinsically queer, ornamental, and problematic. More recently my view of modernism—or I should say “modernisms”—has been informed by the work of Tirza T. Latimer, whose incredible book *Eccentric Modernisms* is vitally eye-opening, arguing for modernisms that are not built on notions of purity or orthodoxy.

aperture



Nick Mauss and Angela Miller's book *Body Language: The Queer Staged Photographs of George Platt Lynes and PaJaMa* (2023) brings new critical discourse to representations of queerness in American modernism. Part of a series called "Defining Moments in Photography," the book contains two richly illustrated essays with an introduction by Anthony W. Lee. Mauss appraises the wide-ranging practice of George Platt Lynes, a photographer who is known (if at all) primarily for his male nudes from the 1930s and '40s. Miller writes about the collaborative photographs of Paul Cadmus, Jared French, and Margaret Hoening French, who worked contemporaneously to Lynes under the moniker PaJaMa, a combination of their first names. Both essays explore the social roles these images played when circulated among a coterie of queer artists as well as their relationship to mass media, and how they not only informed other artworks made by their participants but also reflected a network of queer culture in America between the two world wars.

Angela Miller's essay, "PaJaMa Drama," is the first published piece of in-depth scholarly writing about the work of this landmark queer photography collaborative. PaJaMa made highly staged figurative photographs on the beach in queer havens such as Fire Island and Provincetown, Massachusetts; in the apartments of friends in New York's Greenwich Village; and later on the shores of Nantucket.

Matthew Leifheit
One of Photography's Most Enigmatic Love Triangles Finally Gets Its Due
aperture, June 18, 2024.
<https://urlr.me/KZkVyW>

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Their collaboration started in 1937, and they produced thousands of negatives of staged tableaux, working as a formal collective through 1955, though they informally photographed each other for the rest of their lives, into the 1980s. The pictures were not created for exhibition but were instead “gift images” circulated among friends, sent in letters, and handed out at dinner parties. They were also used as reference images for paintings. Significantly, the label PaJaMa was applied only to the collaborative images by Cadmus, the most famous artist of the trio, when the pictures were first exhibited in the 1970s. Both Margaret and Jared hated the name.



Jared, Margaret, and Paul (in shadow, taking photograph), Nantucket, 1946
Courtesy DC Moore Gallery, New York

The pictures dramatize the complex dynamics between the collaborators. Paul Cadmus and Jared French had been deeply involved romantically for eight years before Jared married Margaret French in 1937, and they remained so afterward. Margaret came from a moneyed New Jersey family; she was devoted to Jared and supported him financially. Margaret and Paul had a “loving if guarded” friendship, Miller writes, because they were both in love with Jared. Today, we might describe this as polyamory, but within PaJaMa’s network of friends and lovers, a kind of freedom existed in the lack of labels and sexual categories, in the unnamed nature of things.

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For Miller, the photographs, which are often foreboding in their sense of light and always statuesque in composition, provided still points of mooring amid their tempestuous and fluid personal lives. She attributes the recurring motif of a doubled, shadowed self in the photographs to Jared French's interest in Jungian archetypes and the dual sides of anima and animus. Miller also argues that the members of PaJaMa were influenced by the aesthetics of 1940s Hollywood film noir and, in particular, melodrama. Reading Miller's list of citations shows the new ground she is tilling. She cites auction catalogs, newspaper reviews of the relatively small number of exhibitions of PaJaMa's work, and websites, in addition to the extensive correspondence and personal papers that Cadmus and the Frenches left to Yale University's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library and the Smithsonian American Art Museum.



George Platt Lynes, Untitled self-portrait collage, ca. 1935
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York © Estate of George Platt Lynes

Matthew Leifheit
One of Photography's Most Enigmatic Love Triangles Finally Gets Its Due
aperture, June 18, 2024.
<https://urlr.me/KZkVyW>

Nick Mauss is a visual artist and writer whose 2018 exhibition *Transmissions* at the Whitney Museum in New York featured photographs by Lynes and PaJaMa. In his essay, “The Uses of Photographs,” he discusses the multiple ways that George Platt Lynes’s photographs circulated, both publicly and privately. He maps the intertwined nature of Lynes’s practices as a portraitist, a photographer of fashion and dance, and an enthusiastic proponent of the male nude. Mauss’s research provides a counterpoint to the publications released by Twelvvetrees Press between 1981 and 1994 that introduced Lynes’s work to a broad audience, but which silo his artistic production into three separate artistic genres. But Mauss’s research goes beyond these sources, examining the staggering wealth of archival material Lynes left behind in the form of correspondence, personal scrapbooks, and printed ephemera, making connections that are unique to a visual artist’s sensibility. To connect the dots, he also includes the work Lynes did not want to leave behind—his fashion photographs, which he begrudgingly made for a living and tried to destroy by burning the negatives before his death. Thankfully for Mauss, they had circulated widely in print and could not be erased.

Within PaJaMa’s network of friends and lovers, a kind of freedom existed in the lack of labels and sexual categories, in the unnamed nature of things.

Mauss tracked down objects and models across different genres of Lynes’s artistic output, showing not only their interconnectedness but also how they fed into and fueled one another. In one example, he shows the evolution of a photograph within Lynes’s world. For a swimsuit advertisement shot in 1937, Lynes built a set that looks like a cabana, with a mural-size photograph of a beachscape as backdrop. The image captures a stiff composition of three men staring at a woman in a bathing suit. It has long been suspected that Lynes reused commercial sets after-hours for his erotic work, and Mauss provides evidence in the form of one of Lynes’s better-known photographs titled *Demus*, also from 1937, in which a dejected-looking nude man cradles his head in the same cabana against the same seascape. Here, Mauss writes, the setting has been transformed to evoke a well-known 1836 painting by Jean-Hippolyte Flandrin, whose figure of another “sad young man” became “an archetypal cipher for the homosexual’s isolation from society.”

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George Platt Lynes, *Nicholas Magallanes and Tanaquil Le Clerq in Jones Beach*, 1950
Jerome Robbins Dance Division, New York Public Library © Estate of George Platt Lynes



George Platt Lynes, *Swimsuit advertisement with notes for retouching*, ca. 1937
Courtesy Keith de Lellis Gallery © Estate of George Platt Lynes

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Building on this revelation, Mauss identifies one of the male models in the fashion advertisement as the American ballet dancer Nicholas Magallanes, one of Lynes's frequent subjects and a charter member of the New York City Ballet. A 1950 photograph Lynes made for George Balanchine and Jerome Robbins's ballet *Jones Beach* uses a similar otherworldly set of a beach and features Magallanes cradling the dancer Tanaquil Le Clercq, whose pose is strikingly akin to that of the model in *Demus*. Finally, Mauss links this dance image to a spectacular male nude that Lynes photographed on the same set as the *Jones Beach* image, perhaps on the same day, in which a male model strikes this same pose but is turned upside down and rotated toward the camera in what Mauss describes as "a flagrant consecration of the rectum."

Earlier in his text, Mauss asks: "Could Lynes's work be seen as a new form that fused commercial imaging with vanguard aesthetics, and opened up the performative potential of the photographer's studio? Would it not be more accurate to call Lynes an artist who used a camera rather than labeling him a studio photographer?" Though photographers may bristle at the second question, it identifies Lynes's work as an important antecedent to the conceptual photography that prevailed at a much later period in the 1980s. As Miller writes in her essay on PaJaMa, the staging of scenes for the camera "anticipated the postmodern turn toward artists who used photography as an instrument of self-performance and role-playing." In the staged photographs of PaJaMa, one begins to see a precursor to the far-off stares of motionless figures in Gregory Crewdson's tableaux or, as Miller notes, artists of the Pictures Generation, including Cindy Sherman.



James Ogilvie, Portrait of George Platt Lynes in his studio, ca. 1940
Princeton University Art Museum

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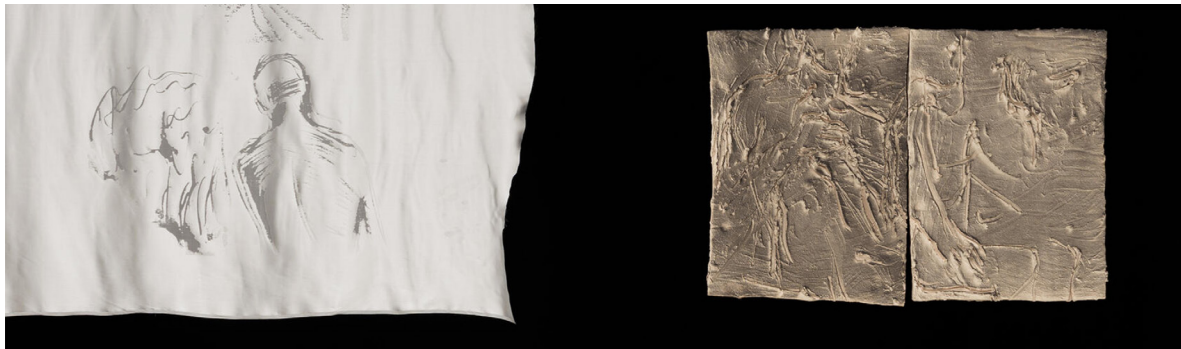
Body Language is part of a resurgence of interest in these mid-twentieth-century queer photographers, beginning in 2019 with two concurrent shows about queer modernism in New York: *Lincoln Kirstein's Modern* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and *The Young and Evil*, curated by Jarrett Earnest at David Zwirner Gallery. Since then, the gay photography historian Allen Ellenzweig has published an extensive biography of Lynes, *The Daring Eye* (2021), and the art director Sam Shahid has released a documentary about Lynes titled *Hidden Master: The Legacy of George Platt Lynes* (2024). Artists have also depicted similar themes of love and desire, particularly through staged photography. These projects include Ian Lewandowski's intricate and luminous contact prints of queer communities in conversation with vintage prints by PaJaMa and Lynes and the recent exhibition *Communion* at Brick Aox Gallery in Brooklyn of photographs by the self-taught photographer Kris Mendoza, who describes sharing a "spiritual connection" with PaJaMa.

The concept of a "gift image"—an artwork that has no immediate purpose other than to act as an expression of friendship or shared queerness—is particularly important to consider now, in a time when art and arts education have become over-professionalized. Mauss considers the function of gift images to be "not unlike love letters, or the circulation of painted portrait miniatures among friends, lovers, and family members in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England and the United States, or the exchange of painted fans inscribed with verse between nineteenth-century painters, poets, and their muses." Artists should be trading more inscribed fans; as something to be shared among artists, this book shows the potential of such an exchange. Lynes, the authors of *Body Language* note, was devoted to creating a "future history of art"—a line that is also used as the book's epigraph. In a sense a gift image itself, *Body Language* provides a fascinating, deeply researched background for the enigmatic works these queer artists left behind, helping to illuminate their contributions for generations to come.

FRIEZE

The Fractured and Dancing Bodies of Nick Mauss

The show at Galerie Chantal Crousel in Paris is filled with motifs of choreographed movement and figures created from slashed lines



Bodies caught mid-choreographed movement, forms in absence, figuration emerging from an accumulation of slashed lines: these are the core motifs of Nick Mauss's debut solo show at Galerie Chantal Crousel, which explores the interaction between lightness and density through variegated actions of daubing, cutting and burning in ceramic, fabric and glass.

The title of the show, 'Close-Fitting Night', recalls the artist's past presentations drawing on the works and lives of costume designers for Paris's famous Ballets Russes in the early 20th century, including Léon Bakst and Christian Bérard. Mauss has sought to reclaim both from historical obscurity over the last decade in a series of exhibitions, including 'Portraits d'Intérieurs' in 2014 at the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco. The influence of modernist ballet design can be found here, too, in new pieces such as *Breath Caught* (2024). This work contains thick black velvet that absorbs light like theatrical curtains, with swatches of silver satin hung over it.



Nick Mauss, *Untitled*, 2019, ink, crayon and gouache on paper, 42 × 59 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris; photograph: Jiayun Deng

The satin is burn-out printed using sodium hydrogen sulphate to create a network of slashes and scribbles that suggest human bodies. The corrosive has eaten away the strands of fabric, leaving a fine mesh. The contrast of the thinned lines in the satin against the dense backing material gives the ghostly sensation of dancers twisting in bright light across a dark backdrop. In *A Line that May be Cut* (2024), Mauss also mounts on the fabric two stoneware ceramic tiles coated in manganese oxide; set against the velvet, the tiles have an uncanny valley aspect to them, as though they are gleaming under UV light.



Nick Mauss, *Held*, 2024, stoneware and terracotta, 2.4 × 1.3 m. Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris; photograph: Jiayun Deng



Nick Mauss, *Misremembered*, 2024, reverse-painted glass, mirrored, 2.2
x 2.7 m. Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris;
photograph: Jiayun Deng

The ten ceramic works in the show also echo the illustration style employed by the Ballet Russes, with erratic lines cut into the clay or drawn on with wax. These wall-mounted tile works emphasize the moving body, its angles and parts as it is thrown from one stance to the next, describing the human form lost within itself through vigorous motion. This is exemplified in *Untitled* (2024), where Mauss has drawn in wax on the cut and warped surfaces of the tiles before they were glazed and fired, leaving raw lines in the black stoneware glaze.

This figuration of accumulating lines is continued in the four mirrored works in the show, including *Misremembered* (2024), which each comprise back-painted glass tiles adhered with reflective film. Slashed with black scribbles and patches of smudged brown and blue paint, these works have the look of large, tarnished mirrors from an old Parisian brasserie. The mirrored tiles are warped and have different concave and convex aspects. The reflections of visitors who stop to take their photo in them appear discordant, their bodies stretched out of recognizable proportion and form, the mirrors rendering them malleable material to be cut up and reconstituted in motion..

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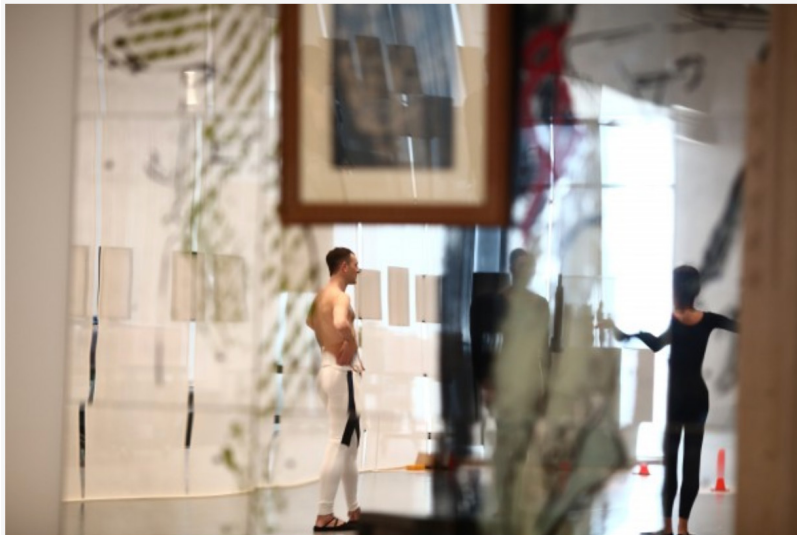
The foundations of this exhibition rest in subtraction, reversion and the creation of form from what is removed from an object. The work here develops from the artist's experimentations with wax-resist watercolour, as seen in *Split Time* and *Film* (both 2023). These beginnings in blind drawing speak of the human body as a spatial void, presented as something in matter removed or hacked out of clay and glass. 'Close-Fitting Night' demonstrates Mauss's studied intimacy not only with the myriad materials of the works but with the quiet figures he depicts, who go about their choreographed motions seemingly unaware they are being observed. It is an intimacy of chance, absence, askance looks and sharp cuts in repetition.

Andrew Hodgson
The Fractured and Dancing Bodies of Nick Mauss
Frieze, May 20, 2024.
<https://urlr.me/Gkhyp>

MAY

The Practice of Transmissions: conversation with Nick Mauss

— Helmut Draxler & Megan Francis Sullivan



Dancers Brandon Collwes, Quenton Stuckey, and Christina Bermudez rehearsing in "Transmissions," Whitney Museum of American Art, 2018

This conversation took place in April 2021 in the Georgen-Parochial-Friedhof Cemetery in the Mitte neighbourhood of Berlin.

Helmut Draxler: Here we are in the cemetery talking about afterlife. That's what it is all about. So, when we were listening to the presentations of your book *Transmissions* you recently gave online at After 8 Books in Paris and at the Public Library in New York, I got curious about some sort of surplus. Because these presentations were strongly content-related, almost exclusively at least as far as I heard—and they were extremely interesting in being so, namely in talking about dance, queer subcultures and their influence on high modernism. At the same time, it made me miss something. I wondered in which terms you would like to describe or to reflect yourself and your work not only on the content level, but more on the practical and artistic level. What does your own artistic practice mean in relation to this content, and in which tradition would you locate it? Or, maybe more precisely, how do you see your own studio practice in relationship to the more curatorial projects?

Nick Mauss: It's interesting to be asked about locating this in a tradition.

I think it started for me with the impulse to chart genealogies that I could work with productively as an artist, because I was frustrated by received histories that seemed lacking, or biased, or repressive. So I was trying to establish a ground to work against, but I realized that this ground would always be shifting and expanding. This genealogical idea became a way to push against existing methodologies that also informed the kind of work I was making, and at a certain point I realized that this would also have to *be* the work.

You're right, the presentations I've given around "Transmissions" have been very content-driven, and in a way this is unintentionally misleading, because it suggests that I work toward an already-defined thematic, when really the opposite is the case. And if I were to speak about my studio practice, it would never be foregrounded by content, I would talk about space and the indirection of influence, poetics, how images are made. But "Transmissions" was unique in terms of other exhibitions because it surfaced such an excess of cultural information that was new to me that also cohered into histories that most people have been unaware of, so I dwelt on this aspect, rather than bringing it back to the artistic gesture, as your question does. At the end of the day, the historical bracket that became the way people could enter the exhibition was secondary to me. Or, to be more precise, it was a diversionary tactic, because "Transmissions" both was and was not an examination of a certain idea of the performing body in a specific historical place and time. It was primarily about developing a method of operating artistically and generating structures and frameworks.

