[00:00:00.900] - **Luke Whittaker**
Hello everyone. It's working. First time being up here, so trying to get the distance right. Thank you so much all for coming. My name is Luke Whitaker, and I'm a second-year graduate student here at the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard. It's my pleasure this evening to introduce Jarrett Earnest. Jarrett is widely known as the author of *What It Means to Write About Art: Interviews with Art Critics*, an equal parts collection of oral histories and analysis of craft in American art writing. The book includes 30 in-depth conversations that chart the— sorry, this is really bizarre [comment on the sound of the mic]— that chart the role of critic as it has evolved from the 1960s to today and provides a portrait of art criticism through conversations between Jarrett and notable art critics and writers such as Michael Fried and Lucy Lippard, as well as the editor of *The Young and Evil: Queer Modernism in New York, 1930-1955*, *Painting is a Supreme Fiction: Writings by Jesse Murray, 1980-1993*, and *Devotion: Today's Future Becomes Tomorrow's Archive*. Noting his most recent awards and nominations, in 2021 he was awarded the Dorothy and Leo Rapkin Prize for Visual Arts Journalism.

[00:01:29.010] - **Luke Whittaker**
In 2022, was the inaugural critic in residence at the Fire Island Residency and curated *Ways of Seeing: Three Takes of the Jack Shear Drawing Collection* at the Drawing Center in New York, and was the Kennedy Family Artist and Scholar in Residence at the University of South Florida for the fall of 2022 and 2023.

[00:01:49.540] - **Luke Whittaker**
I was hopeful and really excited to be able to have him here with us tonight. His writing draws attention and asks questions about the unique and complicated relationships each of us as individuals have with art and artists. So please join me in welcoming Jarrett Earnest.

[00:02:13.120] - **Jarrett Earnest**
Do you think it needs to be adjusted? [the microphone] Yeah, it seems like you were going for it.

[00:02:21.220] - **Jarrett Earnest**
So thank you very much, Luke, for that introduction. I've had the pleasure of being in dialog with Luke intermittently over the past few months, and it's really been nice. And I'm grateful to be invited here to speak because I think it's an honor to be able to talk about what you do and what you think about, and usually because I think about myself primarily as a writer and in context of art and dialog with artists and writers, I've never had the occasion to pull together thoughts that I have about exhibitions, mostly because they're pretty hostile, and so I was hoping--I put together images of some shows that I've worked on, that I think are interesting in relationship to each other, and that relate to how I think about exhibitions. But I would also really like it, I'm a really good extemporaneous talker, and I like an active audience. So if I say something and you're like, "wait, wait, can you explain that more? Or like, I can't believe you think that, or how dare you, or like, actually, I'd like to know more about that."

[00:03:35.790] - **Jarrett Earnest**
Please just like shout out or like raise your hand, because I think the opportunity of a situation like this, especially since it's such a smaller group and a bunch of people who are really focused on thinking about these things together, is that like it would be more productive if it was more of a dialog rather than me being like, and then I did this, and like working out some bits for my one-woman show. Although, next time.

[00:04:08.420] - **Jarrett Earnest**
The thing is: I don't like most exhibitions that I see, partly because I don't like a lot of contextual material, especially language. I think most of the writing within exhibitions is extremely detrimental to one's ability to look at them in a way that I'm interested in. Because I think the way that I approach exhibitions, and my work as an editor and as a writer, is very focused on artists, and it's very, it's almost collaborative, and it's very intimate work, and it's about prioritizing this particular relationship. When I think about doing an exhibition, that focus shifts onto the art object itself, and so rather than saying like: "I have an idea, let me go out into the world and like find the things that illustrate

my idea,"which is the way I think most exhibitions are organized, because of the different necessities, the professional necessities in the steps it takes to make an exhibition happen, my approach is to go out and look at the stuff and find the weirdest aspects of the stuff and then pull it together into a room in order to make an argument that I couldn't have expected before I experienced the things all together.

