[00:00:01.140] **- Alex Kitnick**
Hello. I just want to commend all you, winter warriors who aren't dissuaded by canceled shuttles and inches of powder. So thank you for coming out. My name is Alex Kitnick, and I teach art history here at Bard College. And I was raised on abjection, the anti-aesthetic, and dematerialization. A trifecta of strategies meant to corrode the traditions of art, namely beauty, art's commodity status, and the author, too. I wasn't the only one who learned these lessons. For a time, they constituted the very dogma of post-'60s contemporary art. And though in many ways I stubbornly hold on to them, a bevy of artists, including and perhaps even led by Nick Mauss, have made it their business to question and reconsider these received truths. As Nick wrote in a remembrance of the art critic Douglas Crimp, after reading him, he said, "I realized that I also had to brush history against the grain." In other words, he had to find another way. But how to do this? Nick has made a method out of locating other traditions. Spending time with minor figures from Florine Stettheimer to Ian White, whose papers are housed here at CCS, he patiently unravels the ways in which these figures reworked major traditions in order to pilfer new forms of pleasure.

[00:01:35.110] - **Alex Kitnick**
Instead of fanning out on the opticality of modernism or the phenomenology of minimalism, Nick searches out queer corners where art, dance, fashion, and photography run up next to one another, imbricate, hold each other, embrace, and then he pays the spirit forward into the future. Nick Mauss has done so much to expand our ideas around art and art history in the 20th and 21st centuries. He is an artist for whom research is central, but whose work looks nothing like the practices of so many research-based practices, which is to say it looks quite lovely. He is a writer whose sentences are sufficed with analytical intelligence, yet still curve with the line of beauty. Though I'm not sure he would accept the designation curator, he has orchestrated exhibitions, including Transmissions, a sort of gentle manifesto, at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 2018. And he is also a teacher. I would love to be a fly on the wall in one of his classes. Nick graduated from the Cooper Union in New York about 25 years ago. He has lived in New York and Berlin. He is currently a professor at the Art Academy in Düsseldorf. Tonight he is here at Bard.

[00:02:54.580] - **Alex Kitnick**
Please join me in welcoming him.

[00:03:03.560] - **Nick Mauss**
Thank you, Alex, for that really very moving introduction and for the invitation to come here and speak to all of you tonight. And thank you to everyone here at CCS, Casey, Amanda, Mary, Mariano, for making it possible for me to visit and stay the night. I taught in the MFA program a couple of years ago. I'm very happy to be here again. I've never been here in the wintertime. And in thinking about the context of this program, it seemed like the most productive thing I could do is to really focus on my work through the lens of exhibition making, which more and more over time really has become like my primary concern, as much as it must be yours, I imagine. So there will be kind of an onrush of images eventually, and the talk is a bit jumpy, but I just want to give as best as I can a sense of the different processes I put into play as I think and rethink what an exhibition can be. As a way in, I'll start with an early collaboration with Ken Okiishi, my partner, from 2007, which was an exploded illustrated book of poems, more specifically a translation of Arthur Rimbaud's Season in Hell, translated by Ken using an early Google translation app.

[00:04:34.260] - **Nick Mauss**
So this is a long time before AI, where Ken really took into account all the glitches and fractures of language produced by this translation across centuries. And I, in turn, illustrated Okiishi's new poem with the same disregard and infelicity to direct illustration and meaning that Okiishi had sort of levied against the source poem. We presented the book as an exhibition in a few venues. This is what you see here in Berlin [PICTURE], suspending each page of the book in frames from the ceiling of the gallery and creating a kind of other space within the space, the exhibition space itself. And this also still by way of an introduction is an exhibition I made in New York in 2015 where you can see a kind of internal logic of staging at work where in a way, you know, the parts of the exhibition are indivisible and the gesture of drawing takes over and reorganizes the entire space. This movement I wanted to describe in the exhibition, sort of from the space of the page and the intimacies of drawing and writing to a social space, such as the space of the exhibition, came out of this kind of awareness or this acute fixation with the way a viewer— and I include myself when I think about the viewer— moves through a space or is coerced through a space or implicated in it.

[00:06:24.970] - **Nick Mauss**
The sense that the space of the exhibition itself is a time-based medium, which is essentially the focus of what I want to talk about today. So around 2010, there was a shift in how I perceived myself as an artist, and that's when I began curating exhibitions. We can talk later about, you know, Alex brought up whether I would accept the term curator. I began making exhibitions of works by other artists and starting to think more concretely of exhibitions as open frameworks. And this happened at the same time that I began to write about artists and practices that were important to me. But which were for many reasons overlooked or not part of the broader discourse. So I hope you'll see as I go on how these impulses have become integrated over time into a way of working where my authorship is very much destabilized. So in 2006, I naively cold-called Lorraine O'Grady to invite her to participate in an exhibition I was organizing in some rooms at the Chelsea Hotel. And she was gracious enough to entertain the idea and invited me to her studio at the Westbeth. And then over the course of 3 hours, I learned the story of her multiple careers as a novelist, a translator for the State Department, and a rock music critic.

[00:07:59.080] - **Nick Mauss**
All in all, she narrated her very late formation as an artist. O'Grady lent the photographs I'd wanted to show from her landmark series, Miscegenated Family Album (1994), but she also decided, as we talked about the central role of language in the exhibition I was conceiving, that I should include works from a series that had never been shown publicly before, the now very well-known text collage series, Cutting Out the New York Times, which she had made in the hospital while recovering from surgery in 1977. Here, the only two installation shots I have of what became "Between the Lines", the first exhibition I conceived with works by other artists, among them Tariq Alvi, Charles Henri Ford, Kianja Strobert, Ken Okiishi, Danny McDonald, and Paulina Olowska. And something that grew out of this is that both Lorraine and I were invited by Adam Szymczyk to present our work together in a very open-ended exhibition he had curated at Kunsthalle Basel. And so you see Miscegenated Family Album on one wall and these Conversation Chair sculptures I had made in the middle. And this is me laying out Cutting out the New York Times, the entirety of which was shown on the opposite wall.