HD: For me, this question of practice gets more and more interesting, because it seems obvious that we do not live in a formalist world anymore, but in one, which is thoroughly content-driven. Around your show at Kunsthalle Basel, for example, Megan and I were having a discussion with a curator of another show at the Museum für Gegenwartskunst, who was arguing exclusively on a content level, and thus defending his show as the more "political" one. I, however, defended your show in political terms, because it was formally so interesting, opening up a space that could be experienced in many different ways, where one could find out things one did not know already in advance.

NM: The show in Basel was a turn away from an apparently central subject, deliberately placing greater emphasis on this method I had developed, on the multiple interacting ideas and tensions. Presenting these very different coordinates that overlap in ways that are not immediately apparent, and a much more orchestrated passage through the Kunsthalle spaces that allows you to think and rethink how all the works are operating and what they're doing.

HD: Your shows at the Whitney Museum and Kunsthalle Basel were very different in a way, but had similar elements in the way they addressed aspects of exhibition design and educational elements or simply a rhythmic structure—how to walk through the exhibition. In comparison, the exhibit in the Museum für Gegenwartskunst was focused on singular artworks, which, despite being pure and good examples of political art, had to carry the burden of all content, whereas your show at the Kunsthalle was about relating works and materials, a constant instigation to move around in the exhibition and to generate one’s own content as a viewer. As a concrete example, I would name your own “threshold” pieces you had placed in the last room, which were works in their own right, but at the same time they functioned as displays or intersections between other works or elements in the show. These indicate a specific interest in the connection—another sort of transmission—of different spheres on the very practical level.

NM: This is very helpful, as people tend to want to break the work apart into distinct functions, where *this* is the curatorial operation and then *that* is the studio work, as if they are not engaged with each other. Of course, as you said, everything flows back and forth, and often in ways that I can’t understand immediately. For example, even if this way of working that I was able to develop through “Transmissions” is what I hold on to, I couldn’t have arrived at this method independent of the material I was exhibiting, which delineated a certain nexus of art history, performance history, and queer social history that I had already been reaching toward in my previous work. So, the things I had been looking at, working around, the questions that had been irritating me, led me to this particular synthesis, and then the material and affective dimension of the artworks and documents led me to think about how they needed to be presented and situated, which led again to new forms of presentation, generated new forms of working.

In terms of this sense of display, I’ve always been drawn to the fantastic history of its commercial and vanguard applications throughout the twentieth century, but also to older forms, such as festival architecture and so on, contingent ways of defining spaces and events that intervene in, or temporarily disrupt, what is customary. Even the jobs I’ve had dressing department store windows come into play, as I learned only later that this line of work in and of itself, at least in New York, has a particular history as a training ground for artists, and as a frame for a very impure presentation of art and its derivations. The overt gesture of display, of showing, has always featured in my work in some way. Initially, this allowed me to suggest multiple pathways through an exhibition, to indicate certain conditions of viewership, such as, if you want to see this you will have to peer over something, or look at this surface obliquely—you have to move in some way.

That manipulation of the space as well as the viewer's movement through it was my way of extending the *Spielraum* of my work, but also to conflate my own status as "producer" with that of "viewer." And it was also the introduction of an element that might not read as art, or that would invite uncertainty as to the function of the various elements in the show. I was very attuned, in looking at other exhibitions, to things like: What are the framing devices? What are the ways in which the work can actually appear to have more of a spark? Or something like that, and I'm not just talking about work that is overlooked, but even work that is highly visible is often not really seen—it's misapprehended. I became very interested in the things you can do to draw the work out or make it legible with new eyes.

Megan Francis Sullivan: The term "framing" is rather present to me, since I've been working with Hannes Loichinger on a German translation of Craig Owens' text "From Work to Frame." The social construction of art is central to his text, which he outlines in relation to artworks and practices, for instance, of Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren, Michael Asher, Hans Haacke, and Louise Lawler, all of whom came to be associated with institutional critique. You went to Cooper Union in the late nineties, a few years after I did. The general milieu included teachers like Hans Haacke, Doug Ashford and Julie Ault, Laura Cottingham, etc. Art Club 2000 was maybe still active. Basically, studio practice was not something taken for granted. In Basel I also had to think of the recent '90s show at mumok in Vienna, where the exhibition architecture by Ken Saylor emphasized the "framing" of walls and display in relation to artworks, reflected on its theme of institutional critique. As just discussed, your work operates with various levels of framing and viewing, as if that were—I like how you just said that—a method, creating a method. You don't do a show and say, "Curated by Nick Mauss." It is your work. The viewers are confronted with this discomfort in a way. "Is this a show curated by Nick Mauss?" Maybe you could say something about that. Do you work also with this discomfort?

NM: That's great. To subtitle an exhibition as "curated by" would fall back on roles that are already naturalized. I don't think of myself as a curator, or a writer, or whatever. I'm an artist, not a tourist in these other disciplines, which is ultimately how the artist-curator is perceived and made harmless. My way of canceling this hobby-like notion is by fully claiming responsibility for the exhibition as a form of (my) work, and I think that has produced discomfort, or, I hope, productive confusion for some viewers, perhaps even for some artists. The terms that are readily available to an institution, such as "project," or even worse, "artist's choice," I had to reject, insisting, for example, that the Whitney Museum communicate "Transmissions" as *my* exhibition, since that would pose some interesting questions. At Kunsthalle Basel they also felt that the exhibition would have to be announced as "curated by" me so that people would know who did this and why the institution was doing it. My response was, "Well, that's precisely why we shouldn't do it," because then everything is resolved, all the roles and hierarchies are in place, nothing is questioned.

Wouldn't it be much better if a visitor comes in and, even for an instant, has a problem with it or a question?

But you're right, it's not something that is ever addressed in the reception—instead, the work is pulled back into the existing rubric, rather than taken on its own terms, because it's just more comfortable. Again, I think it's more important to claim it as my exhibition in order to make the distinction from something like these gestures where a museum lets an artist make eccentric choices or something like that. Instead to show that this is a very deliberate undertaking with some urgency ... inside, not ancillary. Sometimes there is discomfort, certainly when I say no to pre-coined terms like “artist-curator,” “research-based,” and so on because I'm trying to force new terms of engagement ...

MFS: Can I take out ... I just by chance saw a bit from Craig Owens' text who sites Greg Owens ... Can I read something as a context?

NM: Yes. Sure, please.

MFS: Okay. Greg Owens quoting Hans Haacke: “An unequivocal acknowledgement might endanger the cherished romantic ideas with which most art world participants enter the field, and which still sustain them emotionally today.”^[1] I think that was in reference to a sort of studio-centered practice that was questioned for a while, and maybe actually has returned.

This statement of the collective or “industrial” nature of artistic production is especially interesting in light of Haacke's emphasis on the relationship between capital and the art world. [...] The recent penetration of international investment capital into the art world has resulted in an unprecedented expansion of the art apparatus. As the apparatus expands, so do the number and variety of activities necessary to the production, exhibition, and reception of works of art—art handlers, preparators, artists' representatives, publicists, consultants, accountants, administrators, etc. [...] This multiplication and diversification of “intermediate functions”—intermediate, because they exist in the gap between, or the nonsimultaneity of, production and reception—further alienates artists from their own production; as these functions multiply, they increase both the spatial and temporal distance between artists and their “publics.” At the same time, however, the expansion of the apparatus continually generates new positions from which artists can produce critical work. At least this is what is suggested by the practice of Louise Lawler, who has occupied practically every position within the apparatus except that customarily reserved for the “artist.”^[2]

Yes ... Louise Lawler. For instance, I think you used some image from her on the dancers' costumes. I didn't see that discussed anywhere. Has it been? I think sometimes you have hints in your work that don't get duly addressed.

NM: Louise's presence was very subtle, if not to say imperceptible to most viewers, which seems fitting. The way I involve artists or other protagonists is largely determined by the space they choose to take up within this framework I'm elaborating. And I like that in an exhibition: with so many layers there are these different degrees of visibility. Some aspects are immediate and emphatic and others are camouflaged. So I'm always trying to see where there might be a function or a role that could be used as a pretext for inviting someone to appear in a way that is unexpected, and the dancers' costumes were such a pretext, one that instantly made me think of inviting Louise to be the costume designer. Without a doubt her work has given me great license to think about how an artist can operate within and resignify institutions, which I think has to do with the combination of reverence and irreverence in her work that keeps everyone on their toes. We had a back-and-forth, trying out a number of ideas until we realized that one of the works from her series *Marie + 90*, *Marie + 180*, *Marie + 270* (2010/2021) was already in the museum's collection, so I suggested printing that series of the same close-cropped view of the corset and tutu of Degas' *Little Dancer Aged Fourteen* (ca. 1880) onto the leotards for the male, female, and gender nonbinary performers, where the image would be distorted over the different body shapes. Ultimately, I should note, Louise communicated that she saw this as my work, and was open to letting me use her work ... so there had been a change from the initial invitation to Louise to take on the role of the costume designer to me choosing quite pointedly how I wanted her work to appear within "Transmissions." Louise's work was identified on a wall label, but, again, I think hardly anyone noticed that it was her work printed on the costumes.

MFS: And it's also something from within the institution in which it was being shown ... I like to perceive these maneuvers that you make that also reflect on the frameworks, and to me, that's such a rich element of your work that is both exciting and very specific. It also has a clear relation to considerations emerging from or around institutional critique.

Obviously, it's 2021 so we have a different—I don't know—viewpoint. Institutionally critical gestures don't have to be directly offensive, but can be mixed with other interests or desires, contaminated or *légère*, not adhering to a program. If I were to ever write about your work, I would try to pinpoint it within this trajectory because I haven't encountered a deliberate address of its potential ties or overlaps. It was funny in the "Transmissions" catalog because Scott Rothkopf mentions about negotiations you had as if they might share a naive coincidence with institutional critique. I think he used the word "unintentional." Did you guys ever talk about it?

NM: We never talked directly about critique. I didn't go in there saying, "I want to punch a hole in this institution's canon-formation." I was really lucky in that the museum allowed me to arrive at the exhibition that I wanted to make, without demanding a clear outcome, they gave space to a very experimental procedure. My strategy was to naturalize everything, to act as if it were perfectly normal to exhibit all this highly charged and difficult work, and I think that gave an air of *Selbstverständlichkeit* (evidence) that was reassuring for the institution, but that also set the tone for how I wanted the audience to be addressed. I knew this was going to be marketed in New York as a show about the ballet and I accepted it, knowing that anyone who walked in there would instantly see that it was about all these other things that were more important to me. So I think the tone of Scott's essay speaks about some very tricky negotiations, not only on my part. It didn't really occur to me until the show had opened and I was being interviewed by someone I remembered: "Yes, I went to Cooper Union. This is what I was taught." "There's a reason why I'm doing this in this way. The show may not present itself as institutional critique, but it is." Of course, while I was at Cooper (circa 1998–2003), institutional critique seemed like a boy's club to me, and very orthodox in terms of its relationship to aesthetics, so I didn't want to have too much to do with it. In the present, now it's gone through this weird stylization where people use it *as* an aesthetic.

HD: I think that there are two crucial issues at play here. One refers to what you were addressing now, namely, that if you define or label something as artistic research or institutional critique or artistic curatorial practice, it might help to understand a certain practice, but at the same time it creates a stereotype or even a recipe which takes everything away which made that practice interesting or provocative in the first place. Essentially, it takes away the indeterminate, that decisive aspect which allows us to distinguish between a simple presentation of certain objects, the ballet in this case, and an artistic ambition to explore the intersections of different layers of meaning, representation, or reference. That was the problem with institutional critique, already in the early '90s, then it became clear we are not simply criticizing institutions. On the contrary, institutions represent our life-forms, more or less; they are a kind of framing that only enables us to conceive certain works as practice and they have to be addressed as such.

Theoretically, it also would be interesting to understand this topic of a frame more precisely—that a frame is not the outside limit of an image, an artwork, or a practice that can be transgressed as in the avant-garde tradition. Rather, work and frame constitute each other mutually, and in a certain sense every image or work already constitutes a frame, a mental framework, and the frame becomes the enabling object itself, an object of investigation as well as an object of display. So what is the relation between the image, the object, the work, the practice, the viewpoint, and the frame? And how can these relations be methodologically explored or interpreted?

NM: I had this memorable encounter with a classicist named Deborah Steiner who was also working with dance. She translates and theorizes fragments of ancient texts, so it's a kind of work that is very exact and then highly interpretive because there's so much space in between the material that's available to her, so she has to use her knowledge of the period and its literature and society to try and fill in the blanks. She has to be very inventive. It was so interesting to talk to her. At a certain point, I remember someone else asked, "How can you make these claims about these texts when everything that you do is so speculative and most of the information is gone?" She said, "That's what I do." "That's what I'm known for." That was quite inspiring, the way she acknowledged the liberties she takes in her work, liberties that can't and shouldn't be justified.

And in thinking about method, her approach came back to me in the form of: How can I approach these individual works or figures or texts, and treat them with great care, and also do this work of invention? And how do I maintain the space between them? Because I think that's the space that the viewer enters into, and that's where the work happens.

So to answer your question about framing, I think one of my earliest impressions of this as a mental object was in Babette Mangolte's camerawork for *Jeanne Dielman*, where I could sense that the camera frame had shifted from its "usual" place, where it holds the subject, puts her in her place, and that's the internalized movie we all already know that's created through conventions. But if you shift it even slightly, the attention is drawn to a kind of horror in exactly the same place, and that's a completely different film. What kinds of adjustments can be made and how does that mental object take on a physical or architectural presence?

At the Whitney, what I ended up doing there in addition—I didn't like the museum protocol for how their wall labels address the audience—I said, "Well, I'll write all of my own and I'll sign them, so you won't have to be responsible for them." Because I was trying to say things on the wall labels that they felt somehow threatened by or that they wanted to tone down or simplify. And that was a good solution. I was able to bring my voice into this institutional space in a clear way. The audience didn't care that the labels were too long, digressive, or elliptical; I think they enjoyed them. So it was illuminating to push on some of those spots where the museum said, "That's not how we do it," and to ask, "Well, why not?"

MFS: Yes. Precisely. That is a good example. So these types of negotiations are also part of your method in a way?

NM: Yes. I think it's part of the dialogue, part of getting somewhere. I had support from the curators to go there, ultimately, and I was able to do it. I do think it's part of the method. There was another argument about the George Platt Lynes photograph of this guy's asshole: Should there be a warning label, did I *really* have to hang it right at the entrance? And I said, "What are the rules against this? You have all these modernist photographs of nude women hanging in the museum." Then it was allowed to be hung there and people were fascinated by this photograph; it was always covered in nose- and fingerprints.



George Platt Lynes, photograph of dancer Fred Danieli, 1937

HD: You have to find out the limits of the institution because they are not clear. Nobody defines them and everyone says, "There are none," until there are.

MFS: Speaking of limits or boundaries, also of artistic production, which you seem to inherently explore, have there been occasions where requests or invitations misinterpret your work, or go beyond the boundary of your artistic practice?

NM: It's happened, for example, that other institutions have then said, "Oh, you're one of these artists who does dance in the museum, don't you want to do that for us?" and I've had to say, "No,

that's not really what I am interested in." Or there's the assumption that I would want to go into any collection and give it a jolt. Because people often incorrectly presume that I'm motivated entirely by "taste" and so they approach me with things they imagine I'll "like," and that's generally a dead end.

But on the other hand, people from different dance communities or historians, for example, have engaged with my work and that's created an opening and a whole other set of conversations that I wasn't having before, which then goes out of my boundary in a productive way and in a way exposes a very limited view of art.

HD: In a certain way, one could say there are these different discursive or social milieus you are interacting with, and you have to define your place within them. “Okay, I’m not the expert for this,” you say, “but there is an interesting connection” and things like that. That kind of argument always goes in two directions: opening up spaces for possibilities on the one hand, but also emphasizing the necessity to build up limits again on the other.

That’s also in a certain way happening on the spatial level, within the shows, in the way in which you relate to the single works. In Basel, for example, each work had more or less the autonomous space needed; it was taken very seriously as an artwork. At the same time, however, it was embedded in a series of combinations with other works. As a visitor, you were challenged to see the work, but also to see the combinations, like Megan’s work with Robert Morris’s. But there was also Bea Schlingelhoff in the same room, and obviously also your own presence had to be taken into account, as being the one bringing all these very different works together. That is quite demanding because those are very different layers of authorship and meaning. And you are not doing the installation only, but the whole conceptual framework, which again might be driven by certain interests. For me, this is the really interesting aspect in exhibition-making, not a pure affirmation of the single works, and also not a dissolution of the works into pure textuality, but to work with and through the difference.

NM: Yes, I was hoping that what you just described would actually communicate itself—these abrupt changes from room to room, these interrelationships within them, and on another level, one’s recollection of what one had just seen combining with the experience of a subsequent space, and these *Sichtachsen* (perspectives) going forward and backward that are specific to this *enfilade* (suite) of rooms in Basel. What I noticed—and this has to do with eliminating “curated by,” and not offering a way to contain the exhibition in advance—is that people really wanted at least some kind of narrative of motivation. But my hope is always that this experience one has in the exhibition, not just of associations between works, but of a real interplay, that *this* becomes the narrative.

MFS: When you describe this, I think also of the work of Haim Steinbach, if one were to consider his work in terms of curating.

HD: In the history of institutional critique, or whatever you might call it, there are two clearly distinct strands: one, which is more interested in exhibition-making, the *exhibitionary* in general, and the other one in the discursive. Like Andrea Fraser, for example, is not really interested in making exhibitions—the best exhibition is the empty exhibition. Whereas, with Christian Philipp Müller, it's all about exhibition-making. For me, this distinction between the discursive and the exhibitionary is very interesting, because obviously both aspects are always there, even if one side remains mainly hidden. For example, your show in the Whitney interacts with the institutional setting and the canonical ambitions of the museum on both levels. My impression was that the questioning of the canon of the modernist narrative at the same time opened up the possibility to establish a new canon.

NM: Yes. Then also saying—this is actually already in the canon, but ...

HD: ... it's hidden.