[00:05:36.570] - **Jarrett Earnest**
And in that sense, I think of exhibitions as an extension of my writing projects, in that I think of exhibitions as a narrative form, but not a linear form. They're a way of making an argument in space and time in the unique way that art objects, in their irrevocable presence, disclose themselves to you in the relationship between the other things in the room. And so we can kind of open that up as we go along, and actually I pulled out some stuff that's really kind of, you're the only people I've ever talked to this stuff about. So this image [PICTURE] is a photograph, or two sequential photographs, they're film stills, from the windows at 121 Essex Street, where I had a gallery with my friends for a year when I dropped out of graduate school for art history because I had been talking to artists, I went to art school, I didn't go to school for writing or for curating or for whatever. And then I thought, "oh, I wanted to learn how to write about art," and in my infinite naïveté, I went into an art history PhD program. They don't know any, they don't care about writing.

[00:06:52.750] - **Jarrett Earnest**
They don't wanna talk to you about learning how to write. They don't know about it. And I found that I was in these really interesting dialogs with artists, and then I would go into a PhD seminar, and I would just be like, "get me outta here." Like, this is not glamorous, nor smart, nor do I see a goal in the future in which there might be a way to make a living at this. So what else am I gonna do? So I dropped out, and with three friends of mine, we started this space together. We were all in our early 20s. Of the four of us, one of us was really rich, and the other three of us were really poor. And so the really rich one agreed to pay the rent for a year. That was the only money we had, and then everything else we had to pay for, which meant we begged, borrowed, and stole.

So this is what it looked like from the outside. This is my collaborator, Leigha Mason. This is our friend, Marie Carlberg, and we were really interested in asking questions. Every show that we did, everything that we did, we mostly all lived there and slept on the floor.

[00:07:58.070] - **Jarrett Earnest**
We didn't have beds because that'd be bourgeois, but also we'd get in trouble because if we you'd be living there, and you're not supposed to live there. So we had a neon sign that was really important to us, because it was like "we're official," like we're a thing. And we would do performances for each other, with no— very often with no audience but each other. Like this [PICTURE], this was like literally me walking across Essex Street and like looking up at the windows while they were just like dancing. And it was like, then I went back in and was like, "oh, then what else are we gonna do?" And so this was the first show that we had [PICTURE]. This was an exhibition of my friend Leah, who was dancing, and Marie Losier, who's a filmmaker, a French filmmaker, who makes experimental, mostly 16mm portraits. And so you see how really weird this space is, which we were really into. It was kind of like partly yoga studio-ish, had this horrible drop ceiling. It was just one long space with a mirror in the back. And part of the context for what we were doing was we were thinking like, "well, what if we treated every single thing that we did like a formal decision in an artwork?"

[00:09:09.240] - **Jarrett Earnest**
So it'd be like the language that we used, the images that we distributed about what we did, like how we talked about the space, like how we lit things. Like what if all of those things were subject to being considered an artwork? And it also happened to be like the place we were living and the people we were inviting and like how drunk we would let them get. And it's like, okay, all formal decisions. And one of the things that was happening in the art world at that time in like the late 2000s, 2010s, is it was this very sterile net art esthetic that we all really hated and thought was like heinous and horrifying and commercialized in a way that was like supposed to be ironic, but like what just literally was what it was. And it didn't, it felt very oppressive. And so our touchstones were really like Bakhtin's book on Rabelais, *Rabelais and His World*, Pasolini,

Fassbender, Antonin Artaud, like in some ways like very standard kind of counterculture intellectual like aesthetic lineage, but that felt extremely absent from the discourse of young artists our age in New York, which were mostly then focused around a lot of technology discourse, especially at the New Museum around Lauren Cornell, in fact.

[00:10:35.130] - **Jarrett Earnest**
And we really didn't like that. So we thought, what if we just did what we wanted to do? So this is my other collaborator, Whitney Van Gryn. And this was a part of a series of performances she developed there. She did three of them. They were called Blood, Sweat, and Tears. This was Tears [PICTURE], in which she chopped onions and cried while simultaneously lighting matches and putting them into her teeth, and they would burn into her— they would go out when they burned into her mouth, and then she would light another, and she would continue crying. And so the idea was that "it's all coming back to me now," like Celine Dion said; but there was a sense that there's a chemical distinction between the tears that are produced from pain, the tears that are produced from emotions, and the tears that are produced from physiological response. And not that one could detect that, but Whitney was interested in that. And at the time, we were also really interested in Gina Pane, a certain lineage of performance art that was taking the body as a material in the same way that we were taking our behaviors, our sleeping, our being together in a space as an artistic material.