[00:09:20.450] - **Nick Mauss**
So in retrospect, it was a decisive step for me to assert this other kind of authority by bringing together works by artists, many of whom I did not know, that had a sense of urgency for me. And I really used the exhibition as a pretext to reach out to people. Like O'Grady, but also the gallerist Mitchell Algas lent me, for example, an alphabet by the surrealist poet Charles Henri Ford. He literally gave me an entire portfolio of 26 leaves and kind of let me wander out of the gallery without signing anything, 'cause he understood, I think, what it was that I needed to do. That I wanted to make very intergenerational, anachronic exhibition and not just a reinscription of existing networks, but to create these different and unpredictable associations. It was around this time that I also published my first piece of writing, encouraged by then editor of Artforum, Tim Griffin, and it really had never occurred to me to write or to publish anything or to think of writing as part of my identity as an artist, least of all to think of myself as having a voice that could register on the level of official discourse as represented by art magazines by Artforum.

[00:10:46.420] - **Nick Mauss**
So Tim's invitation was really important in that it kind of prompted me to orient myself and to find my own context within and against this existing context. And ultimately what I ended up writing about was the work and activism of the painter Jochen Klein, who was lost to AIDS at a young age and whose work had almost no visibility in 2000. So writing about him was also a way to sort of get closer to the work and sort of bring it to the surface and into connection with contemporary practice. And I bring all this up just to say that what I realized as I was writing and going through the editing process with the people at Artforum, they treated me like a critic. And at a certain point I said, I'm an artist, I'm not a critic, and that too sort of was an important thing for me to realize that the writing, like the making of exhibitions, from my position is most effective if conceived of as my work, not as some adjacent activity. So this impulse to create new constellations of work, partly as a frame of reference for my own work, became more formalized in an installation I would go on to make around another kind of absent figure, the artist Christian Bérard, who's a painter, scenographer, costume designer, and fashion illustrator working in Paris in the '40s and '50s, who at that time was completely ubiquitous and by the year 2010 almost unknown.

[00:12:34.300] - **Nick Mauss**
So in my mind, he became a kind of cipher or a missing link in a queer history of painting. That was actively connected to theater, ballet, fashion, literature, and cinema. Beauty and the Beast, Cocteau's film, is dedicated to him. It's the film for which he made the sets that you have probably all seen. But his work had become very difficult to access by the time I became curious about it. The Museum of Modern Art which owns this incredible self-portrait called "On the Beach: Double Self-Portrait" from 1933, has not, to my knowledge, exhibited the painting since its acquisition over 60 years ago. Something that will recur as I walk through different exhibitions is this, this moment of not being able to access something or kind of coming up against a wall. Omissions are not accidents, as the poet Marianne Moore wrote. So I realized that it was probably because of Bérard's affiliation with theater, with decoration, with fashion, all the things that art historian Michael Fried derisively called that faggot sensibility, he had been written out of history. So for me, he also came to represent in a way the repercussions of a way of writing history that actively devalues queer protagonists, their sensibilities, their histories.

[00:14:15.610] - Nick Mauss
And I wanted to come up with a way of sort of evoking this figure and the absence of the figure, as well as his sort of larger-than-life presence within my own work without spelling it out. So the question became, could I render this as a space or as a sensation? And I learned that one of the interiors that Bérard had designed for the architect Jean-Michel Franck in 1935 was still extant. And I went to visit it and very instinctively understood that I had to remake it basically from memory. So I measured out its dimensions in paces, almost like a Nauman performance. And with my hands. And then I collaborated with a seamstress who worked primarily with TV and theater on fabricating these velvet walls and the ceiling of this room. And it should be noted, it's, you know, it's not painted. Each brushstroke is painstakingly cut out of ribbon appliquéd to a velvet backing. And that remove from painting was also very interesting to me; this allusion to, fresco, as in a Pompeian room kind of turned into a scribble, blown up again, turned back into a room. All these distancing techniques and transformations really caught my attention.

[00:15:43.850] - Nick Mauss
So the surviving passageway designed by Bérard became a kind of life-size architectural

non sequitur. Or like a period room that I dropped into my work and ultimately into the Marcel Breuer architecture of the former Whitney Museum. And it was called Concern Crush Desire. And each time it was exhibited, I created a new kind of constellation of works around and within it. So this is from the Whitney where you see it with this incredible Mardsen Hartley from their collection. It was installed backwards so that the viewer was first greeted by these double doors. And then suddenly you're inside the space and sort of have to reorient yourself and try to understand where you are. And then you realize that the space is in fact a miniature theater with an open fourth wall. And this whole elaborate contraption is in fact about the act of crossing the threshold itself, about some kind of transformation. And I remember really spending ages trying to find the right doorknob because the act of making contact with the door and opening it was so important. And when the work was included in the 2012 Biennial, I selected works from the collection, as I said, but many of which had never been previously shown and required restoration, like this really incredible Red Shoe assemblage by May Wilson.