NM: I think that was, for me, the most valuable, to suddenly realize that anyone who would want to put *camp* outside of modernism is making a mistake because that's actually the core. All these things have been rearranged. In Basel the expectation is that the Kunsthalle presents the most advanced art of its time. So that brings up the question: What is the value of contemporaneity for its own sake, and what role does the viewer play in defining it? So after my initial conversations with them I thought, "I'm more interested in the contemporary as it can be seen through, or put into tension with, or thrown into question by, things that are not *only* contemporary."

Something just came back to me, which was that I had given a talk at the Städelschule and Isabelle Graw said to me, "Well, all these different roles that you're inhabiting, aren't you just fulfilling the multitasking demands of neoliberalism?" I don't remember what I answered at the time, but it doesn't seem to me like I'm doing different things necessarily. These are multiple operations, but it feels like a single approach.

MFS: Yes. That's what I find to be the provocative aspect of your position, not to see it as multitasking but to see it as an artistic position, which is actually throwing into question a lot of assumptions about what is work. What is writing history? What is being fascinated by something? What is the place that it's exhibited? What are the relations between you and the others or the works themselves?

All of these things are essential aspects to your position as an artist and not just, “*Oh, ich mach mal das, ich mach mal das ...*” (I will do it, I will do it ...) That’s why, also, I could imagine it’s hard to endure as an artist. I was wondering myself if it’s ever challenging to you? I mean, just because it is a claim that you always do again. Every show you do, if it’s your show at the gallery, if it’s a show like “*Transmissions*,” if it’s like Basel, or writing a text on George Platt Lynes.

Maybe, for you, it’s just always you continuing your work. To me, sometimes I would think you have to maintain this *Haltung* (attitude). It’s your work, not something else or so.

NM: Yes. From a certain point onward I’ve been pretty adamant about holding a space open, that this is my responsibility, but also a way to allow the work to continue and to define itself. And in that space I can introduce things that I’d like to draw attention to, that I want to know more about, et cetera, but none of this is made secondary to the work, since it is also the space I hold open for myself. To show the work as inseparable from, and in a way suspended in other works or artists, or to implicate my work in the work of others and vice versa ... Part of it is need-driven: you make the things you need, you locate things that aren’t available, you look more carefully because you’re in doubt. And this is something I’ve learned through dialogues with other artists, too, like all the activities that constitute your work, Megan, that is also a way to self-define what an artist can be. So, at this point, I don’t defend it so much anymore. Like, this is my work, I just keep doing it.

HM: But I also think that what Megan was asking about this *Haltung*, or attitude, has significance. Why it is so important? I think it is important because otherwise you would easily get lost in one of the different functions, be it writing, research, exhibition design or whatever. The social dimension is the biggest threat, in a certain way, of getting lost in social transactions and things like that. The only remedy against that is a focal point beyond that, which you can’t embody directly. It needs a kind of idea of what that point might be, what kind of sense it makes as art, yes?

NM: Yes.

HM: Without such a *Haltung* everything you do becomes quickly irrelevant. It implodes and loses its meaning in a certain way. I think that is why artistic trajectories are still so important.

NM: Hearing you two describe this, it’s making me realize that this *Haltung* is a way to maintain the necessary distance. Also how different *Haltung* is from the term I always heard even in the 2000s, *Positionierung* (positioning).

I think it has to do with getting very close while maintaining a distance, working with knowing and not-knowing. Possibly it is a kind of stubbornness, too, a constant counterdemonstration that says: no, that's not what the work is, don't speak for me ...

NM: Nick, what was the moment when you realized or you would recognize in your own practice that you started to ... What would you say is a point where your work went in this direction?

NM: I think it was when I put together "Bloodflames III" at Alex Zachary in 2010. I had also done a show before in some rooms of what was then still the Chelsea Hotel. Neither of these shows included my own work. But "Bloodflames III" felt like a stronger statement in that it really insisted on a certain kind of irrationality. The title posed the exhibition "as if" it were the third installment of an exhibition staged in NY in 1947, to which there had never been a sequel, so it supported itself on a false premise. Megan, you had several works in it, and also produced a new work specifically for the occasion, which is how I realized that this way of working could also lead to unanticipated inclusions, or that it could be generative in this way. There was this Lukas Duwenhögger video that hadn't been seen in decades, and it certainly had never been screened before in the US, *From Cotton via Velvet to Tragedy*, and photograms of vinyl LPs by Louise Lawler that I'd read about in a footnote somewhere, which she dug out of storage for me.

MFS: Those design elements, too, that amazing rug ...

NM: Yes. This Evelyn Wyld rug from the 1920s, and a purse made out of silk designed by Raoul Dufy that I borrowed from a textile archivist. A lot of the work functioned almost like *Attrappen* (decoy) in that they appeared to be one thing, but were in fact another, or cast in a new role: the painter as silk designer, or Lutz Bacher's version of a Dan Flavin that inundated the entire room with pink light, and this anonymous Meissen figure positioned in front of it, shielding its eyes from the blinding source.

I think the intricacy of all the conversations that were necessitated to make this show, and the degrees of trust that were built up in the process—both with people I already knew, such as yourself, and with people I had brazenly contacted out of the blue who all turned out to be receptive to my as-yet unformulated proposal ... that had a very particular energy, which also felt familiar, analogous to how I worked in the studio, or how I followed multiple threads of interest. And the fact that viewers seemed to understand implicitly what was going on here, on multiple registers, and were willing to try to come to terms with it, also gave me the feeling that this was functioning more like an artwork than like a thematic group exhibition.

After that, I felt a greater sense of urgency to entwine this way of “exhibiting” with the presentation of work that I had made. Not only to show my own work, but to show it in the context of some of the other works and relationships that were informing it, sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly. So that led to the exhibition at Midway Contemporary, the reiteration of an entire velvet room designed by Christian Bérard, which functioned as a transhistorical intervention of my drawings, but also implicated the viewer in a dramatic trajectory.

HD: If you integrate other people’s work as part of your own work in a certain way, that could also raise a sort of moral question concerning a possible use or even misuse of the other works. You seem to be able to navigate that trap in an interesting way. I wonder how that works for you and what kinds of experiences you have with that problem?

NM: I’ve seen exhibitions organized by artists that have felt very violent, even though they’ve taken great pains to be on point in their apparent politics. The posturing is what feels violent, I think, because the work is being made unanimously with a certain message, rather than retaining its individual power, and the ways in which it might contradict or deviate from other works and ideas. I try to be as transparent as I can in terms of the process itself, emphasizing that the exhibition is in a way set in motion and ultimately constituted by multiple coexisting, though not necessarily harmonious, dialogues with artists and estates. But of course it happens that I approach an artist who is wary of my proposal, or who rejects it outright. When I began talking to Bea Schlingelhoff about the Basel exhibition, she wanted to make sure that I wasn’t going to misrepresent her work. It’s a valid concern to have. As we continued to talk, and she began to understand what I was asking, she said, “Oh, well, *two* can play at this game. Maybe you can give me a work of yours and I can present it as my own.”

HD: I have to say, Bea’s work, it looked great in itself *and* within your context. In another case—what’s her name? Georgia Sagri, yes—I even liked her work more in this very specific combination with the Konrad Klapheck painting. So, maybe there is something that is improving the work of others in a certain way, would that be a possibility?

MFS: Or putting it in a good light?

HD: Or just creating a context, which makes aspects of a work visible you would not see otherwise, but obviously it could also easily go into the other direction, that a work can lose its specific significance. That often happens when curators work with the principle of similarities and comparison instead of juxtaposition and conflict.

NM: My hope is that an artwork appears as complex as it is, that it is allowed to open up new vectors, especially with living artists, but also with nonliving artists (though in that case one has to be careful because the nonliving are often asked to do too much, as in the case of Alvin Baltrop). When the work is put at the service of a thesis, it doesn't have the ability to misbehave.

But that's not to say that I present it without context. It is very clearly contextualized. It's the *Zusammenhänge* (context) that can be drawn out in different ways.

There are so many cues that can provide a rigorous context aside from didactic language. I think of some of the totally sensual and unorthodox elements of Lina Bo Bardi's exhibition designs, scattering the floor with leaves ... a deep grasp of the power of display that this specific Italian generation understood and exploited. And I tend to trust that if the exhibition is done right, people will be drawn in, and even if they don't have the usual guides, they will understand that there is a way to be in suspension with the work. At least that's my hope, so it's good to hear from you that the work is not getting absorbed.

MFS: I like this aspect of using artists' work, the unclarity of how they are being used or shown, featured or subordinated, because it brings up complexities of relations. It isn't something that can or should be read only as a neutral exchange or something. I remember with "Transmissions" there was a bit of conflict that came up with the dancers, I think. At a certain moment some were like, "What's the relation of power or value?" Those things are within—these questions are within the work. They're not outside of the work.

NM: Yes, that was quite painful but important. Oddly, if I had gone the usual route of how many other artists instrumentalize dancing bodies in the museum—you just hire them and that's it—I don't think there would have been any conflict. But because I also wanted to address this problem and set up this extended discursive workshopping period to make a new work, and we decided on coauthorship of the choreography among the sixteen dancers so that they're acknowledged not only as performers but as artists/choreographers, that led to a lot of conversations about the different economies of the worlds of dance and art. Everything came to the surface and erupted. Ultimately these discussions and tensions were recorded as part of a long-extended interview with the dancers/choreographers that featured in the book.

MFS: Your research is quite electric and you often share—a friend saw one of the "Transmissions" presentations online and said, "It was so beautiful how he was talking about things, so sharing or whatever." There's something like sharing inherently in what you do. I don't know how to place that critically, but it is like a generous thing somehow. I think it takes place in the difference between absorbing, taking, or sharing, or ...

HD: Maybe there is also a kind of subtle undertone in the sharing/caring, because usually there is always a kind of ambivalence at play with such attitudes. That could be understood in an interesting way, for example, that something can be good in an aesthetic sense, but it's not necessarily good in a moral sense.

MFS: It's not just benevolent also.

HD: Yes, yes. It's not that you're just a gracious person and donating all your gifts to others. But it is highly interesting and even subversive to navigate that space between your own interests and desires and those of others, colleagues, and audiences alike.

NM: No. I've had to say, a few times at least, that I am not presenting collections of things that I like—that's a primary misreading of what I'm doing and a misunderstanding of how influence functions. Were I to do an exhibition of my favorite works of art (which I would never do), it would be something else entirely. These are not my friends, my favorites, or my inspirations, this is work that I am engaging and even struggling with and presenting in a new configuration, and that in itself is the process of articulating something. And I think that can be quite disorienting, that I steer against existing social networks and historical trajectories, because the general tendency is to want to emphasize and compound these factors, to use them as forms of legitimation. What assumptions are people then left with to feel stabilized by? The goal is not to confirm anything, but to loosen things up, to understand where there is an opening, or a poetic potential, and to cause reorientation.

[1] Hans Haacke, "Museums: Managers of Consciousness," *M+ magazine* (February, 2018), <https://www.mplus.org.hk/en/magazine/museums-managers-of-consciousness>. ↩

[2] Craig Owens, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*, ed. Scott Bryson, Barbara Kruger, Lynne Tillman (Oakland: University of California Press, 1994), 135. ↩

Flash Art

Nick Mauss “Bizarre Silks, Private Imaginings and Narrative Facts, etc.” *Kunsthalle Basel* by Anna Franceschini



Nick Mauss, “Bizarre Silks, Private Imaginings and Narrative Facts, etc.”. Installation view at Kunsthalle Basel, 2020. Photography by Philipp Hänger. Courtesy of Kunsthalle Basel.

This show, conceived by Nick Mauss, opens — coherently — upon a threshold. A succession of flats commences, the first being a video that documents a Ray Johnson artist book. This is followed by Mauss's freestanding screen *Transcript* (2020) and Bea Schlingelhoff's typeface dedicated to Swiss activist Anne-Marie Piguet. This entryway paratextually anticipates the blossoming of Rosemary Mayer's vaporous textile volumes, vestiges of feminine political hegemonies balanced against the typographical rigor of Ketty La Rocca. Mayer's titles, *Galla Placidia* and *Hypsipylye*, introduce a subtle byzantine allure that gradually insinuates itself throughout the show, including a disciplined conceptual labyrinth vividly manifested in the final room. Here, the environmental conundrum of Mauss's *Thresholds* rearticulate the space into an imaginary unfolding of rooms. The space is inhabited by, among the other presences, Mayer's fluctuant “visitations,” Anton Perich's filmic relic of Victor Hugo Rojas's iconoclast performance, and a shielded *flânerie* by Ken Okiishi. In the precisely orchestrated *mise-en-scène* some symbolic dispersion is planned and prepared. It crystallizes in Edward Owens filmic encrustations that scale his mother's portrait; in Georgia Sagri's bleeding open wounds that rip open institutional limbo; in seventeenth-century “bizarre silks” that transport rootless decorations inflicted in their weft; and is reversed in Megan Francis Sullivan's pictorial quotes. Robert Morris's atomic linen, a textile dystopia, contributes to a “what remains” post-historical system in which elements gravitate and invisible forces allow the works to fully exist.

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Nick Mauss, "Bizarre Silks, Private Imaginings and Narrative Facts, etc.". Installation view at Kunsthalle Basel, 2020. Konrad Klapheck, Liberté, amour, art, 1964; Georgia Sagri, Open Wound, 2018; Georgia Sagri, Fresh Bruise. Photography by Philipp Hänger. Courtesy of Kunsthalle Basel.



Nick Mauss, "Bizarre Silks, Private Imaginings and Narrative Facts, etc.". Installation view at Kunsthalle Basel, 2020. Georgia Sagri, Deep Cut, 2018, and Ketty La Rocca, Comma with 3 dots, 1970. Photography by Philipp Hänger. Courtesy of Kunsthalle Basel.

Anna Franceschini
Nick Mauss "Bizarre Silks, Private Imaginings and Narrative Facts, etc." Kunsthalle Basel
Flash Art, N°330, April-May, 2020.

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Nick Mauss, "Bizarre Silks, Private Imaginings and Narrative Facts, etc.". Installation view at Kunsthalle Basel, 2020. Photography by Philipp Hänger. Courtesy of Kunsthalle Basel.



Nick Mauss, "Bizarre Silks, Private Imaginings and Narrative Facts, etc.". Installation view at Kunsthalle Basel, 2020. Rosemary Mayer, *Galla Placidia*, 1973. Photography by Philipp Hänger. Courtesy of Kunsthalle Basel.

Anna Franceschini
Nick Mauss "Bizarre Silks, Private Imaginings and Narrative Facts, etc." Kunsthalle Basel
Flash Art, N°330, April-May, 2020.



Nick Mauss, "Bizarre Silks, Private Imaginings and Narrative Facts, etc.". Installation view at Kunsthalle Basel, 2020. Edward Owens, *Private Imaginings and Narrative Facts, 1968-70*. Photography by Philipp Hänger. Courtesy of Kunsthalle Basel.



Nick Mauss, "Bizarre Silks, Private Imaginings and Narrative Facts, etc.". Installation view at Kunsthalle Basel, 2020. Video documentation of Ray Johnson's artist book *Ray Gives a Party, ca. 1955*. Photography by Philipp Hänger. Courtesy of Kunsthalle Basel.

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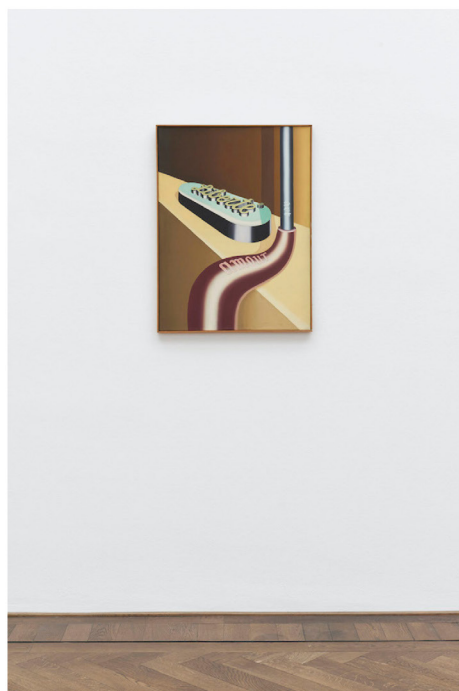
Nick Mauss, "Bizarre Silks, Private Imaginings and Narrative Facts, etc.". Installation view at Kunsthalle Basel, 2020. Gretchen Bender, TV Text and Image (PEOPLE WITH AIDS), 1986-1993. Photography by Philipp Hänger. Courtesy of Kunsthalle Basel.



Nick Mauss, "Bizarre Silks, Private Imaginings and Narrative Facts, etc.". Installation view at Kunsthalle Basel, 2020. Rosemary Mayer, Galla Placidia, 1973. Hannah Höch, Ich bin ein armes Tier, 1958. Photography by Philipp Hänger. Courtesy of Kunsthalle Basel.

Anna Franceschini
Nick Mauss "Bizarre Silks, Private Imaginings and Narrative Facts, etc." Kunsthalle Basel
Flash Art, N°330, April-May, 2020.

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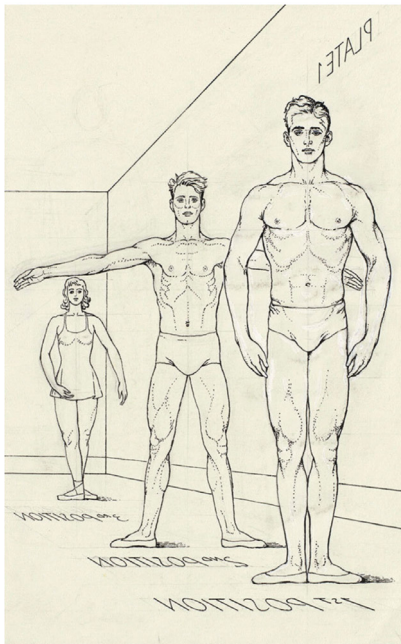
Nick Mauss, "Bizarre Silks, Private Imaginings and Narrative Facts, etc.". Installation view at Kunsthalle Basel, 2020. Konrad Klapheck, Liberté, amour, art, 1964. Photography by Philipp Hänger. Courtesy of Kunsthalle Basel.