[00:11:42.630] - **Jarrett Earnest**
So this was Tears, and then the other thing is that this table is clearly like this completely messed up, it's like a plywood board that Whitney covered with sand and latex and put on a sawhorse, and then this had been part of a platform, which will come up later.. We had to make everything, and none of us were really skilled at it, we were just like, "well, you gotta do it,", and then we would reuse it over and over and over.

[00:12:15.310] - **Jarrett Earnest**
[PICTURE] This was a like a Pasolini movie that was projected at the entrance to the space, so people would come up to the stairs and come in through the film, and then

they would walk into this group of weird people just like watching them come in into the light without seeing the Pasolini thing. And this is not like an artwork, this was just like an experiment, where we were like, well, what if we tried to watch a movie like that, and like, what would we learn? So a lot of this were all questions asking, and like, "okay, and then what, and then what?"

[00:12:48.400] - Jarrett Earnest
[PICTURE] This was a show that we did [with]Peter Lamborn Wilson, who is also known as Hakim Bey. He was the author of a book that we, or a tract that was sort of influential in the '90s called *Temporary Autonomous Zones*. [PICTURES] These were a series of altars that he made, temporary altars that were about different ideas that he had about transience and images and the occult. So we kind of built this platform that he wanted, and he made all of these assemblage altars. And so they all had this kind of alchemical equivalence. And I remember him being like: "this is Mercury, and Mercury is like, like the little, that little version, like the Prague baby Jesus, and also like Baath from ancient Egypt, and also Eleguá" or whatever, and it had all some kind of crazy meaning, and he wrote a text about it, it was called--he wrote a text for the show that was about disappearing art, so it was about these performances that he would do in the woods upstate that would not be documented in any way: they were magical acts. And the only documentation was this zine that we made, that he talked about all the magical acts that he did.

[00:14:04.920] - **Jarrett Earnest**
And that was something that we were really interested in: what is an audience? What constitutes an artwork. Which is all stuff that young people normally do, if they're thinking. But I wanted to show these later projects, which seem very fancy in the context of a way that we really thought about exhibitions. We had a performance night, [PICTURE] this is our friend Roxy, she's now in a really, she's now a really famous screaming musician, I don't know what that's called [laughs]. But she [said], "I wanna do this performance of me with a hologram of myself," and we were like, "we got it, we're gonna figure out how to make you a hologram." So we made these wooden

frames and strung them stretched plastic over them in like a couple sequential depths, and then projected it onto the translucent plastic, and it would catch enough of it that it'd be like, "There's your hologram." And frankly, given the state of hologram technology in live performance, I wouldn't say it was markedly more sophisticated than what we have done, and it was really cheap. And you'll notice that there's a bed there.

[00:15:15.750] - **Jarrett Earnest**
I would like to be clear, that was not a bed that we slept on. One of the artists wanted to make a sculpture that had a bed in it, and so if it were art, there could be a bed, but not if we needed to sleep in a bed. That was the level of our thinking. [PICTURE] This was a performance. Marie did this performance called *A Woman for Sale*. We worked with people. We kind of just asked people, a lot of people who never performed something before. There were no rules. It was like there were no adults, and so if we wanted to think about something, who, and one of our friends, we'd be like "why don't you do that as a performance?" We would help them figure out like, like we did the hologram; the parameters of this performance? Tom Chung was this guy who [wanted to] take ayahuasca and do it in front of everyone; and that's the performance and they just watch [him]. But one of the things that has subsequently come to really bother me about the state of performance art institutionally is that it has to pass through so many hands who make sure that it's not dangerous and that it's not going to be a total disaster.

[00:16:27.260] - **Jarrett Earnest**
And I think that that has robbed it from being interesting at all, because then what you have is basically like a theater piece or a dance piece that has no risk and can be fine, but [that] I very rarely find it exciting. Personally. So, with us, it was like, "well, if we really fuck up, like, that's us." And sort of things went bad. [PICTURE] I just include this photo because it has some people in it that I think are kind of funny. It's like Patty [?] and like Jenny, who came, I think, because of Marie. Genesis P-Orridge over there on the right—she lived nearby, and she became really involved in our little gang of friends. And she loved that we were like 24-year-olds that were just doing what we wanted. So she

would come and hang out all the time and be in our performances, and she represented something to us. On the one hand, she was our friend. On the other hand, she was a gateway into a whole way of thinking about how to be an artist that was really radical and aggressive, and everything should be art.