[00:17:32.540] - Nick Mauss
These [Charles] Demuth watercolors hadn't been shown in a long time. And all of that sort of proposed my own genealogy within and against the larger frame of the biennial and the weight of the contemporary— well, speaking of, it's opening tonight— the weight of the contemporary that it has to bear and the limits of the museum itself. And this genealogical impulse becomes more and more amplified with time, as you'll see. So the artworks populated the space almost like protagonists or actors. Here you have these double-sided drawings by Eyre de Lanux, designer and architect who lived around the same time as Christian Bérard, on these tall, thin display devices I devised. And they're a bit like stand-ins for dramatic characters. And the drawings are also love letters to this woman she's in love with, and they're written in a kind of modernist hieroglyphic, really interesting objects. So this work, Concern Crush Desire, was really the first instance in which I managed to pull several strands together that until then had been separate, where I kind of realized that my work could present itself as porous to other practices and histories. The “gesture of invitation“, I became more aware of, as this very loaded catalyst.

[00:19:08.350] - Nick Mauss
And the division between my work and these various dispositions, relationships, and affects

behind or around it began to dissolve. So now I'm going to make a leap The next work I want to speak about is my first in-depth confrontation with performance-related documents and artifacts and questions about how to exhibit them and represent them within an exhibition. I owe my introduction to working with costumes, beginning with this very direct tactile encounter in the archive where uncountable styles, temporalities, and techniques are compressed, to curator Célia Bernasconi, who invited me to collaborate with her on the 2015 exhibition, Designing Dreams: A Celebration of Léon Bakst, for which I conceived the exhibition scenography in every detail as an artistic intervention. Bernasconi understood implicitly that a contemporary perspective on someone like Bakst could only be opened up in the process of new production and rethinking of the total work of art. And I'd never looked at or worked with material artifacts like these before, indicating the body as undeniably close yet absent. Costumes especially narrate their own multiple histories through the imagined time and place they evoke, as well as the real names of various performers stitched into their linings.

[00:20:42.960] - Nick Mauss
I don't have a good picture of this, but you know, a lot of times costumes have like seven names stitched into them that mark the subsequent performers who wore them. The bonding of designers, artists, makers, and performers in a single object complicates questions of authorship and presentation. But if, as Anne Hollander observed: "no surviving costume itself can convey its proper effect in context"--I took that on as a challenge, realizing that this kind of distanced condition of the costume kind of begs one to imagine different approaches for how to display and vivify what is not there and to directly address the viewer through the simple fact that basically everyone knows, you know, what a costume is or, you know, has probably worn, imagined, or made one for themselves or for someone else. In the process of assembling stage designs, photographs, maquettes, costumes, textile designs, and drawings related to Bakst, I began to apprehend his life work as a form of expanded painting. Or rather I started to think about this work as a form of expanded painting or a kind of trajectory that began with painting.

[00:22:17.040] - Nick Mauss
He started as a very academic painter through theater to fashion, whose arc circumvented the categorical separations that are otherwise so staunchly border policed. The exhibition

scenography itself would need to communicate the all-enveloping impression his work left on the public imaginary, to show that his designs not only changed the sensorium of the stage, but also how spectators dressed, desired, and perceived. I was very inspired by the work of a friend of mine, the art historian Emmelyn Butterfield-Rosen, in thinking about modes of spectatorship and performance at the time, which features in a chapter on Nijinsky and her incredible analysis of the representation of figures at the turn of the last century. And that essay was included in the catalog for this exhibition, which I designed and I hand-stenciled each of the 2,000 copies of the catalog by hand, which is something that also came out of looking at the costumes directly and realizing that they hadn't been printed, but they were hand-painted or hand airbrushed. So I resorted to these original techniques of the materials themselves in making the exhibition. Basically hand painting and stenciling the scenography, remaking the late fabric designs that Bakst produced for a company in New York called Klingens and Selig.

[00:23:48.490] - Nick Mauss
Here you see sort of going from model to exhibition and all the painted walls. And these are the fabrics that he made that, you know, obviously quote a sort of weird mishmash of cultures. And this is the elaborate process of remaking the fabrics as a way to kind of try and understand their logic by color separating them to make stencils and then going one color at a time and making like vast quantities of fabric, which were hung in the entrance to the exhibition. You can see it here in a manner evocative of both modern department store displays and Bakst's paradigmatic vision of ornamental excess in the 1910 ballet Scheherazade. And this is the model for Scheherazade. Another nexus of modern art, fashion, and performance I found in the work of Florine Stettheimer, which resonated with me for a long time. I mean, I too— was educated as Alex described. And I think my instinct at the time was to sort of try and find the opposite, and Florine Stettheimer was a sort of gateway. Her 1921 painting, Spring Sale at Bendel's, transposes the frenzied orgy scene from Scheherazade to the hystericized arena of conspicuous consumption.

[00:25:29.680] - Nick Mauss
And you see here, it's the sort of like very precise caricatured battle among competing customers who are trying to get their hands on last season's fashions in this velvet-draped department store full of mirrors and folding screens. In some ways, the painting is a variation

on the traditional motif of the hunt. As much as a self-ironizing depiction of the context in which Stettheimer and other artists exhibited their paintings. You know, there were exhibitions in department stores such as these. But what really interested me about Stettheimer's work is that it, you know, sort of went far beyond the frame, expanding to poems of radical vulnerability that decorated interiors in which she not only lived but also presented her work. And, you know, very sugary designs for stage and costume. Her art sits at odds with the conception of modernism shored up against decoration and theatricality that I already touched on. A modernity that was invented, in the words of Jacques Rancière, to "prevent a clear understanding of the transformations of art and its relationships with the other spheres of collective experience". And so what I did at one point, I was approached by a minimal techno label to make something for them.