Anna Franceschini
Nick Mauss "Bizarre Silks, Private Imaginings and Narrative Facts, etc." *Kunsthalle Basel*
Flash Art, N°330, April-May, 2020.

BOMB

The Politics of Dancing by Matthew J. Abrams

Overlooked modernisms on display.



Paul Cadmus, *Ballet Positions*, drawing for the primer *Ballet Alphabet*, 1939. Ink, pencil, colored ink, and gouache on paper, 12 x 8 1/2 inches. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Lincoln Kirstein. © 2019 Estate of Paul Cadmus. From *Lincoln Kirstein's Moderns*.

Theory + Practice is a series supported by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts and the Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation.

This spring, three interrelated exhibitions across Manhattan have created a rich constellation of modernist inquiries the likes of which the art world rarely sees. Together they might even form a portent, an augur of greater things to come—a cognitive shift in how the art world and perhaps even the public at large are willing to engage with the various, disparate, often queer or gay, and largely overlooked modernisms that have defined US culture for the past hundred years. To examine them, and to appreciate them, is to challenge some of the most ossified and intractable narratives in art history today. It's a moment of reckoning for modernism at large; for the small, non-normative communities that cultivated it; and, perhaps most of all, for the centrality of dance within the movement.

Matthew J. Abrams,
The Politics of Dancing by Matthew J. Abrams
BOMB, May 27, 2019.
<https://cutt.ly/fwvz8YEO>

Together, *Hymn to Apollo: The Ancient World and the Ballets Russes* at New York University's Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, *Lincoln Kirstein's Modern* at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), *The Young and Evil* at David Zwirner Gallery, and last year's *Nick Mauss: Transmissions* at the Whitney Museum of American Art posit a thesis as iconoclastic as it is daring: What if modernism, just like dance, is more akin to a state of dwelling, a modality of being that is defined less by a material production than by an immaterial meditation—a sort of sustained attention that rests outside normal, lived experience?



Attributed to the Frignano Painter; *Skyphos with a Dancing Maenad*; Late Classical, 375–350 BCE. Terracotta. Campania, Italy. 16.5 cm x 15 cm. Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Gift of Dr. Harris Kennedy, Class of 1994. Photograph by Imaging Department. © President and Fellows of Harvard College. From *Hymn to Apollo: The Ancient World and the Ballet Russes*.

Each show has a story to tell. A story, and a lesson. *Hymn to Apollo* pairs artworks from Greek antiquity—primarily kylikes, kraters, and other pottery forms—against set designs, costumes, and documentary photographs from the famed Ballets Russes. Among the exhibited objects is an astounding hand-painted suit by the great proto-Surrealist Giorgio di Chirico, maybe the most interesting single *thing* in New York right now. *Hymn's* mission is two-fold: to demonstrate the deep and complex collaborations that many European modernists maintained with the Ballets Russes, which, directed by Sergei Diaghilev and often featuring Vaslav Nijinsky, dominated the vanguard of modern ballet and elevated the status of the male dancer to new heights. But curators Clare Fitzgerald and Rachel Herschman also wanted to demonstrate this particular modernism's indebtedness to antiquity, especially in their posturing of the human form and the creation of a culture in which dance plays a central role (as it did in ancient Athens). The show interfaces the homosexuality and homosociality that so often defined ancient Greek culture with the homosexuality and homosociality that so often defined modern culture, and especially ballet. Dancing, *Hymn to Apollo* seems to suggest, can never leave the body, let alone the body politic.

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Adolf de Meyer, Vaslav Nijinsky as the Faun in Opening Scene from *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*, 1912. Platinum print. 15.9 x 21 cm. New York Public Library, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, Roger Pryor Dodge Collection. Image courtesy of the New York Public Library. From *Hymn to Apollo: The Ancient World and the Ballet Russes*.

Just a few dozen blocks below the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, one finds *Lincoln Kirstein's Modern* at MoMA. The timing is fortuitous, because it was George Balanchine and his trailblazing work with the Ballets Russes that directly inspired Kirstein, who brought the impresario to the United States, became his collaborator, and developed into the most important champion of modern dance, and particularly ballet, in American history. *Lincoln Kirstein's Modern* is brimming with objects. Here we find ephemera, like sketches for the Virgil Thomson/Lew Christensen one-act production, *Filling Station* (1937), now famous for its incredibly campy and erotic costumes, and patronized by Kirstein. We also find videos of other Kirstein ballet-productions projected onto screens. But more than anything else, we find caches of homoerotic paintings, sculptures, photographs, and films.



Pavel Tchelitchev, *Nervous System*, 1941. Designs for the ballet *The Cave of Sleep*. Gouache and watercolor on paper. 13 1/4 x 11 inches. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the artist. From *Lincoln Kirstein's Modern*.

Matthew J. Abrams,
The Politics of Dancing by Matthew J. Abrams
BOMB, May 27, 2019.
<https://cutt.ly/fwvz8YEO>

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Kirstein's legacy is titan. He didn't just bring Balanchine to the United States. He started the New York City Ballet and the School of American Ballet. He effectively built the New York State Theater, recently renamed the David H. Koch Theater at Lincoln Center. He spent a lifetime amassing a huge dance archive and library. MoMA's show honors this legacy, but it also honors its own legacy. Kirstein was Harvard University buddies with Alfred H. Barr Jr., MoMA's very first director, and he became a very early and very active member of the museum. In fact, *Lincoln Kirstein's Modern* is as much about congratulating MoMA's supposed commitment to the performing arts (which it pegs to its impending renovation) as it is an homage to Kirstein.

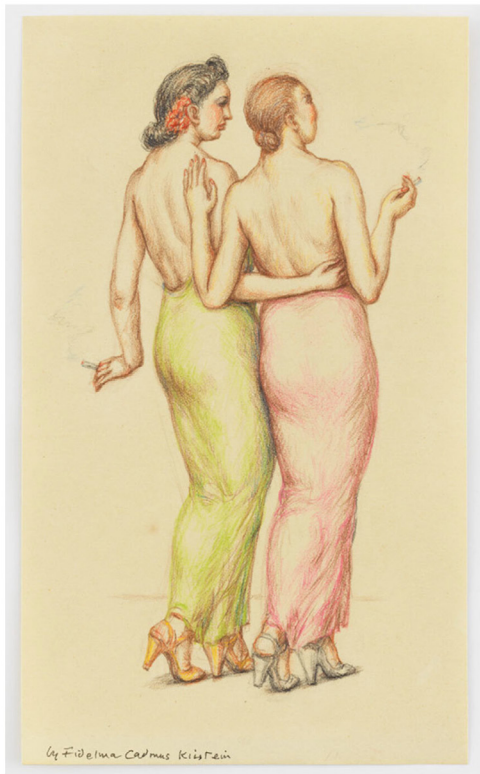


Jared French, *Billy*, 1938. Costume design for the ballet *Billy the Kid*. Gouache and pencil on board, 17 1/2 x 9 5/8 inches. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Lincoln Kirstein. From *Lincoln Kirstein's Modern*.

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BOMB, May 27, 2019.
<https://cutt.ly/fwvz8YEO>

But there is something strange about this heartwarming buddy narrative—something that speaks to another politics of dancing. Kirstein and MoMA were intimate, but they also had a huge falling out. The department Kirstein started was eventually shuttered, and he was left so resentful that he revoked his massive archival donations and redistributed them to Harvard and the New York Public Library. Russell Lynes, who was George Platt Lynes's brother, a *Harper's Magazine* editor, member of the Kirstein circle, confidant of Barr's, and author of the MoMA history *Good Old Modern: An Intimate Portrait of the Museum of Modern Art* (1973), remembers a very different relationship. "Alfred Barr," he writes, "who was never convinced that [Kirstein's dance archive] belonged in the museum ... paid it no heed, and Kirstein was fairly thoroughly disenchanted with Barr and the Museum." Moreover, *Lincoln Kirstein's Modern* ends with a spray of Latin American paintings that Kirstein personally secured. The conceit here is to show how Kirstein's expeditions to South America kickstarted MoMA's commitment to Latin American modernism, which becomes another self-congratulatory maneuver. But what's not really broadcast (except very quietly in the catalogue) is that Kirstein's first trip to South America with a ballet troupe was a cultural propaganda mission funded by Nelson Rockefeller and that his second art-buying trip included mandates from the US Government's Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs and no small amount of spying. "Gentleman espionage" as dance historian Lynn Garofola calls it. In other words, the most valuable lesson that one could learn from *Lincoln Kirstein's Modern* comes not from what it displays, but from what it hides: the friction and enmity between the performing arts and the visual arts, between corporate America and gay bohemia, and the well-known, mid-century entanglement of American art with American geopolitics—the Cold War culture wars. *Lincoln Kirstein's Modern*, then, forms another politics of dancing—a secondary register that is invisible to most casual visitors, but quite glaring to those initiated into this history. This is a politics of the suppressive kind. The oppressive kind. The revisionist kind. The good-ole-boys-from-Harvard kind. And it's a shame, because how saucy and fun would *that* show have been?

Nevertheless, curators Jodi Hauptman and Samantha Friedman have done substantial work, and they've produced something exquisite. Moreover, MoMA's last decade of dance and performing arts programming, now under the expert stewardship of Stuart Comer and others, along with the inclusion in the museum's new renovation of a space specially dedicated to performance, are correcting the course and implicitly making amends to Kirstein, to ballet, and, quite frankly, to the small gay and queer communities whose legacies were all but obliterated from art history by the very narratives that MoMA helped enshrine.



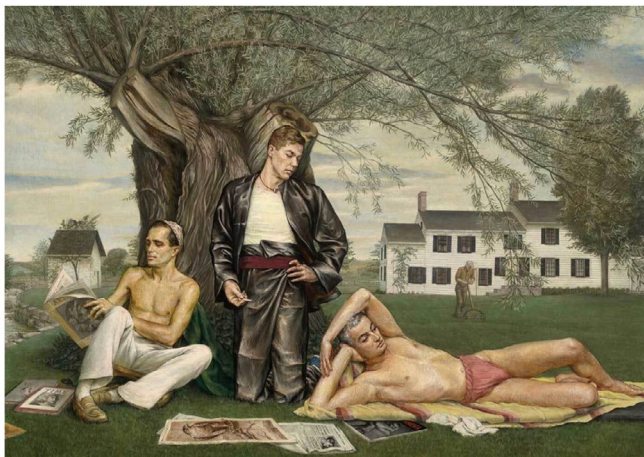
Fidelma Cadmus Kirstein, *Two Women*, ca. 1930-39. From *The Young and Evil*.

Now continue your journey downtown to David Zwirner in Chelsea and feast your eyes upon *The Young and Evil*. In particular note the prominently positioned vitrine filled with erotic drawings by the queer modernist darling and recipient of Kirstein's patronage, Pavel Tchelitchev. Here, two paper sheets offer a platoon of male nudes engaged in complex sexual sequences. Behold this infinity ring of fellatio, this Möbius strip of sucking, this unadulterated festival of Olympic-grade, acrobatic fucking: an orgy for our time.

Curator Jarrett Earnest gives us a gift—one that the more conservative *Lincoln Kirstein's Modern* does not, even though the two shows overlap so much that they display duplicate objects. *The Young and Evil* puts on full display the gay sexuality that defined Kirstein and his circle, like Tchelitchev, Paul Cadmus, Jared French and the brilliant collaborative work of Cadmus and Jared and Margaret French as PaJaMa. It forces the viewer not to cleave one exhibition from the other. *So you want to honor gay modernist cultures like those that cultivated American Ballet? Well, the show says, then honor this.*

GALERIE
CHANTAL CROUSEL

It's also admirable that such an exhibition would overtake a good chunk of David Zwirner's real estate. After all, the reason that dance and performance art are still so overlooked in art museums and galleries is obvious to many, and especially to a corporate juggernaut like David Zwirner: dance, quite simply, is a terrible instrument of capital. It is much harder to commodify a sequence of pirouettes than a sequence of brushstrokes. A dance, a dancer; a choreography, a choreographer—none lend themselves to the careful cultivation of exchange value. Dance cannot be contained, then carefully doled out by gallerists to important collectors and institutions. It is difficult to reorganize performance-based artworks into assets, or containers of wealth, as one can so easily effect with paintings. But Earnest plays this to his advantage. In lieu of comfortable, canonical masterpieces, *The Young and Evil* provides the documentation of dance, the gay frivolities of its great patrons, and their interrelated, often collaborative artworks.



Paul Cadmus, *Stone Blossom: A Conversation Piece*, 1939–40. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Juliana Cheyney Edwards Collection and Seth K. Sweetser Fund. © 2019 Estate of Paul Cadmus / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. From *The Young and Evil*.

The triangulation of *Hymn to Apollo*, *Lincoln Kirstein's Modern*, and *The Young and Evil* marks an incredible moment in New York's cultural milieu. Hopefully such shows will not be the last—they were certainly not the first. Nick Mauss's recent solo project at the Whitney Museum, *Transmissions*, resurrected much of the same material. It was one of the most unique and perspicacious engagements with modern American ballet, and alternative modernisms more generally.

Matthew J. Abrams,
The Politics of Dancing by Matthew J. Abrams
BOMB, May 27, 2019.
<https://cutt.ly/fwvz8YEO>



Nick Mauss: *Transmissions*. Installation view. Wall installation: Nick Mauss, *Images in Mind*, 2018. Left to right: Documentation of George Balanchine choreography in rehearsals, 1951–58; Pavel Tchelitchew, *Interior Landscape Skull*, 1949; John Storrs, *Forms in Space #1*, ca. 1924; Elie Nadelman, *Two Circus Women*, ca. 1928–29; Gustav Natorp figure (formerly owned by Lincoln Kirstein), 1898; Sturtevant, *Relâche*, 1967; Ilse Bing, *Untitled (Skyscrapers, night, NY)*, 1936; Ilse Bing, *Dead End II*, 1936. Photograph by Ron Amstutz. Digital image © Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Incorporating a wide array of objects that stood cheek to jowl with a stage-like space where dancers performed eloquent choreographies, Mauss transformed the top floor of the Whitney into an architecture that was equal parts photo-history exhibition, conceptual art space, and live performance. Mauss, alongside curators Elisabeth Sussman and Scott Rothkopf, were eager to understand why figures like Tchelitchew and Kirstein, who were quite literally among the most notable personages of American culture during their lives, had all but vanished from public memory. Moreover, *Transmissions* argued that many modernisms (for there does indeed exist a plurality of modernisms) were highly conceptual endeavors. Isn't it interesting, for example, that the contemporary traditions of performance art and conceptual art emerged almost simultaneously in the mid-1960s?

Similar to *Hymn to Apollo's* intervention, Mauss remediates various modernist strategies, and he choreographs objects and bodies into a quasi-historical network. And the word choreography, it is important to recall, is Greek in origin and literally means *dance-writing*. The concept, then, is about a mapping of movement, a tracing of flesh, a writing of being. And more so than the other shows, there was something distinctly choreographic about *Transmissions*. It was transitive. It hinged on multiple registers of movement: temporal, cognitive, spatial, and more.

GALERIE
CHANTAL CROUSEL

This is choreography—a remediation of blood and bones into words and signs, a *hieroglyphics of the flesh*. And this is what Mauss sought to reenact. Incidentally, during antiquity there was even a name for such a person—a *choregus*. These were men who sponsored and led choruses, like the famed Greek writer Demosthenes. And these four exhibitions make one thing clear: like Mauss today, Kirstein was a *choregus* in the truest sense of the word. He was a modern Demosthenes who pumped his wealth, creativity, ambition, and desire into ballet; who lead the chorus of modernist movement; and who translated that genre into a coherent language.



Nick Mauss: *Transmissions*. Installation view. Left to right: George Platt Lynes, *Ralph McWilliams (dancer)*, 1952; George Platt Lynes, *Tex Smutney*, 1941; Carl Van Vechten, Carl Van Vechten slideshow, 1940–64. Dancers, left to right: Brandon Collwes; Quenton Stuckey; Kristina Bermudez. Photograph by Ron Amstutz. Digital image © Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

I'm struck by Mauss's synthesis of conceptual art and dance. Could this be more than an homage to a specific historical tradition? Does not dance, in its pure physicality, transcend the body in some meaningful way? Does it not become a meditative practice—an exercise in dwelling, in the truest sense of the word? If so, dance, one could argue, is a kind of philosophy, a pure investigation into the nature of being. Friedrich Nietzsche certainly believed so. The famous German philosopher, who couldn't have managed a plié if his life depended on it, found a symmetry between these two activities. Dancers, his logic ran, seek a leanness, a taut and compact form, and an austere diet to match. And because rigorous inquiry runs metaphorically parallel to rigorous movement, the ideal philosopher's mind should resemble the ideal dancer's body: efficient, toned, and filled with total self-possession. "It is not fat but the greatest possible suppleness and strength that a good dancer desires from his nourishment," Nietzsche once argued. "And I would not know what the spirit of a philosopher might wish more to be than a good dancer. For the dance is his ideal, also his art, and finally also his only piety, his 'service of God.'" May we all—we thinkers, we mind-dancers—become so lucky.

Hymn to Apollo: The Ancient World and the Ballets Russes is on view at the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World until June 2. *Lincoln Kirstein's Modern* is on view at the Museum of Modern Art until June 15. *The Young and Evil* was on view at David Zwirner Gallery from February 21–April 13, 2019. *Nick Mauss: Transmissions* was on view at the Whitney Museum of American Art from March 16–May 14, 2018. *Nick Mauss: Transmissions* will be reprised in a forthcoming artist's book published by Dancing Foxes Press.