[00:17:32.650] - **Jarrett Earnest**
What if literally every aspect of your existence was art. And so Gen's [Genesis] presence, I actually think, became really important, and then increasingly important, in that she and I in particular became very close after this experience. That was Roxy, who was doing the hologram. This was the bed performance [PICTURE]. They just wanted to be in the bed DJing on a livestream for a week or whatever. We said: "okay, cool. Like, you do your thing. Here are the keys. We also will be sleeping in the corner." This was stills from a film that Leigha Mason made that was called Spit Banquet [PICTURE]. We got really into banquets as a form because they were all about bodily, they were all gross and bodily and stuff and rotting, and it felt so antithetical to the kind of tidy consumerist internet staged gallery spaces, and also a lot of people came to these projects, but sometimes they were totally private like this, sometimes it was just us. Also, we'd have parties where there would be so many people there, and we thought about each of those differently, almost in a formal sense, like what does it mean if it's 8 people versus if it's anyone versus if we invite them?

[00:18:52.600] - **Jarrett Earnest**
So because the feedback loop was so tight where after everything we did, we didn't have jobs because I never wanted to have a job. The thing that freaks me out the most about the art world is everybody seems like they want to have a job, and especially here, maybe, you know, like, so the worst words for us would, if something was like careerist or professional, we're like, let's not be either of those things. So we got really into these performances. This was *Spit Banquet* [PICTURE] which, like it sounds, it was just us spitting for, I don't remember the parameter, but it was just like, pfft, pfft, pfft, like drooling, and then all the spit filling all of the vessels, and me and Gen Gen.

[00:19:39.070] - **[unknown speaker 1]**
Jarrett, what year is this?

[00:19:40.610] - **Jarrett Earnest**
2011

[00:19:41.910] - **[unknown speaker 1]**
Nice. Also, can I just follow up? Did the space have a name?

[00:19:46.740] - **Jarrett Earnest**
It was called One to One. So, the address was 121-121 Essex. But then it was the symbol, and it was very confusing for everyone, 'cause they're like, "We, how do we say it? Is it one one?" And we were like, "No." But also, I think that part of the confusion of it, we were really interested in also populating our sign, our logo around in the Lower East Side, and so it would be like stickers and whatever, and you're like, "What is that?" 'Cause it also kind of looks a little bit like a plug or whatever. So, this [PICTURE] was kind of the most important performance project that we did, in terms of learning about stuff, and it was called *Banquet for Artaud*, and so we made this, we bought plywood sheets, and we like filled the space with this long table, and we went around to all the food sellers in Chinatown, and we asked them for the rotten food that they couldn't sell anymore, and then we just like heaped it on this table, covered it with flowers and candles, and then we asked a bunch of people to do performances, but we didn't announce who they were, and they weren't signaled in any specific way.

[00:20:51.590] - **Jarrett Earnest**
We would just go up and say to Karen Schneider, or Raúl de Nieves, or Cody Critcheloe, [and] it's like, "okay, now it's your turn, and you just do your thing." And it would be very discreet, and they would do some kind of disruptive thing. Also, we had like a wine sponsor, because one of our collaborators' mom worked at a vineyard in California, and she got them to sponsor us. So we would just have heavy, heavy pours all night long, cases and cases of wine. So everyone got really drunk. And as the night wore on,

it was like we had really strategically made this decision about blurring the boundary between audience and non-audience, because everyone was an artist. But then what happens is like people start doing stuff too. And what ultimately happened is during this performance, Marie, we had a lot of nudity, we were really into that, because , why not? We're all young and beautiful, why do you have clothes? Like, why do they exist?

[00:21:57.700] - **Jarrett Earnest**
So Marie was doing this performance, it was really sexy and weird, and then she ended up kind of having a weird erotic fight with someone on the table, and this guy kind of ended up flipping the table over onto them with all of the stuff and the plates... And then I remember it was this moment where we were like, "what's gonna happen?" And then Joe Heffernan, who's a musician, he collaborates with Juliana Huxtable a lot, he was playing the keyboard, it was like very synthy, and then it got like very, he started playing like a very David Lynch-y soundtrack, and everyone just kind of like picked the table up and like started putting all the shit back on it. And, what happened was that this was like a really transformative experience for us because one of our collaborators was really upset by it. She experienced it as an assault on women, like on women's sexuality in particular by this particular guy, which I think it was. But also we started doing the formal analysis of the performance and it was like, we systematically blurred the boundaries between what was and wasn't permissible.