[00:27:00.170] - Nick Mauss
And I decided to make an LP compilation where I asked various artists and writers to select a title, a poem from Stettheimer's Crystal Flowers, which is a book of poems posthumously published by her sister for, "Florine's friends, and the friends of her paintings."

[00:27:21.260] - Nick Mauss
[PICTURE]. This is the tattered version I found at the New York Public Library. That's the front of the book where you see her paintings in the way she wanted them to be seen. And so this LP was an exercise in translation, transposition, where I took the writings of a painter and asked contemporary figures like Lorraine O'Grady or Jutta Koether, Karl Holmqvist, a number of people to respeak her words into the present in whatever way they chose. The tracks that came back to me reflected each person's own work in some way, as well as their proximity or distance to the work of Stettheimer--incredibly different interpretations, some highly cut up or abstract, while others were very lyrical or even fully formed pop songs. I had intended for the LP to serve as a re-edition of Crystal Flowers as a text, but I realized that it was also in and of itself a kind of irreverent exhibition without objects or an exercise in appropriation where contributors were literally incorporating the work of another artist and making something new of it.

[00:28:37.150] - Nick Mauss
So I think you can start to see here how I'm beginning to think of exhibition making as

flexible and scalable, but also with this always very interpersonal dimension. And then in 2014, on the occasion of the Stettheimer survey at the Lenbachhaus in Munich, I created reverse glass mirrored paintings set into the museum's walls to suggest devices of transition and multiple points of view. They functioned in a way or appeared like oversized revolving doors or monumental dressing mirrors and activated a space where the viewer could negotiate kind of oblique reflections of the exhibition and of themselves, their own poses entangled in the act of looking. Speakers embedded within these niches played the various tracks of the LP that I had made, which kind of echoed through the exhibition.The exhibition I'd like to talk about next grew out of the 2012 Whitney Biennial project and my ongoing dialog with one of the curators, Elizabeth Sussman, who encouraged me to go further with what I had proposed and concerned Crushed Desire. Transmissions, the exhibition I ended up making at the Whitney, was almost 6 or 7 years in the making and further complicated my interest in collections, archival methodologies, how to think about display and staging, and especially the presentation of ephemeral histories such as dance.

[00:30:40.720] - Nick Mauss
In many ways, this exhibition also became a kind of manifesto. Alex called it a soft or gentle manifesto, I believe, of how queer histories might be presented within an institution. I began by going into the Whitney's collection database again. And I mean, you've probably experienced this; it's kind of like the backstage of the museum where it's very incoherent unconscious. And so when you're confronted with this kind of chaos, you can start to draw out other storylines. And I was asking myself, you know, what is it that I could contribute to this museum? How might I use it or, you know, make it do something that it wasn't already doing? What was the story I wanted to tell about quote unquote American art and my relationship to it, especially given that most of the art of the modern period in the U.S. was made by, carried over, or influenced by the practices of people who were exiles, immigrants, or people relegated to second-class citizenship. And I wanted to address art forms that were often collaborative that cannot be collected, cataloged, and adequately displayed in museums. So one of the things that really struck me as I sifted through the museum's collection was that so many of the works held there related directly to dance, specifically to modernist American ballet, though they were rarely contextualized in that way.

[00:32:11.420] - Nick Mauss
And it dawned on me, as the American expatriate painter Gerald Murphy has said, "The ballet was the focal center of the whole modern movement in the arts," end quote. And that became the catalyst for Transmissions as a way of rethinking New York art of the 1940s and '50s from the point of view of performance. The first questions I came up against had to do with how time-based art forms can be exhibited, especially at that moment that was— I mean, it's not 10 years ago, but it's a while ago— [where] dance in the museum was really experiencing this intense third wave, and it often felt very unintegrated and decontextualized or otherwise, you know, spectacularized. I often say it like, click and drag. And with the Bakst exhibition that I showed you previously, I had been very adamant that there be no live performance in the exhibition. I wanted all the historic dances to be kind of made palpable entirely by the images, texts, and the materiality, the sort of traces they had left behind. I'm not sure how successful it was, but it just seemed like— I'm not sure that everything can be restaged.

[00:33:40.080] - Nick Mauss
And so I started thinking again about how the objects, documents, and memories produced by dance might be shown together with the kinds of things that a museum usually shows, as well as live performance. To create a kind of multi-determined layered exhibition that could draw from a number of archives, not limited to the museum's collection. So I ended up, you know, starting with the Whitney's collection. I also found documents in the archives of the dance division of the New York Public Library, a few private collections, and then I went as far as Bloomington, Indiana to the Kinsey Institute where there was a huge archive of work by the photographer George Platt Lynes, who not only had been the official photographer for the New York City Ballet in its founding years, but, you know, as you know, was one of the most prolific and influential photographers of his time. These are some of the things that were in the exhibition. [PICTURE] This is a Walker Evans photo of the backstage of New York City Ballet with graffiti of Nijinsky leaping. [PICTURE] And here we are at George Platt Lynes. The fact that a sex research institute in the Midwest had collected and cared for a trove of avant-garde photography from New York was part of the more complicated story of American modern art.

[00:35:14.890] - Nick Mauss

Art and dance that I wanted to tell. And there's other facets of the story of modern photography, which is so linked to the development of modern dance. But Lynes's work especially--I think what drew me to it is that it was so shrouded in cliché. I hadn't been able to see it for a very long time, and when I went to the Kinsey, I was I was kind of shocked by how contemporary these images looked, they looked much more radical than even Mapplethorpe. They looked like they had been made in the '70s or more recently. And I understood that I had kind of accepted an interpretation of this work that wasn't necessarily valid and that this was actually a work of performance as much as it is a photographic corpus. Long after the exhibition, I kind of kept working on Lyons and published a book together with the art historian Angela Miller about Lyons and his collaborators titled Body Language in 2023. But that's just to kind of show you how some of these things cast long tendrils forward. So overall, I was thinking of this exhibition as a kind of portrait of New York, fully queer, pre-Stonewall New York that I had never known about or seen represented and which I tried to invoke in different ways.