FRIEZE

GESTURING PERSONAE

Light like the mind:
NICK MAUSS's queer histories of dance

IN 'TRANSMISSIONS', Nick Mauss's recent solo exhibition at New York's Whitney Museum of American Art, a semi-transparent scrim, adorned with images of mostly naked dancers by George Platt Lynes – an American fashion photographer popular in the 1930s and '40s – separated the museum's elevator from the rest of the show. At certain times of the day, you could see through it to men and women in black and white leotards ascending and descending a temporary staircase or crossing the room to dance on a blue-grey mat. They would pass in front of a large colour slideshow of dancers in costume by the American photographer Carl van Vechten, best known for his portraits of modernist writers in the first half of the 20th century. These images had never been exhibited before Mauss retrieved them from the artist's papers at the New York Public Library. His performers were silent, forming pairs before separating to dance alone or in greater concert with their colleagues. In one corner of the room – which included a large array of historical photography, sculpture and painting documenting, responding to or once used to complement dance – a large painted mirror, an original work by Mauss, reflected the performers. Its title, *Images in Mind* (2018), recalls the famous meeting in 1941 between a young Merce Cunningham and the deaf-blind writer and activist Helen Keller, when the former was a member of the Martha Graham Company. In the studio, Keller gripped Cunningham by the waist as he moved at the barre. She remarked: 'So light, like the mind.'

Here, in a visual essay derived, in part, from his Whitney exhibition, Mauss's images blend research

and performance documentation – the dual core of 'Transmissions'. The artist focuses on the intersection of contemporary dance and its art historical pedigree via sculpture (figures, theatre mock-ups and colourful screens), photographs, slideshows and paintings that arrange and rearrange dance's queer archive. Mauss's history is one of omissions, revisions and admissions. In *Gesturing Personae*, flesh and blood meet their representational analogue, as a male dancer is mirrored in a bronze statue. A modernist sculpture of a female figure sits under bright lights in the conservatory of a museum. Finally, we see a few of Van Vechten's slides from 1947 of the late, renowned dancer, director, choreographer and teacher Todd Bolender costumed as the 'Phlegmatic Temperament', one of the ancient world's four personality types. According to Greek philosophy, the phlegmatic is a person at ease, quiet, sympathetic. Light, like the mind ●

ANDREW DURBIN is senior editor of frieze.

NICK MAUSS lives in New York, USA. 'Nick Mauss: Transmissions' was staged earlier this year at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, USA. In 2017, his work was included in *La Triennale Di Milano and Torre Velasca*, Milan, Italy, and he had a solo show at Museu Serralves, Porto, Portugal. Forthcoming projects include a permanent installation at the Massachusetts Institute of Art, Cambridge, USA, and an exhibition at Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland, in 2019.

PHOTOGRAPHY: Nick Mauss (pp. 183 & 187), Ken Okishi (p. 184–85) and Ron Amstutz (p. 186).







Andrew Durbin
Gesturing Personae
Frieze, N°196, June-July-August, 2018, p.148-153.



Andrew Durbin
Gesturing Personae
Frieze, N°196, June-July-August, 2018, p.148-153.



ARTFORUM

Nick Mauss

Nick Mauss talks about *Transmissions* at the Whitney Museum of American Art

For “Transmissions,” his first museum solo exhibition, New York–based artist Nick Mauss juxtaposes his own works with those from public and private collections to reinterpret New York modernism during the first half of the twentieth century. On view through May 14 at the [Whitney Museum of American Art](#), the show encompasses dance and visual art. Here, Mauss considers the connections to be found across artistic histories.

I CONCEIVED OF *TRANSMISSIONS* as a new work for the museum that is continually in process. I wanted a title that immediately signaled away from received ideas about ballet, to open the field to other art forms and social histories. Initially, it was the representation of the body as strangely glamorous and overtly sexual that drew me to the work of Carl Van Vechten, George Platt Lynes, and their contemporaries, and I wondered what it would mean to confront those images now.

The performance was made in collaboration with sixteen dancers based in New York, and its structure is quite porous. It leaves people wondering, sometimes perhaps frustrated, about what it is that they’re seeing or at which point of the performance they’ve come into the space, or how to relate the danced gestures to the artworks and traces of entwined lives that also comprise the exhibition. This interrelationship is purposefully oblique because I don’t believe that these histories can be reenacted, or recuperated. I think of the dancers as performing a discontinuity.

As an art student I remember seeing Natalia Goncharova and Marie Laurencin’s designs for the Ballets Russes and understanding that the unassailable version of modernism I had learned could be destabilized when seen from a different point of view in relation to performance, collaboration, and intersecting media. The sidelining of these aesthetics, the fact that we are left with something so incomplete, is the result of an ideological program, buttressed by a homophobia that supports the stream-lining of historical and aesthetic narratives.

GALERIE
CHANTAL CROUSEL

In the studio, and at the dance division of the New York Public Library, the dancers and I reflected on the motivations behind the poses in these works, the play with gender, stylization, and expression—how the images were constructed. We spoke about camp and affect, but those terms seemed inadequate catch-phrases for what is going on in front of the camera. I think a more sophisticated analysis is required. The sensibility of the images produced by the interplay between ballet and avant-garde art carries this mix of pathos, wit, and irreverence. It's hard to define, and totally ahead of its time. So it's exciting when visitors to the exhibition make connections to downtown dance of the 1960s, or find that the lines between modern dance and modernist ballet are blurred. It was my hope that people would be able to see this work and to make diachronic associations.

One reason this work feels so present is that the proximity of different worlds in the New York of the 1930s and '40s allowed for collaborative, hybrid approaches. In the early twentieth century, there was no context for ballet in America. It was taken up as an open concept, and often performed as a rupture with tradition. There was a lot of crossover among the ballet world, Broadway, and vaudeville, and of course with the visual arts at a moment when artists were urgently trying to define modern, authentically American idioms. But much of the art of this period was defined by artists who were not American, or relegated to second-class citizenship.

In some ways ballet is the subtext to this exhibition, where these various images reveal the lives of people straining against codified, socially inflicted notions of race and sexuality. Today the term *queer* is used so arbitrarily that it's been nearly depleted. I think queerness as a concept only has potency if it's constantly reinvented and eviscerated. I am interested in the questions around identity and identity construction thrown up by the artworks of this period that predates so many concepts that anchor us. How these artists, and the gestures they made, resonate, even though the transmission of these styles, and ways of being and being together were wiped out by the AIDS crisis.

Artworks open up differently when they are not framed by the omniscient institutional voice. I am not interested in fixing or reinscribing narratives, and I can use the museum as a space in which something new is made.



Nick Mauss, *Replace*, 2017, nine panels with reverse glass painting, mirrored, 87 1/8 x 63 1/8".

Transmissions is a portrait of New York and a kind of evocation. When I choose to show certain works by Platt Lynes, they summon Hujar, Mapplethorpe, and Warhol, just as Ilse Bing's photographs of birds in the sky bring to mind Felix Gonzalez-Torres by surprise. The transparent "Filling Station" costume floats in front of the view to the former Piers and the Berman folding screen alludes to a very private performance, or transformation. The maligned aesthetics that run through *Transmissions*—American surrealism, Neo-Romanticism, the heavy exoticism of many of the photographs—are intended to cut across our piety toward minimalism and to enlarge, or scramble, frames of reference.

There's an exceptional statement by Van Vechten that followed me through the making of the show: "A great many people who are dead are more alive than a great many people who are alive." I sense that with many of the portraits of dancers and choreographers, though even the artworks have this vivid quality of provocation. Because of their relationship to a specific body, or to events in time, dance artifacts feel vulnerable and poignant, which is different from the sense of the aura of an artwork. As I worked in various archives, I found the experience very emotional—sifting through thousands of photographs or slides and wanting to know, with each new image: *Who is that person?*

FRIEZE

Nick Mauss: Eras and Eros at the Whitney

In New York, the artist untangles the intertwined histories of ballet, avant-garde visual art and clandestine gay life in mid-century America



A sailor suit made of organza hangs at the entrance to Nick Mauss's solo exhibition 'Transmissions'. Installed in the Whitney Museum of American Art, it's a re-fabrication of a costume designed by artist Paul Cadmus for the 1950 ballet *Filling Station*, during which dancer Jacques D'Amboise did *jetés* while dressed in the translucent fabric. Without a wearer, the costume looks ethereal and ghostly. Still, I thought I saw it swaying gently in the breeze – an illusion produced by the bronze statuette below it, of a kneeling dancer by the artist Elie Nadelman made around 1916, which gently rotates on a motorized plinth.

This confusion of motion with stillness is one of many graceful ways Mauss, a visual artist, animates an important but abbreviated period in modern ballet history for his first institutional show in the US. Between the 1930s to the 1950s, a distinctly American style of ballet emerged in New York, amid intense collaborations between critics, choreographers, dancers and visual artists. The work in Mauss's exhibition feels surprisingly contemporary, both for its experimental quality and for its overt, exuberant expressions of homosexuality from an age in which it was rarely allowed to be made public. In addition to original works inspired by archival research, such as a 53-panelled enamelled mirror painted using a reverse glass painting technique popular in the 1930s called *verre églomisé*, Mauss sourced objects from the Whitney's collection, the Kinsey Institute for Sex, Gender and Reproduction and the Jerome Robbins Dance Division of the New York Public Library – uncovering the era's social, romantic and artistic relationships as he went.

GALERIE
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Nick Mauss, Re-creation of a costume Paul Cadmus designed for *Filling Station*, 2018, above a bronze sculpture by Elie Nadelman, c.1916, Installation view, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

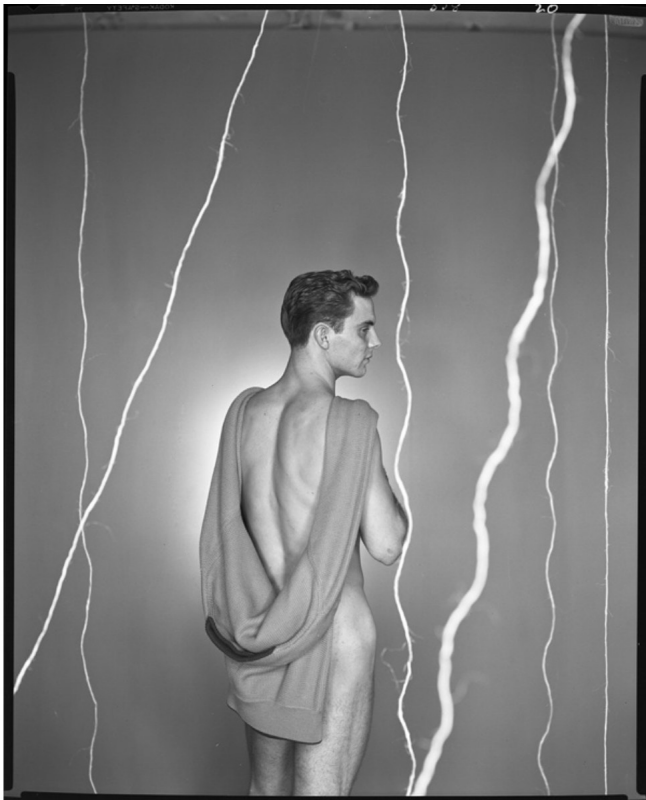


Nick Mauss, 'Transmission', 2018, installation view, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Courtesy: Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; photograph: © Paula Court

Lizzie Feidelson
Nick Mauss: Eras and Eros at the Whitney
Frieze, April 3, 2018.
<https://cutt.ly/lwvxg1pE>

GALERIE
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The legacy of the collaborations between the visual arts and choreographers such as Merce Cunningham, Simone Forti and Yvonne Rainer are much better-known than the exchanges between the visual arts and ballet. Mauss writes that he was surprised not to know of 20th-century ballet figures such as Christian Bérard, a French painter and designer of ballet sets who was an important artist during his lifetime but relatively unknown today. It seems as though Mauss found something engrossingly familiar in the artists of these period, as though they are relatives he never got a chance to meet. Some of the photographs, paintings, sketches, slide projections and sculptures – such as a Pavel Tchelitchew costume design for the ballet *Variations on Euclid*, (c.1932), a graphite sketch by the artist Elie Nadelman, *Head of a Woman*, (c. 1925) and a 1931 Walker Evans photograph of the famous ballet director, *Lincoln Kirstein (Without Hat)* – are arranged along the gallery walls in scattershot fashion, like family portraits hung along a hallway. Mauss is as concerned with history's absences as he is with its remnants: in one wall text, he writes that while researching this period, he realized that he might have known much more about the era if the intervening generation hadn't been decimated by AIDS.



George Platt Lynes, *Ralph McWilliams*, 1952, silver gelatin print, 20 x 25 cm. Courtesy: the George Platt Lynes Estate

Lizzie Feidelson
Nick Mauss: Eras and Eros at the Whitney
Frieze, April 3, 2018.
<https://cutt.ly/lwvxg1pE>

GALERIE
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At the front of the gallery, a group of 16 silver gelatine prints by artist George Platt Lynes – who became American Ballet Theater's official photographer in 1934 – reveal the exhibition's most explicit interchange between a clandestine visual language of homosexual erotics and the cool formalism of early ballet photography. Elegantly-posed choreographers and dancers alternate with nude portraits of ballet dancers and models that Lynes shot after hours, sometimes repurposing the same sets he used for ballet photographs and commercial work for *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue*. One man hangs gently upside down, like a piece of fruit on a low-hanging branch; another curls into a ball, revealing an anus framed in dark hair. The selection of photographs provides an introduction to some characters that crop up repeatedly in the exhibition, such as Paul Cadmus (who designed the organza men's sailor suit, another photograph of which is found inside) and Jared French, who together with his wife Margaret Hoening French and Cadmus, formed the photography collective PaJaMa. In Lynes's 1937 photograph, they appear in a pose both geometric and tender, bottomless and draped over a set of stairs.



Nick Mauss, 'Transmission', 2018, installation view, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Courtesy: Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; photograph: © Paula Court

Lizzie Feidelson
Nick Mauss: Eras and Eros at the Whitney
Frieze, April 3, 2018.
<https://cutt.ly/lwvxg1pE>

GALERIE
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Generous exhibition space is given to a piece of grey marley flooring, where a group of four dancers perform collaboratively-generated ballet in the gallery each day. Mauss loosened the conventional understanding of ballet's present-day lineage by selecting a group of 16 dancers with varying relationships to the form, from professional ballerinas to modern dancers. Together they developed gestures and steps inspired by archival rehearsal footage and photographs – some of which is on display in the exhibition, some coming from Mauss's larger body of research. In another subtle transposition of time, the dancers move through stately poses costumed in muted colours, while a nearby slideshow of photographs of fancifully-dressed dancers taken by the seminal ballet critic and photographer Carl Van Vechten between the 1940s and '60s flashes in bright colours.



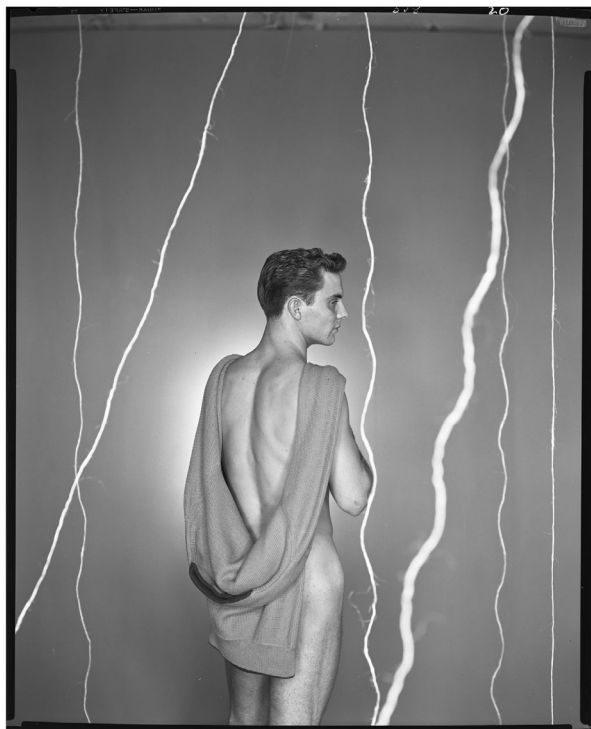
Nick Mauss, "Transmission", 2018, installation view, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (performers: Jasmine Hearn and Anna Witenberg).
Courtesy: Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; photograph: © Paula Court

One dancer, Maggie Cloud, told me later that although they hailed from different parts of the dance world, many of the dancers already knew each other. On the day I visited, the four performers occasionally laughed while warming up or going over the steps in a partner duet. When they began a quartet jumping section, the museumgoers around them surrendered to the compulsory modern-day ritual of capturing every minute of their performance – instantly generating a trove of documentary images of intimacies and gestures that, despite the performance's public nature, I wondered if anyone else would ever see. I asked one especially enthusiastic photographer what he planned do with the images. He told me he was an amateur ceramicist who rarely got this close to dance. 'I'll probably put some up on Facebook so my friends can see them', he said. 'Then I'll put the rest away, until I feel like getting them out and looking at them again.'

Lizzie Feidelson
Nick Mauss: Eras and Eros at the Whitney
Frieze, April 3, 2018.
<https://cutt.ly/lwvxg1pE>

VOGUE

A New Whitney Exhibition Examines the Proto-Queer World of Early Modernist Ballet



George Platt Lynes, *Alolph McWilliams*, 1952. Photo: Courtesy of the George Platt Lynes Estate

When the elevator doors slide open onto the Whitney Museum's eighth-floor gallery, home to Nick Mauss's new solo exhibition, "Transmissions," a collection of George Platt Lynes's photographs suspended against a white scrim sets the tone: at once refrigerator-cool with black-and-white classicism and 98.6-degrees-hot with erotic charge. The handful of dance-related portraits—ballerina Diana Adams in a calf-grazing tutu; Maria Tallchief with outstretched legs at a right angle—nod to Platt Lynes's longstanding liaison with New York City Ballet. In the others, drawn from the studio photographer's private work, a nude man dangles by his rope-tied ankles; another lies back languidly, draped in translucent plastic sheeting. A third kneels in a Surrealist composition, a cut-out eye over his heart and a smile across (most of) his lap.

Laura Regensdorf

A New Whitney Exhibition Examines the Proto-Queer World of Early Modernist Ballet
Vogue, March 16, 2018.