[00:23:07.980] - **Jarrett Earnest**
That was part of the context. And thus, we have to take responsibility for everything that happens in the space. Like things were broken, people were upset. And then I was like, "oh, that's cool, that was exciting." That was like an exciting thing to learn that I would never have gotten to learn if I did the show at a real gallery or a museum. Because then it's like the HR department gets involved, you know what I mean? Which is just like covering, it's ass covering for legality. And we didn't have that, the buck stopped with us. And Martha Wilson, the founder of Franklin Furnace, she was kind of a patron saint to us. She came to everything that we did, she helped us get insurance through Franklin Furnace, and she also I think was into the idea, it's like, well, we're doing this thing. And

because we were interested in temporary autonomous zones as a structure, as a heuristic with which to think, Hakim Bey's argument is that utopia, or really radical social experiments, they fluoresce, they open in time, and then they close in time and disappear.

[00:24:15.880] - **Jarrett Earnest**
And that disappearance is not a referendum on their value, that's a structural part of it. And so we always, from the beginning, were [agreed to] just do it for a year, and we'll talk about it if it ends, but maybe we'll go do other things. So then we all went off and did other things. That is just a prelude to what seems like the complete opposite project. [PICTURE] This was a show I did at David Zwirner in 2019 called *The Young and Evil*. And this is like a wall that's all of portraits that these groups of artists from the '30s, these portraits are all from the '30s to the '50s, but they continued to live, believe it or not, later into the '60s and '70s, in some cases much later. But it was all like very queer, both gay and queer artists who were friends in New York, are sort of related to Lincoln Kirstein, so it was Paul Cadmus, his boyfriend Jared French, his boyfriend's wife Margaret French, who was herself an artist, Paul Cadmus's sister Fidelma Cadmus, who was married to Lincoln Kirstein, George Tucker, Charles Henri Ford, Pavel Tchelitchev, Charles Henri Ford was Pavel Tchelitchev's boyfriend, and Cecil Beaton makes an appearance, and George Platt Lynes, the photographer, who photographed everyone, and they all made portraits of each other, like really intensely.

[00:25:49.630] - **Jarrett Earnest**
And so I was interested in how to do a show that was about a group of people; about collaboration, or the way that people make a culture together through their work, all stuff— or through a way of approaching their life in concert, in which some people come together and fall away, but that becomes almost like magnetic fields in which organize the kind of iron filings, or the field becomes visible through these kind of iron filings, which are the objects themselves. And then in the vitrines--I love vitrines--I went to the Kinsey Institute and got all this like really erotic, pornographic art that they made that had never been seen. And a lot of personal ephemera. And so I was kind of, when

I started working on this show, I was kind of asking myself, "I don't really like institutions, I hope that's clear."[laughs] And so I wanted to find the weird stuff that institutions didn't want. So I was going to people's houses and getting stuff out of their bedrooms and basements [wondering], I don't know why the Met didn't want these photographs of George Platt Lynes sucking Monroe Wheeler's dick as a 19-year-old.

[00:27:09.480] - **Jarrett Earnest**
But I was like, "that sounds great." And the other thing about this particular material, which was a certain kind of queer or gay esthetic in New York at the time, is that the people who dealt with it were usually dealing with it through the lens of the New York City Ballet, which was the most innovative, undeniably avant-garde art form that these people circulated within, and they were kind of framed as almost like the back, the reactionary, or like backwards-looking figurative artists vis-à-vis the emergence of abstraction within 20th century American art. And so I wanted to go the opposite direction, which is if I thought something was too elegant or made too much sense in terms of what people like, I didn't want to include it. I only wanted to include things that were tacky, things that were embarrassing to people, things that were really explicit. And then I thought if the exhibition itself in terms of exhibition strategy were extremely refined and elegant and restrained, it would emphasize the freakiness of the work or like the vulgarity of it and become hard to resist.