[00:37:00.050] - Nick Mauss
Sorry, I always get carried away because there's so much material that I want to show. One way of kind of creating this portrait was to literalize the idea of the portrait of the city via these photographs of the Manhattan skyline. [PICTURE] These are by Ilse Bing. And then these sort of skyline or island-like displays that I devised of miniature figures amid skyscraper sculptures by John Storrs or Man Ray. Another way was by reconstructing the transparent costume designed by painter Paul Cadmus for the American Capitalist folklore ballet Filling Station, which is you know, an incredible costume that immediately elevated anyone who wore it to the status of a sex symbol. And I think I showed you the image earlier. I had it kind of floating with no mannequin inside. It's just this bodiless sheath hanging over the view to the Hudson and the skyline behind it and the remnants of the piers and directly above a 1920 Ellie Nadelman sculpture of a Grecian dancer, which I mounted on a pedestal that was motorized to rotate at the speed of a record player. I mean, it got very detailed. And I wish— I don't have footage of it here today, but James Welling actually made a beautiful video of it, sort of like the skyline and this turning sculpture.

[00:38:34.830] - Nick Mauss
I discovered hundreds of slides by the dance critic and author Carl Van Vechten taken

between the '40s and '50s in the archive of the dance division of the New York Public Library, featuring mostly the Ballet Theater Company. The library allowed me to digitize these photographs, which feature countless dancers, Alicia Markova, Arthur Mitchell, but also costume designer Barbara Karinska, the lighting design innovator Jean Rosenthal, people in formal poses, but then also, these very intimate, informal and playful poses where you can tell they're just sort of making things up. And this discovery, again, the sense of kind of vividness and contemporaneity of these images really informed the exhibition as a whole, particularly the work that I was doing with 16 dancers from completely different areas of practice and training backgrounds. Who had not previously worked together. [PICTURE] This is Arthur Mitchell, Swedish Christmas Angels. And so together we looked at these slides along with rare period films of dance and paintings and sculpture that ultimately made it into the exhibition, dance documents such as these, to develop a new co-authored choreography that would be performed in the exhibition every day for the 2 months of its duration.

[00:40:07.340] - Nick Mauss
And I don't have a dance background, so I had to really kind of come up with a way of— for us to communicate. And I realized that it's actually quite logical for many performers to work from pictures and to stitch pictures together. So that's what we ended up doing. And I was interested in doing period reenactments of [George] Balanchine ballets, for example, which also would not have been possible because the style of dancing and training and affect has changed so drastically. Something else needed to be made, and we tried to create a new response by contemporary artists in dialog with all this often unknown material. And the process of working together, it's— I have a hard time reconstructing it, but we were negotiating a lot of things at the same time. Each dancer's own history with ballet as a foundational form of training and as a normative and racist regime of the body. So oftentimes there was a struggle to reapproach a form that many of the dancers had rejected at some point in their dancing lives. Then there was the question of how to work together and talk to each other through images.

[00:41:30.010] - Nick Mauss
But then what I think opened up was this possibility to revisit the material, to find surprises within it and kind of invent from it. So over the course of several months of collectively

generating and editing choreography, a very dense field of phrases emerged, often citing specific sculptures or poses and photographs. And kind of the idea of any original source really evaporated.

[00:42:22.250] - Nick Mauss
One thing I do want to say about transmissions-- I have to give full credit to the people I worked with at the museum. They understood that it was not a concrete thesis, but a kind of unfolding process. So even while the show, you know, the show had opened, it was going on, so many things were still changing. I was still learning so much about it. The dancers were learning so much about it. The visitors brought so much information to this. A lot of people, especially from the dance world, were kind of taken aback and very moved to see this material in a museum. So the greatest thing I heard was people saying things like, "oh, it doesn't even feel like a museum. Feels like a workshop or a studio."

[00:43:10.170] - Nick Mauss
So there was this sense that something was being made. For me, the most important thing ultimately was that it sort of spoke to art forms that are not— cannot be recorded or can't really be captured, but really just exist in the transfer from one body to another. And in this case, the impetus behind the exhibition was also that I wanted to address the fact, and I get back here to, there's always sort of something I come up against where I can't go any further, where I realized that the transmission of a highly coded queer art history that had been occluded not only by a modernist ideological imperative, but also by AIDS, that the chain of transmission had been so badly damaged that originally would have made it possible for people of my generation, for example, to access, to know about, relate to, and also to potentially reject these histories. But what you see here, I mean, the exhibition architecture was essentially built around the performance so that the dance could be visible from all sides. At first through the scrim, but really there was no front or back. The exhibition created the frame around the performance.

[00:44:43.300] - Nick Mauss
And I had mentioned this before that I kind of wanted to push against the protocols of contemporary museum dance where visitors just kind of— snap into a certain passive, spectatorial mode when confronted with a performing body. So I tried to make a space

that the viewer wanted to explore, to view the performance from every angle, and to see with, through, behind the works on view. This is sort of the— when you get spat out of the elevators, that's what you would be confronted with. And then I also tried to think about all the ways in which the works could be shown differently. So for example, this is [PICTURE] Louise Lawler's Little Dancer at Age 14, which I printed onto the dancers' leotards. This was something I made in consultation with Lawler herself. I was thinking of her stretch-to-fit murals, and I thought maybe we could do something like that on the dancers' bodies, and she was interested in the idea. And, she herself has made a lot of work about ballet and spectatorship. So the dancers and I worked on creating a flexible choreography with no climax, no beginning or end, and found ways to play with the power dynamic between performer and viewer.