<https://cutt.ly/dwvxzWnj>

GALERIE
CHANTAL CROUSEL

Encountering the body—by turns passive and active, stylized and sexualized—makes a compelling introduction to Mauss’s reexamination of early modernist ballet as it unfolded in New York between the 1930s and ’50s. Then, dance occupied a central role in avant-garde circles. The Russian émigré, George Balanchine, was shaping a wholly new, wholly American take on choreography, with the polymath impresario Lincoln Kirstein at this side; painters such as Dorothea Tanning, Paul Cadmus, and Pavel Tchelitchew, along with composers Igor Stravinsky and Virgil Thompson, took part in the spectacles. “One of the big surprises for me early on was that this is not just a matter of artists making costumes and sets for ballet, but it was very much an ongoing, reciprocal dialogue,” Mauss says of a cross-pollination that blurred into collaborations, kinships, even dalliances. “It’s not fluidity, exactly,” he continues, shying away from the contemporary term, “but it’s a very intense kind of participation in multiple and often disconnected worlds.”



Nick Mauss, Re-creation of the costume Paul Cadmus designed for *Filling Station*, 2018 Photo: Laura Regensdorf

Laura Regensdorf
A New Whitney Exhibition Examines the Proto-Queer World of Early Modernist Ballet
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The same could be said for the jewel box exhibition, which incorporates swathes of media—projection, video, live performance, costume, stage design, sculpture, and photographs—with gossamer finesse. On the far end of the gallery, backlit by a river-view window, is a sheer work suit with red trim and a cartoonish red heart. It's a re-creation by Mauss of the costume for the 1937 ballet *Filling Station*, choreographed by Lew Christensen; Cadmus, then steeped in notoriety following his louche sailor painting *The Fleet's In!*, was invited to bring a subliminal undercurrent to the costume design. (Elsewhere in the gallery, a Platt Lynes photo shows the dancer Jacques D'Amboise posed in the jumper; not included is the version of a model wearing it sans briefs.)

The element of transparency carries over to the scrim, which separates the first part of the exhibition from the stage. Each afternoon (plus Friday evenings) a rotating quartet of dancers turns up for a four-hour performance, spanning barre exercises to cooldown. In between, a choreographic section created with the 16 dancers draws on vintage poses seen in photographs and on film, with shades of the group's disparate backgrounds. There's a Merce Cunningham alum (Brandon Collwes), a former ballerina from Dance Theatre of Harlem (Alexandra Jacob), and several who have worked with dance/art-world crossovers Sarah Michelson and Ryan McNamara.



Dancers Anna Witenberg and Ahmaud Culver performing in *Transmissions*, by Nick Mauss (2018). The costumes feature imagery from artist Louise Lawler's work, *Marie + 90*, *Marie + 180*, *Marie + 270* (2010/2012). Photo: Paula Court / Courtesy of the Whitney Museum of American Art

That's where Mauss, something of a polymath impresario himself, as a scholar, curator, and artist, has staked out territory in recent years. In 2014, he staged a five-day "disarticulated ballet" at Frieze London, casting dancers alongside performers like Kim Gordon and Juliana Huxtable. He then teamed up on an exhibition in Monaco celebrating the artist, textile designer, and Ballets Russes scenographer Leon Bakst.

Laura Regensdorf
A New Whitney Exhibition Examines the Proto-Queer World of Early Modernist Ballet
Vogue, March 16, 2018.
<https://cutt.ly/dwvxzWnj>

GALERIE
CHANTAL CROUSEL

There, the challenge was “how to contextualize even something as fabulous as Nijinsky’s tights from *La Spectre de la Rose*. If you just see them in a heap, they don’t communicate anything,” Mauss says with a laugh. (Serge Diaghilev, the troupe’s mastermind, makes a cameo in “Transmissions” via his calling card—a talisman that Kirstein displayed in his living room.)

A larger-than-life projection of 850 color slides further animates the space, part of an enormous body of photographs taken by the dance critic Carl Van Vechten from the late ’30s to the ’60s. “He would hold these photographic séances in what looks like a very small room in his apartment, with these amazing colored fabrics and boldly printed backdrops,” says Mauss, describing a cache that includes fictional spoofs, star turns by Alicia Markova, and a spotlight on the shorts worn in the Ballets Russes’s *Le Train Bleu*. “As the slides were going by, one of the dancers recognized Carmen de Lavallade, and she said, ‘Oh my goodness, I just did a workshop with her—she’s so incredible,’ ” Mauss recalls of that hyperlink-style connection. “As much as it’s a kind of historical exhibition, it’s not a straightlaced historical exhibition. It’s meant to be about our moment.”

“One thing I hope,” he continues, “is that people would come into the exhibition and say, ‘This is not ballet’—that it would actually undo a lot of assumptions.” The reputation for being stiff, humorless? Not this crowd, with Dorothea Tanning’s renderings of her whimsical animal-head costumes for *The Night Shadow*, or the tassel-stockinged dancer in Van Vechten photos, or the free-spirited Fire Island photo sessions with Margaret French, Cadmus, and José Martinez. (In a sign of complicated times, Kirstein married Cadmus’s sister, Fidelma, and kept Martinez as a lover.)

“I do think it’s a lot of layers to take in,” admits Mauss of the show’s interwoven threads. His own 9-foot-tall *verre églomisé* panels offer up more points of reflection—including of a video monitor playing Balanchine rehearsal footage, after an anecdote about how ballerinas often learn choreography by watching a tape through the mirror. Unlike the Ballets Russes works, largely lost to time because Diaghilev refused to record them, the Balanchine canon lives on some 50 blocks north of the Whitney, where the School of American Ballet grooms students to fill the company members’ shoes. Still, when *Vogue* first announced the academy in 1934, the future was uncertain: “The directors of this young school are deeply worried. Their funds will carry them only a few months longer. Then what?” Balanchine himself stated that Platt Lynes’s “pictures will contain, as far as I am concerned, all that will be remembered of my own repertory in a hundred years.” Time will tell.

The New York Times

Review: 'Transmissions' Evokes a Climate (Poetic, With a Chance of Ballet)

Nick Mauss's exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art links visual art, photography, sculpture, dance, live performance and queer theory.



"Ralph McWilliams," a 1941 photograph by George Platt Lynes in "Transmissions." Lynes made many intensely poetic studio images of dancers and choreography. George Platt Lynes Estate, via Kinsey Institute, Indiana University

The most pressing reason to see "Transmissions," [Nick Mauss's exhibition at the Whitney Museum](#) of American Art, is its generous array of sculpture, photographs and dance designs, almost all from a place and time — New York, between 1930 and '60 — when the city was becoming the center of modernism in the arts. But the juxtapositions show that "Transmissions" is a work of creative imagination as much as revelation. You go to sample it as history; you absorb it as poetry.

Alastair Macaulay
Review: 'Transmissions' Evokes a Climate (Poetic, With a Chance of Ballet)
The New York Times, March 26, 2018.
<https://cutt.ly/6wvxmuW3>

GALERIE
CHANTAL CROUSEL

“Transmissions” is an installation, a collage of several art forms, a revisionist investigation of New York modernism and sexual expression, and an essay in queer theory. One of its binding threads is ballet (excitingly linked to the visual arts in a number of prestigious commissions). At its center are live dances, which hint at further links among art forms, history and the present. Mr. Mauss is an investigator of lost time: There are real discoveries here. He also proves, with the cooperation of his dancers, something of a choreographer. And he’s a presence in the way he arrays groups of items by artists. He evokes a climate.



“Images in Mind,” a giant mirror with enamel paint made by Nick Mauss. Works displayed in front of it include, from left, Pavel Tchelitchew’s “Interior Landscape Skull,” John Storrs’s “Forms in Space #1” and Elie Nadelman’s “Two Circus Women.”
Vincent Tullo for The New York Times

Much of the history of modernism arises from the friction between the Old World and the New. European politics in the years 1930-60 brought fresh waves of immigrant artists to New York City. Diaghilev, who had made ballet a pre-eminent vehicle for the changing stages of modernism from 1909-29, was dead. In the three decades that followed, ballet became established on American soil, with American and European artists collaborating. There are superb sculptures and photographs in “Transmissions” that have no direct link to ballet. The exhibition suggests connections, opens windows, allows for possibilities.

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Lynes's "Tex Smutney," 1941. George Platt Lynes Estate, via Kinsey Institute, Indiana University



"Reflection," a 1944 painting by Paul Cadmus. The image was used for the cover of a Ballet Theater souvenir program (also in "Transmissions"), dated 1951.
Vincent Tullo for The New York Times

Mr. Mauss has a historical mind: He has had previous exhibitions based on work by two artists known for ballet design, Christian Bérard and Leon Bakst. His title, "Transmissions," has multiple implications. It refers, in part, to migration. The exhibition includes the European-born sculptors Gaston Lachaise and Elie Nadelman, the painter-designers Pavel Tchelitchew and Eugene Berman, and the choreographer George Balanchine, all of whom worked in the United States. Many wanted to continue the Diaghilev tradition: none more so than [Lincoln Kirstein, the titanic young American patron](#) of several arts, who commissioned works from all the above.

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[Kirstein's taste](#), often controversial — he was strongly opposed to both Manet and Matisse — is a common factor in much of this show. He championed Tchelitchew as well as Nadelman; he had caught the final seasons of the Diaghilev company in Europe and, four years later, brought Balanchine (Diaghilev's last choreographer) to America. High among the realist artists he praised was his brother-in-law, the painter Paul Cadmus. Paintings by Cadmus and by PaJaMa (a collective name for Cadmus, Cadmus's lover Jared French and French's wife, Margaret French) hang on the "Transmissions" walls. One of the people shown is the dancer José Martinez, Kirstein's lover.

Although Kirstein made ballet the central part of his vast operation, Nadelman and the photographer Walker Evans (also represented here) were two of the many artists he admired who had no connection to ballet. "Transmissions," like Kirstein, does not stay in one box. Other photographers here, often depicting dance as Evans did not, are [Carl Van Vechten](#) and George Platt Lynes.

The display of [Lynes](#) (1907-55) pictures is where the exhibition most evidently connects ballet to overtly gay art. (The images shown here come from the Kinsey Institute in Indiana, which houses his originals.) Lynes made many intensely poetic studio images of dancers and choreography. They impressed Balanchine in particular with their sense of light, darkness and drama. No less poetically, he was also a pioneer of homosexual photography. His work certainly anticipated that of Robert Mapplethorpe; its imagery and contrasts are often more touching.

If you want to see how gay photography can be admirable art and memorable pornography at the same time, start here. One photo shows a nude man whose anus is the focal point; another, not shocking but striking, is a full frontal nude view of the dancer Nicholas Magallanes. Two 1934 Lynes pictures show three male dancers from the all-black cast of the Virgil Thomson-Gertrude Stein opera "Four Saints in Three Acts" recumbent on the floor, calmly nude, intimately juxtaposed. In one picture, they're grouped with their choreographer, Frederick Ashton, kneeling, elegantly attired in suit and tie.

GALERIE
CHANTAL CROUSEL

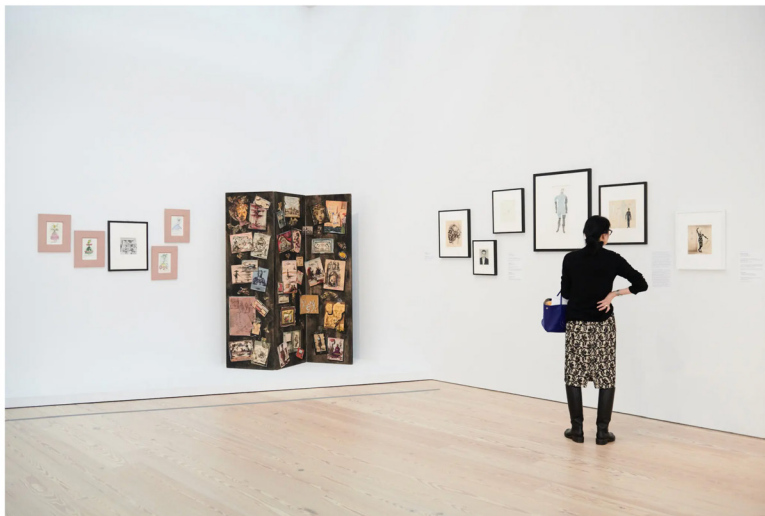


A Carl Van Vechten photograph from the series projected on the wall in "Transmissions." Vincent Tullo for The New York Times

Van Vechten, a complex figure who touched several arts and aspects of society, had been intelligently passionate about ballet since before World War I. His photographs, most dating from the 1940s and '50s, are full of information — but some tip matters decidedly over into the tastelessly tasteful, ego-flaunting, offbeat area known as camp. Although he took pictures in color, they've been almost invariably published in his inferior black-and-white reproductions. In "Transmissions," however, a series of some 800 of his originals are projected on a large screen.

In several cases, the color makes them far more peculiar. [Alicia Markova](#) and Anton Dolin — British ballet stars central to this era of dance in America — are shown in a wide range of roles. Seen in close-up, they often look precious, combining lurid hues and aesthetic flamboyance. Dolin is also seen in a number of nude poses, far from full frontal, but startlingly self-dramatizing. This man was famous as one of ballet's princes? You'd never guess from the poses he strikes when naked here. Van Vechten's photos are fascinating but quaint: They often accentuate ballet's glamorous triviality rather than its more profound capacity for drama.

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The New York Times, March 26, 2018.
<https://cutt.ly/6wvxmuW3>



A view of "Transmissions," Mr. Mauss's show at the Whitney.
Vincent Tullio for The New York Times

The most curious part of "Transmissions" is its element of live dance. Newly made dances amid a history show? Yes indeed. They're performed — coolly, with quiet theatricality, and without camp — in an area with artworks on four sides: on a flat stage and, opposite it, a mini-balcony piece of scenery. Mr. Mauss has worked with 16 dancers (four groups of four) to choreograph dances that subtly connect to several of the themes that were being developed in the art of the era on display.

In one of the two quartets I saw, dancers, wearing allover tights, emphatically leaned over to present their backsides to the audience in sustained poses. Does this seem unremarkable now? It didn't until the mid-1980s. Yet here it feels linked to the Lynes erotic photographs. The dances are a series of brief études, low-key in dynamics, elegant, not claiming great artistic importance yet perfect in context. Same-sex partnering, mixed-race casting and multiple dance idioms are all shown here: a quietly objective, latter-day melting pot.

Being a collage, the exhibition is historically incomplete. Where are the ballet boxes of Joseph Cornell that converted balletomania into exquisite visual art? Why exclude the Lynes photographs of Balanchine's "Orpheus" in which the two lead men are photographed nude? Those would multiply the connections already set up by Mr. Mauss here. Such omissions, however, do not detract from the intricacy and loving detail of "Transmissions."

GALERIE
CHANTAL CROUSEL



The exhibition also includes dances, choreographed by Mr. Mauss and dancers. From left, Maggie Cloud and Quenton Stucky; Alex Jacob's feet; a view from behind. Photographs by Vincent Tullo for The New York Times



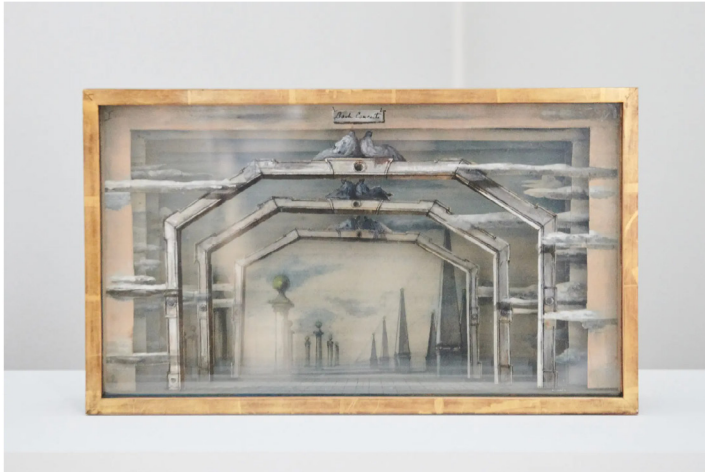
Brandon Collwes dancing as part of "Transmissions." Vincent Tullo for The New York Times

And here too are several fascinating original designs for Balanchine ballets. Today, the choreography blooms by having far less intrusive designs and costumes. And yet our idea of Balanchine grows more complex when we see the look his works once had. Eugene Berman's set model for the original production of Balanchine's "Concerto Barocco" (1941) is radiantly architectural (Piranesian) and reflective, with marvelously subtle colors.

You can also see here the Surrealist costumes with which two 1946 Balanchine classics started life: the medievalist Kurt Seligmann's lopsided costume for Phlegmatic in "The Four Temperaments" (the dancer Todd Bolender looks like the Scarecrow in "The Wizard of Oz"), and Dorothea Tanning's animal-headed early-Victorian guests for "Night Shadow" (now known as "[La Sonnambula](#)").

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<https://cutt.ly/6wvxmuW3>

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CHANTAL CROUSEL



Eugene Berman's 1941 original set model for George Balanchine's "Concerto Barocco." Vincent Tullo for The New York Times

The wide selection of Nadelman items alone — perhaps the peak of Kirstein's often erratic taste in the visual arts — is worth the visit to this gathering: modernism meets primitivism meets classicism. True, much of Nadelman's work predates Mr. Mauss's 1930-60 era. But his exquisite "Dancing Figure" (around 1916-18), memorably placed here to revolve on a plinth by a window overlooking the Hudson River, is the exhibition's most exquisite depiction of movement.

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<https://cutt.ly/6wvxmuW3>

The New York Times

The Best Art Books of 2017

The Times's art critics select their favorite art books (and books about art) of the year.



A spread from "Designing Dreams: A Celebration of Léon Bakst" shows some of Bakst's inspired textile designs from 1923 to 1924. Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

'DESIGNING DREAMS: A CELEBRATION OF LÉON BAKST'

Edited by Célia Bernasconi, John E. Bowlit and Nick Mauss
(Nouveau Musée National de Monaco and Mousse Publishing).

Celebration is right. While famous for his sets and costumes for Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, Bakst was also an inspired textile designer and fashion-forward thinker. This exhibition presents the totality, including Bakst's madly beautiful gouache textile studies. Its fabulous softbound catalog records the show's own superb design, by the artist Nick Mauss, who also made all the unique stenciled-cloth covers. With its matte paper and vintage photographs, the catalog feels sweetly interwar yet ahead of its time. All catalogs should document their exhibitions' installations.