[00:28:21.870] - **Jarrett Earnest**
And so the interesting thing about this, [PICTURE] this is like a characteristic painting. This is a Paul Cadmus portrait of George Platt Lynes. Monroe Wheeler, who was then working for the Museum of Modern Art, and his long-term partner Glenway Wescott; they were in this complicated romantic triad for a long time, [for] decades. And Paul Cadmus made this portrait of them in front of their house, in New Jersey—the weird bourgeois house with the guy mowing the lawn. And this was something where I was like, "where is this?" A lot of stuff like this is I was like, "where is this? I saw a picture of it. Who has it?" Well, it had been in George Platt Lynes's brothers, sons, wives, bedroom, and then they needed money, so I guess they ended up selling it to the museum in

Boston, the Fine Arts Museum of Boston, who had never shown it because it's too weird. It asks a lot of questions that, if people really wanna ask, [it] answers them. [PICTURE] This is a Paul Cadmus from the '30s. [PICTURE] This is a Jared French sculpture called Murder--it's a painting, but it relates to sculptures.

[00:29:45.110] - **Jarrett Earnest**
[PICTURE] This was Fidelma, Paul Cadmus's sister, who went mad, and it was in a drawer in Paul Cadmus's boyfriend's house that was like gay gardens. Gray Gardens, but the gay version in Connecticut; there was standard poodles like pissing and shitting all over everything, and there books, and I was like, "where's the correspondence between Paul Cadmus and E.M. Forrester?" And they're like, "it's in one of these books, I don't know." And I was like, "okay, great. This is the kind of research that I like to do." I like sitting with weird people as they open every drawer and we go, "what is that? Can I, do you think I could put that in a show? Do you think anyone would be mad? And like this was one of them." [PICTURE] This is a Tchelitchev painting where it's like, "what is this? What's going on here?" And it was Lincoln Kirstein's longtime boyfriend who was one of the only ones who didn't get booted, who was a very elegant Southern man named Jensen Yao, who was still alive, he's dead now, but living in New Jersey in a farmhouse that Lincoln Kirstein bought for him, and he was very, very old and quite ill, and so there's also a kind of creepy part where it's like, "can I take all this stuff?

[00:30:59.640] - **Jarrett Earnest**
Stuff out of your house, and like, do you understand that I want to show it?" And he was like, "okay, cool, you can do that." So I included some of his art, actually, and like including this [PICTURE], where it's like, "what is that?" [PICTURE], this was in a storage unit in Brooklyn. [PICTURE] This is a really interesting painting, self-portrait of George Platt Lynes looking into the camera, looking at the thing, and then this kind of diaphanous face.

[00:31:36.640] - **[unknown speaker 2]**
[inaudible]

[00:31:40.110] - **Jarrett Earnest**
[answering] Tchelitchev was considered one of the most famous artists. His painting Hide and Seek was supposed to be the most popular artwork in the Museum of Modern Art in the '50s.

[00:31:55.680] - **[unknown speaker 2]**
Freaked me the F. Out.

[00:31:57.200] - Jarrett Earnest
Changed your life?

[00:31:58.490] - **[unknown speaker 2]**
These people were, or some of them did occupy some kind of institutional spaces, so it's almost a kind of story of fashion and finding things.

[00:32:07.330] - **Jarrett Earnest**
That is unfashionable?

[00:32:09.240] - **[unknown speaker 2]**
I'm thinking how Whitney just had all these pajama works up.

[00:32:13.790] - **Jarrett Earnest**
Mm-hmm.

[00:32:14.750] - **[unknown speaker 2]**
There's been some critical study.

[00:32:15.790] - **Jarrett Earnest**
It's become very chic now.

[00:32:17.420] - **[unknown speaker 2]**
Yeah.

[00:32:17.640] - **Jarrett Earnest**
In a way that I'm now bored by, and people ask me to do work on this I already did the work I wanted to do.

[00:32:24.070] - **[unknown speaker 2]**
But how can you do this work without setting the table for a kind of institutional—

[00:32:32.180] - **Jarrett Earnest**
I think, no, I think you should. I think the institutions, I think it's about shaming the institution to do the work they should be doing. No museum in this particular moment is bold enough to originate an exhibition with a kind of vision of something that seems weird. There's so many committees that have to say like, "yes, yes, yes, we'll divert money there, yes, we'll say that's good, yes", but this particular show is an interesting case study, and if somebody wanted to work on it here, I would suggest it, because there were three shows actually that all happened in very close proximity that helped produce this transformation of the status of these artists within our discourse. The first was the show that Nick Mauss did at the Whitney, which was called *Transmissions*, and that was about six months before my show opened. My show, *Young and Evil*, occurred simultaneously with an exhibition of the same group of artists at the Museum of Modern Art. Their show, my show's called *Young and Evil*–sexy. Their show was called *Lincoln Kirstein's Modern*–boring, nobody wants to see that.