[00:46:08.880] - Nick Mauss
We talked a lot about— how to make the exhibition space the space of the dancers rather than the space of the audience. And at the beginning of the day, the dancers had to warm up. So each of them taught class in whatever combination of movement styles they had chosen for that day. And the space was very dense with material, as you can see, layered historically, visually, and in some sense also very excessive in terms of the labor and constant invention that had to be maintained and elaborated. What happened soon after *Transmissions* was that I was cast as a performer, actually as the minimalist artist and dancer Robert Morris, [PICTURE] who you see here standing on the left with the rope. Hanging from his jeans, in the restaging of Yvonne Rainer's 1965 Parts of Some Sextets, a dance for 12 people and 11 mattresses, which Rainer was revisiting in collaboration with the classically trained ballet dancer and theorist Emily Coates. The dance had not been seen in over half a century, and the task of the 12 dancers who were brought into the revival was not only to perform it, but also to reconstruct it since there were no recordings.

[00:47:34.180] - **Nick Mauss**
And half of the original score had been lost. In some ways, the dance has been made iconic via its documentation. I'm sure you've seen some of these [PICTURES]. I'd been seeing this image for years. And the revival of this dance came at a moment when, you know, I had just done this extensive examination of the dance cultures that Yvonne and her peers had rejected, or so I thought. And for me, it was interesting to then go backwards or

forwards in time. I'm not sure which because I continue to be very interested in thinking about how modernist and postmodern art and performance practices actually bleed into and inform one another, that the division between them is not really as neat as one would like to think. I think I knew first about this dance, parts of some sextets from Rainer's book, Work 1961-73. But, you know, I couldn't tell from the photographs or descriptions what the dance was actually like. So I had this vague image of people in the '60s running around and hurling themselves into mattresses and having a good time. Working with Rainer, Coates and this group of dancers, we reconstructed the hour-long dance using original photographs like these, half of the original score, and notes found in Rainer's archive at the Getty.

[00:49:01.280] - **Nick Mauss**
This [PICTURE] is the so-called No Manifesto. And the space that was opened up by this piecemeal evidence that we patched together and by the erosion of the memory of the dance allowed for a new iteration of the dance to escape the trap of fidelity to any notion of an original while maintaining the overall structure and force of the work that Rainer had conceived when she was around 30 years old. Our gestural vocabulary was established by notes about the original dance. Mixture of banal movements mixed with cues like human, fly, statue, vague movements, but also a few references to art history such as The Laocoön. This is my cue— one of my cue sheets. I mean, we had endless amounts of these that we always had stuffed in our pockets while we were running around. And basically we had to coordinate the change in our movements with specific words in a— narration that accompanied the hour-long dance. And that— the shocking revelation of the dance was that it was accompanied by a recording of Rainer reading the diaries of an 18th century New England minister. A text that may have appeared to describe the everyday in the context of Judson Church, but by 2019 was clearly understood as a document of settler colonial biopolitics.

[00:50:31.000] - **Nick Mauss**
So this is something that was emphasized differently in the 2019 performance than it had been in the 1965 performance, primarily in terms of casting. We dancers had to memorize the text in which our movement cues, as I said, were kind of embedded and changed at roughly 30-second intervals over the course of an hour. And all these dimensions of revisiting

and reinterpreting Rainer's dance 50 years later, we recorded in a book that we made about the process. I'll show you some of the material that entered into the format of the book here. I worked very intentionally with the play between color and black and white. Initially, to save costs, but then it also made for kind of interesting continuity between the two iterations, which Zoe Leonard observed very succinctly as "a very early work by Rainer transformed into one of her very late works". And then these [PICTURES] are also— there are drawings that Rainer asked me to make. On the spot of new configurations of bodies she created as additions to the dance. Even though we all have cell phones, she demanded that I draw people. And this is complete improvisation after rehearsals by Ivan one afternoon, you know, at nearly 90, just working with a rope on the mattress.

[00:52:17.640] - **Nick Mauss**
The final tableau [PICTURE].

[00:52:21.400] - **Nick Mauss**
Parallel to this work on the reconstruction, I started conceiving an exhibition for Kunsthalle Basel that would bring together works by various artists and a few loans from different collections in a scenography that I devised for the succession of the Kunsthalle's spaces. The exhibition was titled Bizarre Silks: Private Imaginings and Narrative Facts, Etc. and included an artist book by Ray Johnson from the 1950s, a filmic portrait by Edward Owens of his mother, also from the '60s, fragments of silk by anonymous 17th and 18th century makers, collage by Hannah Höch from the 1970s, set of apocalyptic bed sheets printed with images of atomic warfare by Robert Morris, double monitor intervention by Gretchen Bender, and works from the 1970s and '80s by the artist Rosemary Mayer, never before seen in Europe. In 2019, Mayer's work was still in the early stages of being brought to light by her niece and nephew, the art historian Marie Warsh and the artist Max Warsh, who represent her estate. I had come to Mayer through the poetry of her sister Bernadette and her friend Hannah Wiener, through my interest in second-wave feminist art, gestures of evocation, and the expanded painting practices of New York that you could find in New York in the 1970s.