Roberta Smith
The Best Art Books of 2017
The New York Times, December 14, 2017.
<https://cutt.ly/lwvxUgj3>

MOUSSE

POINT OF UNDOING

ANNE TERESA DE KEERSMAEKER, NICK MAUSS, HEIMO ZOBERNIG
AND CATHERINE WOOD IN CONVERSATION

A conversation about the relations between art, dance,
and theater: about the movement between the spaces and
values of these disciplines, and what is lost and gained.

Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker (1960
Mechelen, Belgium) is a contemporary
dance choreographer.

Nick Mauss' diverse artistic practice
encompasses drawing, sculpture and
performance along with some curatorial
projects that he initiated in the
last years.

The work of **Heimo Zobernig** spans
an array of media, from architectural
intervention and installation, through
performance, film and video, to sculp-
ture and painting.

Catherine Wood is a critic and as
Senior Curator (Performance) at Tate
Modern she works on performance proj-
ects, exhibitions, collection acquisitions
and displays.

If performance in Western visual art was founded upon ideas associated with experimental collaboration between different disciplines, a "theater of mixed means" since the 1950s (the Rauschenberg/Cage/Cunningham model), it seems that we are in a fascinating, evolved moment where single practitioners move between the spaces and rituals of those disciplines. Dance is presented in the gallery, but often without the collaboration of visual artists; artists make theater plays. A more fitting historical precedent for this mind-set might be the attitude of the Gutai group in their *Gutai on the Stage* (1957-1958): a group exhibition as theater presentation.

CATHERINE WOOD

We seem to be in a situation now that is less about that cross-disciplinarity colliding in a single space, and more about how dance or theater practice might appear within the space of art; or how art might appropriate the format of theater, or use choreography. What does this mean for your own practice?

ANNE TERESA DE KEERSMAEKER

I have spoken a lot about the kind of framed, limited time and space you have in the theater. In the museum, you have instead duration and continuity. You have the state of "availability": that the work of art is simply there. This raises, then, the question "do you also continue to perform even when there is not one spectator?"

CW

That's a nice characterization. Could you say something about the relative satisfaction of the two formats? Because your practice has long been about working in the theater, and that specific discipline. What do you lose from that in a gallery? I ask because I think that there is often an idea now that dance gains from the museum or gallery some kind of freedom and lack of constraint.

ADK

I find that, generally speaking, this idea of a day practice and an evening practice is quite crucial. Museum people are about daylight and visibility. Theater people go into the night...they go into the darkness. They make a campfire. The museum is a time of reflection, of celebration or of mourning during the daytime. In the museum, it's normally a time when people work. And in the theater, it is after working hours. The distinction is to do with what appears in the light. What appears in the darkness...

In terms of my own work, I was quite skeptical when there were these first propositions to perform in the museum at MoMA and Tate. Yet for both the dancers and myself, it was a transformative experience. You definitely get to a different relationship with your spectators, visitors. With the public, you approach the ideal duration and continuity, the aspect of proximity, the freedom of as many people... everyone can decide individually in his or her time and organize his or her time and space. There is the fact, also, that as a performer, you see the people that are watching you. This is nice. You know, when you are on stage, you basically have a black space with anonymous people, and you rarely see how they react. Somebody who decides to walk away in the theater is quite a strong statement. Somebody who goes away in the museum is liquid space and liquid time.

NICK MAUSS

An idealistic response to your question about where we are now is to see our current moment as a point of undoing, or at least as a moment of serious reevaluation of the terms of the relations between art, dance, and theater. But there is also the suspicion that the way in which dance and elements of theater appear in the spaces of art is a desultory engagement. What do we do with the glib language of performativity that circulates so freely now, with hollowed-out words such as *immersive, activation, liveness, engage, intervene, even queering*, applied so freely, and whenever convenient?

I believe that a central tension in the recent vogue for dance and stage performance in the spaces of art has to do with the very strange and shifting status of spectatorship, and with that, of attention and disinterest. The question of how an audience is constituted, on the one hand, and how attention can be modulated, on the other, calls into question how traditional spaces for art, such as museums, will function in the future.

CW

But Nick, what about the way in which "theater" figures in your work in installation, painting, sculpture, and also live performance?

NM

My own interest in theatrical notions of space, and in dance, came from a wish for a larger framework, both on the level of history and of the experience of the artwork, or of the exhibition as a form. I started making exhibitions in which my "work" became the arranging of dissonances between artworks and nonartworks by friends, known artists, and anonymous practitioners, in which the objects on view enacted new relationships, or took on the character of performers. But I was also looking at the "applied" role of painting in theater and dance, and this appeared as a trapdoor out of a solipsistic painting discourse to a space where decoration, irreverence, travesty, and contamination gain resonance.

CW

I agree, and I like how bodily movement in relation to artworks, or in the space of art, implies shifting positions that are emblematic of questions about value or meaning. I think a cluster of very recent presentations is relevant to this question: Anne Imhof's German Pavilion in Venice and her use of non-dance-derived movement

Opposite - Nick Mauss, *Intricate Others* installation view at Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art, Porto, 2017. © Nick Mauss. Courtesy: Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art, Porto, 2017. Photo: Filipe Braga



and choreography; Maria Hassabi's live dance installation, combined with her theater-lighting and carpet sculptures, at Documenta; and Trajal Harrel's Barbican exhibition (developed after his MoMA residency), in which the gallery spaces are set up with different performance situations (seating, stages, plinths), which are activated according to a complex, overlapping schedule, daily.

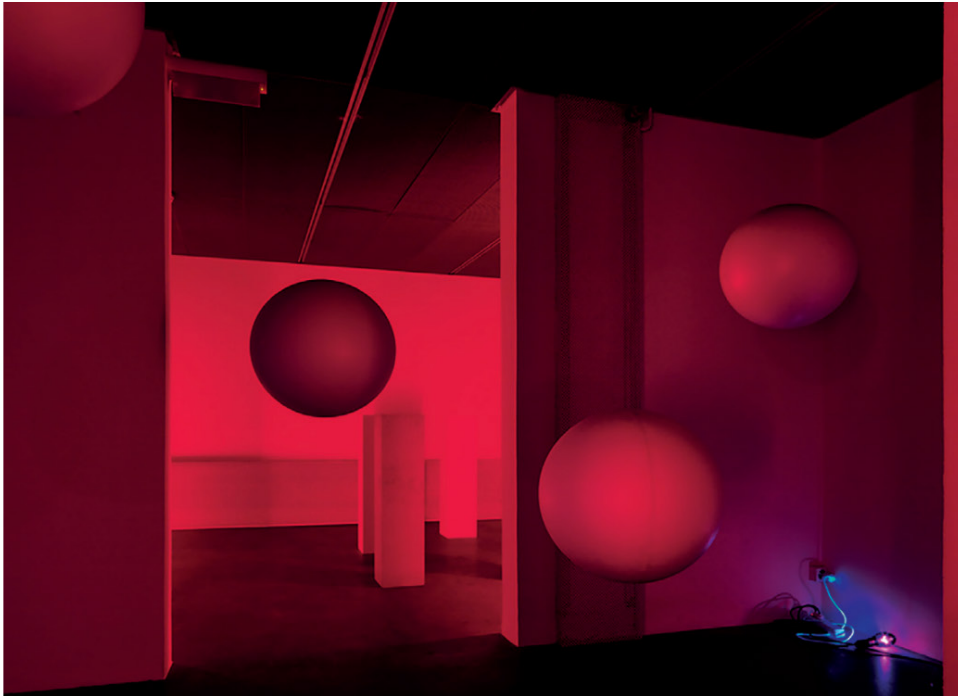
NM Trajal Harrel's work is deeply affecting—as dance, it manages to be both fragile and adamant, and it derives great power from the precise economy of its staging. As a viewer, one feels as though one has been invited personally to a special event, and the dances feel independent of, or even in defiance of, the institutional spaces that host them and for which they have been constructed. With simple make-do props, sleights of hand, and transformative gestures and expressions, Harrel conjures entire atmospheres and then pulverizes them.

Ralph Lemon's exhibition at the Kitchen in 2016 was by far the most important artwork I have seen in recent memory. Not only

within this context, modes that are calibrated in a much more theater-like way. It's not that flat work-time of daylight, actually.

I'm curious as to how you see this: as a merging of disciplinary specificity or the movement from one kind of practice into the space of another, a "contamination"?

ADK My collaboration with Ann Veronica Janssens has been important, not in terms of adding objects or "décor," but to find ways to work with what is already there in a space. It has always been a very strange thing, for me, that when you create dance, you work for months, you work during the day in the daylight, and you construct everything, the whole moving architecture of the dance, during daylight in the working hours. And then at the last moment you go into the black box of the theater, and you make it all black around, and you start to put artificial light, and you start to create a whole thing around it. I was always frustrated by that. Then it was Ann Veronica who made me think differently: to empty that space and look at ev-



Heimo Zobernig, *ohne Titel (in red)* installation view at Kunsthalle Zürich, Zürich, 2011. Courtesy: Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin. Photo: Archive HZ

did Lemon completely undo and blur the purpose and order of the "white cube" upstairs and the "black cube" downstairs, it was hard to leave the various experiences presented during its duration with a sense of how to capture it in a category—dance, lecture, exhibition, reading, casting, performance, installation, reperformance, political fantasy, and fiction were all held in play. This splinter stays with me: Yvonne Rainer cast to read the Marquis de Sade, almost as if she were one of those drag queens in Pasolini's *Salò*, interrupting her reading to wonder aloud why she had been asked to do this.

CW Yvonne embodies all of this in one person! In the works we've mentioned here, the codes of black box and white cube are scrambled in ways that unsettle the position of the viewer and the experience of time and duration. Interestingly, Imhof and Harrel both move on from the looping strategies of artists like Tino Sehgal's enactors' permanent presence. Instead, they create arcs and pauses of attention

ery object—including the body: the body, the sound, the existing architecture. She directed me to observe it and then to try and frame it, to frame what was already existing. Without adding. The Latin origin of the word *abstraction* comes from the Latin word [meaning] "to pull away." When I think about embodying abstraction, it means performing an operation of taking away. But somehow to allow more freedom to emerge, and to create another space that is available. So, it is not the fact of putting objects on stage but... the framework...

CW So actually Anne Veronica's contribution was to help you think through that framework materially and conceptually—from a point of view as a visual artist—rather than adding an object or a décor. A different kind of cross-disciplinarity?

ADK Exactly, exactly. And she also helped me with Wiels. She was the one that said let's take the windows away and allow the daylight

and its movement to come in. And she systematically always takes things away. In the theater also, when we worked together, it was always operations of taking things away but not adding objects. Sort of scrape things away and you get to the DNA of things. Whether you come in a theater or in a museum space, just first looking at what is available. So it's nearly also an aesthetic, ecological, ethical thing. Since my first collaboration with Ann Veronica about nine years ago, which was with *Keeping Still* in the theater, we have this joke going on that in the last decade we don't have a technical crew anymore. We just have a cleaning crew. We throw everything out, you know, all the dust and all the draperies and so on.

CW
Heimo, what does this characterization of the white cube gallery-time as "daytime" or daylight mean for you? I'm interested because it focuses less on the usual question of theater as fixed ritual versus the gallery as autonomous, ambient. I wonder how you think about this daylight mode of viewing in relation to "pictoriality"?

CW
These approaches of yours in the gallery with lighting might appear quite "theatrical," in contrast with the stripping away that Anne Teresa describes. At the same time, the "theatrical" has long been a denigrated term, art historically. Is it a term that is relevant to contemporary sculpture, such as yours, Heimo? What kind of seeing do you want or imagine with such an approach? Is it about seeing with the body as well as the eyes? Are you interested in a viewer's narrative projection into the scene?

HZ
In my work now, I totally do not refer to the theater. Theater, dance, film, etc., are some of many art forms that reflect on reality as such: The body takes in reality with every sense. Next, there is the brain that finds combinations for everything and creates perception: the "presentation." We then know what is behind, above, below us. We have a rough vision of our position, in space and time. The things, the spaces, the city lead our way through the world. And this is reflected in very different art forms.



Heimo Zobernig, *untitled*, 2009, installation view at CAPC, musée d'art contemporain, Bordeaux, 2009. Courtesy: Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris. Photo: Archive HZ

1 UNHAPPY DAYS IN THE ART WORLD?
De-skilling Theater, Re-skilling Performance by Claire Bishop, December 10, 2011
Brooklyn Rail

HEIMO ZOBERNIG
Light has a predominant role in theater. In its qualities for composition, it is a highly complex medium. In my early works as stage designer, I repeatedly searched for very simple but effective solutions in lighting. I wanted to make sure that the light design is easy to understand—only one light source, for example. But even simple light settings have complications.

In an exhibition, I am looking for the opposite of dramatic light. No shadow play. I want to have a situation where you do not think about it at all. It is bright, and everything is obvious—a pragmatic point of view.

On other occasions, I was using the light and its color as the dominant figure or medium in itself. My contribution for the Kunstverein Bonn was a huge space with nothing but engulfing heavy lighting. For the CAPC Bordeaux, my installation was dominated by a red: the vibrant red light in the space originated from a red curtain on the one side and a video projection of an animated red curtain on the other.

Of course, the behavior/performance of an audience/viewer of sculpture can be seen as dance performance. And, evidently, all art forms are part of our reality. Additionally, I like to make references to the routine/behavior of people in the situation of theater, dance, music performance. But not in the sense of genre crossover.

CW
Related to this point, recall that Claire Bishop wrote a few years ago in her *Brooklyn Rail* piece¹, "dance satisfies a yearning for skill and seduction that visual art performance rejected in its inaugural refusal of spectacle and theater." Is it an extension of the "reskilling" that she says it is? Or a real moment of deep rethinking about how we segregate these disciplines? (Or is art just sucking up and claiming everything else?) Anne Teresa has described learning something from the conceptual and material discipline of Ann Veronica. What is art learning from theater? (And perhaps to Nick specifically, since you so productively borrow from theater and dance in your



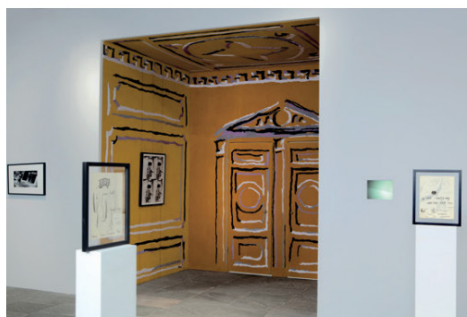
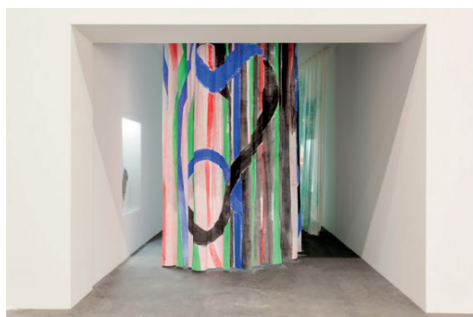
Left - Nick Mauss, *Untitled*, 2014; Léon Bakst, *Une nymphe, costume for L'Après-midi d'un faune*, ca. 1912. Exhibition design by Nick Mauss. *Designing Dreams: a celebration of Léon Bakst* installation view at Nouveau Musée National de Monaco, Monaco, 2016. © Nick Mauss
Right - Heimo Zobernig, *untitled*, 1998, installation view at Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn, 1998. Photo: Archive HZ

Below, from top clockwise - Nick Mauss, *Untitled*, 2014, installation view at Art Basel | Art Unlimited, 2014. © Nick Mauss. Courtesy: 303 Gallery, New York and Campoli Presti, London / Paris. Photo: Andrea Rossetti

Garry Winogrand, *Beverly Hills, California*, 1978, from the portfolio *Women are better than man. Not only have they survived, they do prevail*, 1968-1980; Eyre de Lanux, [Sketches of women], date unknown; Nick Mauss, *Concern, Crush, Desire*, 2011; Andy Warhol, *Untitled (Cyclist)*, ca. 1976; Nick Mauss, *Untitled*, 2011; Eyre de Lanux, [Sketch for Consuelo], date unknown. Whitney Biennial 2012 installation view at Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 2012. © Nick Mauss. Courtesy: Whitney Museum of Art, New York

Nick Mauss, *Depend, fasten, lower, suppose, dwell*, 2010. *Non-Solo Show, Non-Group Show* installation view at Kunsthalle Zürich, Zurich. © Nick Mauss. Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography

Heimo Zobernig installation view at MUDAM Luxembourg, Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg, 2014. Photo: Remi Villaggi



Opposite - Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, *Work/Travail/Arbeid* at WIELS, Brussels, 2015. Photo: Anne Van Aerschot



Catherine Wood
Point of Undoing
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own work, in order to resituate the art object in a meaningful/useful social context: do you have disciplinary envy?!

NM Disciplinary specificity is essential and rare, especially if it manages to reinvent the discipline. As a spectator of Anne Teresa's work, I would say that this specificity is crucial to the work, and distinguishes it from other occurrences of dance in the museum that tend to look imported.

Perhaps I am motivated by a kind of envy to look to fields outside art that appear truly rigorous. To study the couture of Madame Grès, for example, as though I had Isa Genzken's sculptures in mind. I am trying to think and see together what is otherwise seen apart, so I tend to move across or in combinations of disciplines. But a specific disciplinary framework can be a great excuse to articulate new ideas. In the twentieth century, ballet and avant-garde dance sparked new possibilities for criticism in the voices of Edwin Denby and Jill Johnston. Johnston herself admits that "...while my column was still headlined DANCE, or DANCE JOURNAL, my subjects were anything but." She goes on to say, about the "confusion of roles (artists making dances, dancers using artists as performers)," that "those games of identification are usually substitutes for seeing... they arise from fear."

One thing that is now possible, rather than the experimental, cross-disciplinary collisions of the classical avant-garde you refer to, is the construction of historical collisions, by which I mean the active rewiring and re-presentation of histories—"what if" or "as if." Trajal Harrel performs such an operation in his cycle *The Twenty Looks or Paris Is Burning at the Judson Church*, by taking the synchronism of Judson Dance Theater with the development of vogue balls as a way to mutually interrogate and assign new values to both forms and histories.