[00:33:38.100] - **Jarrett Earnest**
I didn't see that. And then when you went and saw the show, guess what? There was no sex, there were no dicks, there was nothing weird. It was all nicey-nicey, and it was all about the Modern patting themselves on the back because they had been affiliated with Lincoln Kirstein at a certain period, and like, "thus, this is, you thought you knew what the Museum of Modern Art was, but you didn't. We had faggots too." And it didn't

work, and so our shows, which happened at the same time, were always reviewed together, and it was always, as Laura Hoptman said to me with her characteristic elegance, "you kicked the Museum of Modern Art's ass." And I said, it's not a contest, but if it were, I would have won. [laughs from the audience]

[00:34:21.400] - **[unknown speaker 1]**
What was the Nick Mauss show?

[00:34:22.650] - **Jarrett Earnest**
Nick Mauss was *Transmissions*. Okay, so that was what was different. This is why these are three different takes. Nick Mauss's show was more like an artist's project. Nick Mauss is a very interesting artist, he did a lot of historical work, he cares very deeply about this stuff, he cares mostly about dance. So his show was about the role of ballet. And my distinction is, I feel a little weird about the fetishization of an art form that you could never experience. The New York City Ballet under Balanchine on those bodies at that time, was about real life, and all of the things around it were not the art. They were subsidiary to the art. And so what you're doing is fetishizing the impossibility of ever dealing with the art itself. And so, for instance, Nick Mauss did this thing where he recreated a costume that Paul Cadmus designed for one of the performances, The Filling Station, it's like a sailor suit that's translucent. It's very sexy. And no copies, there are no extant versions of that costume, but there are photographs of it, and so they recreated it and put on the thing.

[00:35:36.810] - **Jarrett Earnest**
For me, I want the real thing. I don't want a recreation of a costume. If you can't get the real costume, if you can't get the real book, if you— I don't think it should be in a show. Frankly, that's something else, that's an artwork.

[00:35:52.160] - **[unknown speaker 2]**
That's not very queer.

[00:35:54.500] - **Jarrett Earnest**
Well, let's talk about what that means to you. What do you mean?

[00:35:57.440] - **[unknown speaker 2]**
Well, I think that there's a lot of strategies right now, especially within sort of, you know, recuperating lost histories and sort of like telling stories, speculative fiction, that is generally kind of queer, and I think interesting and exciting. So like, you know, if the custom doesn't exist, then you make it.

[00:36:14.710] - **Jarrett Earnest**
Yeah, it's paste, but then it becomes about the artist, it becomes about Nick Mauss as an artist, or the curator as an artist, authoring this particular experience. For me, it's like my biggest problem with the Whitney Biennial's current title, I haven't seen the show, I've been very busy, but I don't like the title, which is *Even Better Than the Real Thing*, which apparently comes from a U2 song that I've never heard, have you? What the title should be is the Marvin Gaye song, "Ain't Nothin' Like the Real Thing," because "Even Better Than the Real Thing" makes me think, "I guess there's a real thing somewhere else. I should go look at it." But the artworks themselves, the thing about this is, "this is the real thing, this is the artwork," and whether you like it or not, it exists to open its fullness for you to engage with through time and space. That's what art does. Art is displaced in time. Its destiny in some ways is to be encountered in a future where everyone is dead. And it sustains that, it's available to accrue meaning in that sense. Dance, I don't think so. I think there's a lot of virtues, and mostly that's why George Platt Lynes is such an important character for Nick's project, is because he was making art from the photographs of the ballet dancers.

[00:37:50.340] - **Jarrett Earnest**
I think that that's enough time, unfortunately. I had all this other stuff to talk about, but maybe if you have some questions— I like that queer question. And there's like a lot of answers to it, but you want to ask it again?

[00:38:03.480] - **[unknown speaker 3]**
I can ask it in a different way maybe.

[00:38:06.090] - **Jarrett Earnest**
Yeah.

[00:38:09.220] - **[unknown speaker 3]**
Like I feel like in this project that you just presented, which is lovely, and I love the book too.

[00:38:14.360] - **Jarrett Earnest**
Thank you. I'm glad you got it.