[00:53:54.610] - **Nick Mauss**
And all these pathways twined together in what for me was a revelation when I first saw and was very bewildered by Mayer's work, which described to me a previously

unlocalizable nexus of poetry, conceptual art, decoration, feminism, mannerism, and historiography. And these constructions for which Mayer became known in the 1970s— this one [PICTURE] is called Galla Placidia. It was recently on view at MoMA. On the cover here [PICTURE] of an anthology titled Individuals. These works were often titled after female potentates as historic figures as a feminist evocation of forgotten names to counteract their erasure. And what I think I'm drawn to especially, is that they sort of defy the categories of sculpture and painting. In this garment-like or Renaissance instrument-like facture. The way that they span walls or gently brush the floor like the hem of a dress. The more I looked at Mayer's work, I understood the centrality of embodiment and performance and really the notion of practice that is integral to these objects and the conditions she created for them. From the diva-like presence of this work to the invented ritual character of her so-called temporary monuments suspended over public spaces such as parks, sidewalks, and rooftops to draw attention to humane or planetary brackets of time that are not regulatory or monetizable.

[00:55:35.160] - **Nick Mauss**
I also became interested in a series of later works by Mayer, which she described as follows: “Since the 1980s, I have been making ghosts, fragile structures made from wood through and over which different papers are draped. In these works, I'm looking for an edge between abstraction and figuration, using the paper and wood to suggest and subvert both. The wood rods for each ghost are painted with several different metallic powders in an attempt to dematerialize the structure by making it changeable in its subjection to changing light. Ribbons mark connection points between rods, hopefully emphasizing the fragility of the whole structure, but because they are decorative, undercutting fragility with elaboration, possible elegance“.

[00:56:23.670] - **Nick Mauss**
The images I saw of the ghosts in slide documentation at the estate struck me with this, you know, very unruly, exclamatory presence that they have. They made sense as a continuation of Mayer's interest in angel sleeves, Baroque drapery, figures of Annunciation, but expressed very differently under the strain of limited resources and time. Like all of her work, the ghosts pose questions about the ethics of how one takes up space. But what affected me the most was the fact that these works announce with their immediate,

unpretentious, and raw presence, their inevitable dissolution, that they announce kind of the, the beginning and end of the exhibition itself.

[00:57:19.180] - **Nick Mauss**
In the rush of this kind of extremely physical retrieval and reinvention of Yvonne Rainer's dance, I asked Mayer's estate if it would be possible to similarly revive Mayer's Ghosts. I sensed a similarity in the activity of reconstructing and performing parts of some sextets and remaking these sculptures. Though I should say I hesitated for a moment, again, because I'm not sure that everything can or should be reconstructed. But there is something about the ghosts in this kind of adamantly unprecious, conceptual signpost-like nature and the fact that Mayer made them often enough and with enough variation that they could be seen as a set of flexible instructions or even a score. So I felt like there was potential to think about what it would take to be able to present some version of these works that was not a display or documentation of them, but an enactment of their continued presence. Perhaps it would be possible not to think of these ghosts as recreations, but as a fulfillment of a set of conditions, to reperform them in a sense. And since all of Mayer's work was variable, fragile, contingent, it seemed that the ghosts too could be revisited with care.

[00:58:46.600] - **Nick Mauss**
So Mayer's estate luckily was open to the idea. They had been interested in studying the work more closely, already. And so we undertook the study of the materials from which previous ghosts had been constructed, various colored ribbons, colored plastic films, and, you know, basically learned what sort of what the engineering of these works was like. We met for several kinds of R&D sessions and scavenging sessions during which Marie, Rosemary's niece, recounted the dinners her aunt loved to host on tables decorated with colored plastics and foils, or the gifts she gave wrapped in materials left over from the ghosts. We first constructed a miniature version at the estate, which you see here [PICTURE], followed by larger construction sessions in my own studio. And we refer to these early on as rehearsals in relation to the event of the exhibition itself. Here you see the artist Amanda Friedman, who worked with Marie and Max of the Mayer Estate and who guided us very sensitively through the process of remaking the ghosts. I wanted to make sure I could sort of— I would rehearse the making of these kind of formless but very formed things enough that I would be able to perform them again in Basel in a way that the estate felt

comfortable with.

[01:00:34.780] - **Nick Mauss**
And you might be able to see from the images that there is a kind of internal logic that they have that ultimately lends them this sort of strange breathless presence. The artist Harmony Hammond described Mayer's knack for, quote "using cheap materials to perform opulence." Mayer's working notes on the ghosts listed "presence and absence. Paper, impermanence. Engagement not an issue. Chance and trash. Transparency. Returning, dissolving. Impermanence of individuals, of things, of appearances. Attempts to suggest. Attempts to catch appearances. Beauty and trash. Glass people." These [PICTURES] are pictures of one of the last rehearsals where I made two more ghosts. And here you see them in the Basel exhibition. And there would be a lot more to say here, I think, about the interrelationship between works and the exhibition as a whole, the kind of syntax I created, sort of forward, reverse sight lines. But something that I maybe neglected to talk about, which relates to transmissions, is that after that exhibition, which is the most thematic of all my exhibitions, I wanted to do something that had no historic focus, no ostensible subject aside from the kind of riddle-like associations proposed by the exhibition itself.

[01:02:25.560] - **Nick Mauss**
And now I'll briefly tell you about something I've been working on for the last couple of years, which Alex has followed and encouraged me in, which is a project that also ties back to transmissions.