I had such an experience years ago when I watched a VHS tape of *Saturday Night at the Baths* and noticed Robert Morris's infamous bare-chested self-portrait in helmet and chains decorating the bedroom wall of one of the protagonists, somehow perfectly out of place and in place at the same time. Alvin Baltrop's photographs of men cruising on the West Side piers under Gordon Matta-Clark's giant cutout of the pier facade, or even the thought of George Balanchine and Merce Cunningham choreographing during the same historical moment, have a similar effect of almost unfathomable copresence: history as heterotopia. We can take our current vantage point as a position from which to radically reconfigure, or think together, previously unthinkable relations.

I'm interested in deep discipline, whatever form that may take. I am trying to imagine, for example, a museum that could show the charged spaces between a painting, a perfume, a gesture, a dress, and a film. Your question about how we segregate disciplines is crucial, particularly in a global situation tending more and more towards polarization and essentialism. But I don't want to acquiesce to the notion that art is a single, steam-rolling entity that has it within its power to suck up and claim other forms, without regard for their specific histories and economies. To do so would give the current notion of art too much power, and would mean that it is no longer possible to think of other kinds of art.

CW Tino Sehgal raised questions in the past about the relative cultural power of theatre and art: seeing the arena of art as the locus of significant effect. But Anne Teresa, you are committed to working in theatre. Yet is the disciplinary specificity of theatre something you seek to break? I'm trying to think from the work of yours that I've seen on stage. You haven't gone as far as to make the whole situation light inside a theater? Do you feel that would be cross-contaminating the wrong codes somehow?

APK Well, the fact that the audience are in the dark is relatively recent. Until Wagner, there was always light in the audience. It was Wagner who said that the audience and the orchestra had to go in the dark and to create this kind of super illusion. Before there was always light. It also has to do with architecture, in the sense that since the Italian

theaters, very often you have the possibility to strip the stage, but the theaters are full, full, full of information architecturally. So the attention created by light is a focus thing also. We had the premiere of my new work in this industrial space in the Ruhr, in Germany, and we purposely started the performance at seven o'clock with the daylight, and then the night came in. The piece incorporated the falling of the day and then in the night, coming from the darkness into the light.

And my experience has been that when you try to do that in a black-box theater in the evening, then you have to do it with artificial light, and it's super difficult and you can't compete with it. And also, of course, because the stage is very fixed, and everyone is sitting on their chairs. I also realize people prefer to go to museums... but people have real difficulty to stay in groups in stillness! It's this notion of shared concentration, and attention in a group is super difficult.

If the theater performance is historically also an extension of sitting around the campfire and then assisting at a ritual and going to church, which is, you know, a moment of reflection and celebration or mourning and where, as a collective, you sit together and create physical stillness... I mean, to a certain extent theater performance grew out of that, and in the same way it disappeared in Western society. It hasn't in other parts of the world, but in Western society it disappeared. I sometimes wonder if the same thing is going to happen with theaters. That people will not go to the theater anymore.

CW But it's interesting to consider how the matrix of relations that is "theatre" morphoses in new ways too. Nick, in terms of your works that don't involve actual live dance, where you use tape or metal structures to articulate a provisional architecture, or make and install curtains, often in relation to painting: could you say a bit more about what you hinted at earlier in terms of utilizing ideas of theater to "situate" painting?

And maybe also you could say a little about your work for Frieze Projects, which—perhaps unlike Anne Teresa at WIELS—put the dancers very much on display?

NM I can't really think of an art viewing experience that is not theatrical. But a particular relationship to theater in my work comes through in my focus on the frame. In making exhibitions, I put a great deal of emphasis on the presence of people looking at my work, apprehending it but also becoming the figures in the work. Protocols of spectatorship are warped or rerouted by structures such as the ones you've described, this banister-like sculpture that is a drawing of the movement of the eye through the space, or hanging, collapsible rooms made of ribbons that impose themselves on a space while delimiting another kind of possibility. I think of the way one might move through the space, and what can be encountered along the way, or how this experience can be frustrated. The automated curtains are large paintings running on automated tracks programmed to open and close at varying intervals, creating volumes of air between them. They open and close, revealing nothing but the different spaces they create.

The most directly theatrical work I can think of is *Concern, crush, desire*, a velvet appliqué reiteration of a proscenium-like antechamber designed by Christian Bérard for Jean-Michel Frank, invoking the overlay of stage design with interior architecture with surrealism. The work is installed in such a way that the viewer enters the work and finds herself looking out the "fourth wall" into a space in which a constellation of other works is encountered. At the 2012 Whitney Biennial, I mounted recto-verso rebus drawings by Eyre de Lanux on freestanding pedestals like game pieces, or characters populating this scenario.

My work "with" dance has generally been linked to a curatorial process. Dance objects and artifacts have an amazing charge, but a dubious status, and I think they pose interesting questions with regard to the supposedly more stable status of art objects and the narratives to which they are made to adhere. But *INVERSIONS*, in 2014, the work I made for Frieze Projects, was the first time I made what would normally be called a performance. The work was entirely shaped by the context of the fair and by my questions about how a performance might exist within its particular energy. It also became a frame for a set of invitations I was able to make to two ballet companies, to choreographer Lorena Randi, and to

Opposite - Nick Mauss, *INVERSIONS*, 2014. *Frieze Projects* at Frieze, London. © Nick Mauss. Courtesy: 303 Gallery, New York and Campoli Presti, London / Paris. Photo: Ken Okiishi

Kim Gordon and Juliana Huxtable, none of whom were intended to be compatible with one another, but rather singular in their roles within the setting I devised. Juxtaposed in the entirety of their internal and external contradictions—to bring a way of working over from “curating.” I resisted a performance with traditional staging conventions, turning the process of a ballet inside-out, rather than presenting it frontally and temporarily. There were long pauses and interruptions, things let to happen as they happened, and also simultaneous intensities—rehearsals and improvisation. And moments that also felt “on stage.”

The antic ebb and flow of the art fair’s audience became an important element of the work. It was fascinating to see people try to negotiate this kind of time and viewership that was very different from how one is supposed to “use” and “do” an art fair, and what to do with that space of uncertainty as well as the pleasure of viewing something that is forming without a purpose.

CW
It’s a tough call to negotiate this highly purpose-driven context, the fair. A losing battle so far as inviting any kind of concentration that Anne Teresa was talking about. But how to “perform” as a question of asserting visibility is surely a key part of what it means to make work today, so in this way, the fair is a harsh frontline context in which to experiment! Whatever criticisms there are of ambient modes of museum performance, it remains in contrast with even the most atomized autonomy of the conventional gallery situation.

Heimo, speaking of conventional viewing modes, I was especially curious about your exhibition at MUDAM, in Luxembourg, where you separated the theatrical quality of the sculpture from the pictorial quality of your painting. How do these two approaches to illusion coexist, for you?

HZ
It does not matter whether the objects/sculptures are theatrical or not. For the perception of things in a space, we want to and have to go beyond and around them—in order to understand them. With pictures, a similar thing can be experienced; they, too, encourage the viewer to observe them from various distances.

In order to be able to move freely, I was showing paintings and sculptures in separate rooms. The viewers should not trip over things when they step back to view the paintings from different perspectives. Certainly, paintings are objects, and sculptures are pictorial. Through the spatial separation of sculptures and paintings, the differences can be experienced—probably in a better way.

CW
And referring to your Bregenz show, Heimo: what about the language of plinths, podiums, platforms, screens, and of furniture such as shelves: it is as though your work is a perfect setting for the display of something else, or for some action to take place?

HZ
It is exactly what it is meant to be: objects, sculptures in an exhibition. The dimensions result from the common use of such objects. Take shelves, for example. We have certain experiences and ideas of the usage of those objects. Curiously, we talk to them: Where is this book? Can I put this on here? and the like. We have ideas and knowledge of their character and style. I try to show their structure in a very reduced form. And with “reduction/reduce,” I refer to the fundamental form of things, in order to make their impact/effect/appeal comparable. In the exhibition design, we are confronted with these things as sculptures, and in this setting, we can reflect our vision and use of everyday objects. In other site-specific installations, the sculptural aspects of those objects would step behind their usage as a display. However, the exhibition in Bregenz focused on the inspection rather than their application.

ADK
In dance, the fact is that we create an experience. The fact that we don’t create something that can be speculated (sold) and that with dance, we are doomed to disappearance... let’s celebrate that, no?

CW
Yes, absolutely. It’s beautiful. But the interesting thing is, since the so-called dematerialization of the art object in the sixties, art needs to learn some things from theater and dance. Learning about calibrating time and configuring spectatorship. These issues are

ASK
Yeah, but maybe that doesn’t really work in the market.

CW
I’m talking more about sharing a work. I was thinking, for example, of the artist Senga Nengudi, who used to collaborate with a dancer, Maren Hassinger. She’s part of the African American Studio Z movement in the 1970s. She chose to make sculpture out of women’s tights and sand: stretching the nylons and pinning them on the gallery wall because she said that she liked the idea that she could turn up with her handbag and open it and make her work. And her sculpture was as much about portability and disappearance as the performance that she staged with Hassinger around it. But of course, you’re right, galleries are selling them as objects. But that comes after the intention of the artist.

Yet my point is that “performance” is the catchall under which live art, dance, theater appear in galleries and museums. Shannon Jackson identifies the elements of performance (describing an emergent context of performance studies) as “gesture, image, space, voice, facial expression, corporeal motion, and collective gathering” but leaves out materials, which in my view (and in both of your work) can appear as performers or performative elements.

Without wishing to replicate the casual application of terms to do with performance in the art world that Nick describes, is the “choreographic” a better term to approach this continuum between bodies moving and things? What does choreography mean for you both, in terms of considering our encounter with an aesthetic space that includes all of these elements, as well as / in relation to the art object? The idea that beyond dancing per se, choreography is a way of stabilizing or ritualizing a “state of movement” seems more and more important—as does the idea of witnessing, and collective gathering as the foundation of the experience of art.

NM
I see choreography as a mode of organization and reorganization, of working with material over time to find new forms and sequences, as well as bringing historical material to life in the present. The walls of Eileen Gray’s villa E-1027 are stenciled with commands that prescribe uses (and misuses) for its different spaces: ENTER SLOWLY, LAUGHTER FORBIDDEN, BIRD SANCTUARY... I am fixated on the architecture of encounter, which vibrates with my own memories of experiences of viewership or spectatorship. Of being confronted with an object or an event that produces new language. Choreography becomes a spatial organization, a pacing, a delimiting of spaces. What I am curious about now is the meeting of choreography with the archive, with the traces and artifacts of movement, or how thinking through their status destabilizes the status of the artwork.

ADK
Well, firstly, I am a choreographer; therefore I work on organizing movement through time and space with a certain energy. The time and space of a theater and the time and space of a museum remain fundamentally different. Secondly, what I like so much about dancing is embodying: the presence of the body as a medium. Thirdly, I am interested in collective experience: in relations, relationships between people, whether in the theater or the museum. Ultimately, in the museum, the space and time allow you as an individual to decide how to attend to the work. When people get connected, the intensity of it can be really quite beautiful. I feel that at WIELS, you had people coming back day after day. People said, “I want to be here.”

CW
And the constellation of an audience group of people you see is a kind of choreography of their free will. It’s not because they’re expected by convention to sit in seat number E14 for an hour? I also find that kind of mobile architecture of the audience quite thrilling.

ADK
Yes, yet within these shifting contexts, the central question that remains, maybe, is how you can create stillness and concentration. Sometimes the work needs that.

POINT OF UNDOING
C. WOOD



Left - Nick Mauss installation view at 303 Gallery, New York, 2015.
© Nick Mauss. Courtesy: 303 Gallery, New York. Photo: John Berens

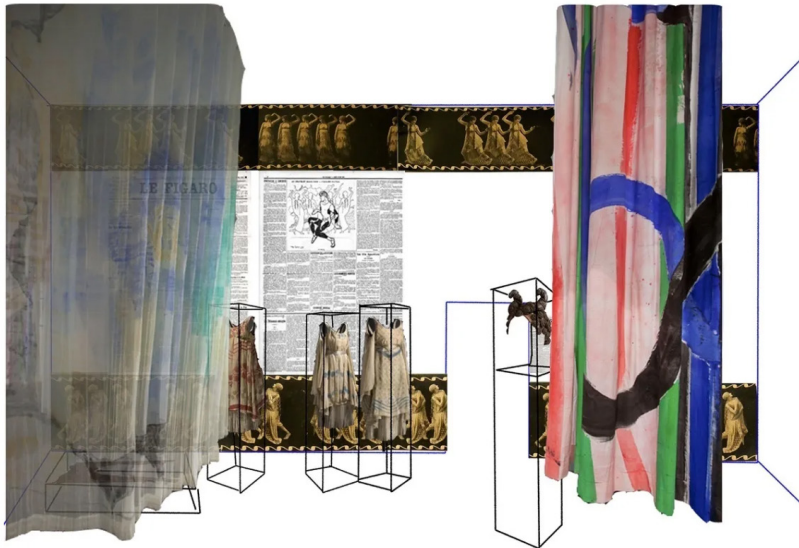
Below - Nick Mauss, *Answering a glance, glance up* installation view at Campoli Presti, Rome, 2012-2013. Courtesy: the artist and Campoli Presti, London / Paris



ARTFORUM

Nick Mauss

Nick Mauss discusses his work on “Design Dreams, A Celebration of Léon Bakst”



Nick Mauss, visualization for Spectre/Faune, 2016.

Nick Mauss frequently stages and animates historical material in his works, which revel in unexpected juxtapositions and recontextualizations. It is fitting that he has envisioned the exhibition layout for “Design Dreams, A Celebration of Léon Bakst” at the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco—one of several shows worldwide this year celebrating the 150th birthday of Bakst, the consummate set and costume designer of the Ballets Russes, among other creative roles. Here, Mauss describes the itinerary through the exhibition as well as Bakst’s enduring impact. The show is on view through January 15, 2017.

I OFTEN INCLUDE PIECES BY OTHER ARTISTS IN MY WORK, and for me the interest is always in the resonance of that work, whether it has a sense of urgency. It may be historical work by someone no longer living or no longer known, which allows for a shift in emphasis or a redistribution of attention. I am less interested in standard historicization than in how the work vibrates through layers of histories and senses of the present moment.

Celia Bernasconi, curator at the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco, contacted me to see if I would consider working with her and dance historian John E. Bowlt on a historical exhibition about Léon Bakst. She asked me to be the exhibition designer, which is something I've always dreamed of doing and in many ways I've already done in my work, but not explicitly. Much of the way I work is about the negotiation of distances and intimacies, and about reorienting the roles of artist and viewer and artwork. I think about the spray of implications of "the decorative." I was drawn to modernist ballet because it's a multiauthored, but not necessarily collaborative, form. And these twentieth-century ballets are inextricably linked to and propelled by innovations in the visual arts, especially in painting—ballet is where painting is "put in its place" as decoration.

Given the indelible impression Bakst left on twentieth-century visual culture and early modernist spectacle culture, it's surprising how few people seem to know his work. In developing the exhibition, I learned that aside from his innovations for the stage, Bakst was an undeniable influence on Paul Poiret and other fashion designers, changing the world of fashion forever. And while he didn't live long enough to work in Hollywood, you can find his atmospheres of excess, especially his synthetic Orientalism, drifting from Hollywood to B movies to Jack Smith. His imagery has had a strong afterlife. In the show we are even exhibiting some second- and third-generation costumes that live off fumes of what he designed. Bakst was really pathbreaking in the way he did so many different things. He was a set and costume designer; he made jewelry and paintings; he wrote treatises on fashion; and he gave lectures. He was a polymath and entrepreneur. He cast a wide net and operated in a variety of media and roles, and also upended them. He seems especially interesting to revisit now.

In terms of approaching the work of another artist—there are so many questions that can run alongside conventions of curating. What is a way to actually fully incorporate the work, literally take it in—but also step away and actually disappear again? Because Diaghilev forbade the filming of his productions, his dances live in a space of total projection. I tend to work well with absence. But at the same time I wanted to see how close I could get to the material. I made many visits to the museum's storage, and I saw that the costumes were often collages of culturally incompatible fabrics and techniques, or that the amalgamation of ornamental motifs had been hand-painted or airbrushed directly onto the costumes, and they looked incredibly fresh.

It became clear that textile ornament was an integral part of Bakst's logic that I could use as a guiding principle—you can see it in his famous billowing costume drawings, in his set designs, and in his late designs for the New York fabric company Selig, of which we were able to include many original gouaches. So these motifs that could be found throughout Bakst's work, on a cellular level and in a grand scheme of his stage designs, became a literal substrate to the exhibition, an inherently disparate grammar that unites everything.

The big challenge with an exhibition like this is that you're trying to show, in the static museum setting, objects which were never intended to be seen as museological artifacts. They are remnants of an elaborate time-based spectacle that lasted for a few evenings, or maybe a few seasons. How to show these fragments is something I'm still thinking about, and it is such a challenge: How can you make a displayed costume become vivid enough that you want to read it like a text? How can the impact these productions had at the time they were performed—and they were very radical—be transmitted?

It was important for me to work with what was already there, and to take cues from the things I was discovering. In programs and publications from the time, I found evidence of the way these ballets were advertised, received, and consumed. One publication in particular, *Comoedia Illustré*, combined fantastically written descriptions of the productions with photographs, drawings, and ornamental borders in very dynamic page spreads. I transferred the space of these pages onto the exhibition walls as a way to frame, double, and narrate the costumes, headdresses, and miniature set maquettes.

Framing and making conflicted spaces is central to what I'm doing. In this case, I was able to bring the work of Bakst to the public in a way that is hopefully a rich experience. From the point of view of artistic practice, I was able to synthesize something about historical material and its formal problems, such as the basic (but often sidestepped) tension of translating two dimensions into three dimensions, from Bakst's highly idealized drawings to the reality of the costumes and the sets, of getting how exactly to display their formal properties as constructions, their reception by an outraged or enthralled public—the list of problems could go on for days. I hope I have created a succession of experiences for the viewer that keeps these tensions and questions in motion.