[01:02:47.660] - **Nick Mauss**
And my work with Yvonne Rainer. And it centers on the archive of an artist and choreographer who had been Rainer's teacher, a figure on the very precipice of being forgotten named James Waring. The material I'm going to show is really unknown and I'm in the process of working together with filmmaker Alla Kovgan and theorist Carrie Noland on a book about Waring. As well as an exhibition that resituates him in the New York of the 1960s. Waring— I don't know, what is the best way to describe him? He's a sort of parallel figure to Merce Cunningham, but someone who even before Cunningham was inviting artists and poets to collaborate with him on his dances, which were also very close to Happenings. In a way, he's a kind of artist without category. This is a flyer for a performance of one of his most

celebrated works called Dances Before the Wall, which I believe the flyer was designed by Allan Kaprow. And it featured a set by Julian Beck, one of the co-founders of the Living Theater. And here the same flyer [PICTURE] is reworked as a greeting card to David Vaughn, the Cunningham dancer and archivist and a good friend of Waring's.

[01:04:11.220] - **Nick Mauss**
And here the flyer is turned into a work by Ray Johnson overpasted with a reproduction of a daumier. And all these kinds of relays of paperwork and hand-to-hand exchange of things is something I love to think about and also to think about, you know, how do you actually make that into an exhibition. This is one of many contact sheets of portraits of Waring by Peter Hujar, who greatly admired him and included him in his famous book, just recently republished, Portraits in Life and Death, and who was with Waring at his deathbed. And here's another flyer for a dance showing Waring in a costume designed by Remy Charlip, a dancer for Merce Cunningham, who was also a celebrated children's book illustrator. When I asked Yvonne about her teacher, she told me, James Waring worked in the mailroom of Time-Life magazine and would scrape together money to make a few dances each year, making every costume by hand. And he was the first person to put me in a dance company. Waring was also a collage artist. You see in this collage a scrap of the same polka dot fabric that makes up the stripes on that costume.

[01:05:27.060] - **Nick Mauss**
He was also a male artist, logically, working in the male room of Time Life. And here's another form of collage he practiced, a patchwork coat modeled by the dancer Valda Setterfield towards the end of her life. When I asked Valda about Waring's methodology, she said that he embraced everything that was, quote, not suitable, not proper, not appropriate. [PICTURE] this is, I think, a costume he made for the dancer Eileen Passloff. And a George Brecht event intended for Lamont Young [PICTURE], which James Waring accidentally opened. And a dance set for James Waring for a dance called Duettino [PICTURE], made by Ray Johnson. Here [PICTURE] you see Yvonne Rainer and Trisha Brown dancing Rainer's— one of her first real works, Satie for two, in costumes designed for them by Waring. And here's the dancer Raymond Johnson performing a piece called Feathers in a Waring costume [PICTURE]. Feathers was a dance made in homage to Vander Clyde, the artist known as Barbette, a trans trapeze artist celebrated by Jean Cocteau and

photographed by Man Ray. Here on the left, you see a sculpture by Robert Indiana, and on the right, an Icarus costume he devised for wearing, which I found on the cover of the cult sort of— I don't even know how to characterize this magazine, After Dark, like a sort of homo art magazine.

[01:07:07.660] - **Nick Mauss**
Waring kept continual lists of dancers, composers, poets, and artists he wanted to collaborate with. And these are really fascinating. [PICTURE]Here you see Charlip, Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Claes Oldenburg, Pat Passloff, Allan Kaprow, Bob Clark, Ray Johnson, among others. So these lists, which I think are half speculative and half concrete, are in a way the basis for the exhibition I want to make. Which I think could radically reframe our understanding of artistic production and kind of interrelationships in '60s New York and really make apparent the simultaneous co-emergence of multiple artistic movements. Minimalism, Judson Dance Theater, poets, theater, pop, happenings, Fluxus, Cajun poetics, you know, all of which Waring participated. But also a kind of extreme anachronism that appears strange to the contemporary eye. You know, we're used to the 1960s as having a certain flavor. So here, for example, you see a replica of Nijinsky's costume from the 1912 ballet, Les Dieux Bleus, made by Waring. Waring was also an expert in Tiffany stained glass, and the posters of Jules Chéret. He loved Sonia Delaunay. I think all these things will sort of come into contact or tension with each other in the exhibition. And then there are these sort of proximities that seem almost too good to be true.

[01:08:48.340] - **Nick Mauss**
This [PICTURE] is a contact sheet by Billy Linich, the former Judson lighting designer who, by the 1960s, was the right hand of Andy Warhol. And, you know, you can see on the same film strip the making of Warhol's first talkie, Harlot, starring Mario Montez on the Factory's sort of infamous velvet couch. And then you see Waring's dance, Poets' Vaudeville, based on a libretto by Diane di Prima.

[01:09:16.290] - **Nick Mauss**
So, these proximities, things that are not written down but only exist in documents like these, I think that really is the material of the exhibition. One of the anecdotes that most endeared Waring to me recounts him fixating on sewing beads onto the hem of a skirt. And, you know,

I think he's running out of time. The performance is supposed to happen. Someone says, "No one's going to see them." And Waring says, "Yes, but they will feel them." Here on the left [PICTURE]is a set for a wearing dance by the artist George Brecht. And this is a dance that had a very particular format where it was sort of like a split screen. You had two dances happening next to each other, not relating to each other.

[01:10:08.720] - **Nick Mauss**
Very much like this work, Andy Warhol's Chelsea Girls from 1966, made 2 years after Waring's dance. And this is [PICTURES], as you probably know, 2 films, one color, one black and white, and they're sort of slightly off. And the reason I show you this is that I learned from dancer Lucinda Childs, who danced in this work, that Warhol had come to make a film of the dance. And she told me it's among all those rolls of undeveloped film in the basement of the Andy Warhol Museum. I'm not sure that the film of the dance will ever come to light, but ultimately it's not that important. I think I'll try to find some way to make us feel it. Thank you. Would love to take any questions.