[00:38:15.930] - **[unknown speaker 3]**
I know it's an important book, I think. But there is a kind of imagination involved in this project of history, of recuperating history, right? It's not the real thing that we're looking at. It's actually a sort of a reimagination that depends a lot on sort of like rumor and like what's left in someone's dresser or whatever, you know. So, I mean, I don't know. I'm not going to push too hard back about it. But I just think that the idea of imagination in this is kind of evident. What does that mean to me? And it's kind of the same as the costume thing that you're talking about, maybe.

[00:38:54.140] - **Jarrett Earnest**
Well, I think the question that you're asking is, if you were to come back to my statement about I want the real thing, then the question is "what is real and what is the thing?" And those terms are both open to a lot of complexity. I do think that these projects that I've put together, like the big curatorial projects that I've done, are mostly of dead artists, and they're historical projects. I just found out this afternoon that everyone here basically works on post-1960s art. My work is pretty much earlier and I mostly like older art. I sort of think like Renaissance art, you know what I mean, like that's really real to me. You want to talk about the real thing. So I do take your point that

embedded within this is a proposition about what history is, how it gets told, like what are viable objects to enter into the constellation that are being animated, and that that is in and of itself an imaginative proposition. And I do think that's true. Yeah, what do you want to say, nay?

[00:40:10.940] - **[unknown speaker 4]**
I think the missing piece there is the institution and the way in which, like, when I think about Tchelitchev designing costumes so that, like, queers can go to the ballet and ogle the dancers. That's a very different operation than a kind of historical recovery of that, which is super sanitized and also doesn't really involve any ogling. And I artists get to queer things, but I think institutions don't.

[00:40:59.300] - **[unknown speaker 3]**
I don't know the Big Mauss show, so I'm sure that example, that example I might find horrific too. I mean, I just don't really know.

[00:41:04.860] - **Jarrett Earnest**
It's great. No, he's fine. Don't be mean to my Nick Mauss. That's my job. This is the last example that I might share. It was like how I feel like the thinking thing. So this was a show, a collection show that I did at the Drawing Center of Jack Shear's collection. And I wanted to see how it would work to organize drawings in a particular way in relation to each other. So the organizing pair, the structural pair, was like to put this Henri Michaux drawing next to this, um, Vija Celmin's drawing and let that be a spectrum that moved around the room that was organized strictly on form, like on the way that the drawing was made and how it discloses itself, in which this was about the line and this, the mark that narrates its own becoming on the page in a way that is you can follow visually, and then over here was like the line that is submerged below the surface of the mark-making, and so it becomes a unified whole that like doesn't allow you to enter into the experience of the drawing in those terms, and like how they would go.

[00:42:10.400] - **Jarrett Earnest**
And so this was what I had organized the show around, and I wanted to see a number of things when I did it, and to see how they reacted. And one of them was next to the Vija Celmins, next to it was another Vija Celmins, which was a galaxy, and then right next to those were Tom of Finland's. And I thought, "ooh, this will be interesting. I wonder how the super tightly rendered Tom of Finland leather jacket is gonna look next to the Vija Celmins galaxy, or like the butt, you know, like whatever, in terms of rendering and graphite." And when you put them together, you then think, "well, same time period, they're both in LA, they're both displaced from Europe." Like, there's all of this stuff that's suddenly interesting that one could think about. But my experience of having put these Tom of Finland in this context was that nobody cared. Nobody was scandalized. And so what I learned was like, actually, Tom of Finland has been so completely recuperated as a contemporary art object that nobody was upset and nobody asked any questions about it, even though it might be a little amusing or whatever.

[00:43:24.470] - **Jarrett Earnest**
And so from that, then I had this whole other set of questions, which was, "well, how did this happen? How did this go from being porn that was deeply imbricated in conversations around racism and fascism to being up on the wall in the Drawing Center, up on the wall in David Kordansky Gallery, up on the wall in the Finnish National Gallery as their greatest Finnish artist, which happened last year. And what are people saying about it?" Basically nothing. They're like, isn't this great? We have got gay liberation. Love is love. And so then I was like, "wow, that's not right. Like, what does that mean?" And this is also a question about institutionalization, or in a different way, how something becomes a viable object in the contemporary art market. And so I have in the next issue of the New York Review of Books, but you can read it online right now as of today, an article about Tom of Finland and this trying to retrace this back. So yeah, I don't know, does anyone else have a question? But I think there is more to what you're saying. I say all of that.

[00:44:34.040] - **[unknown speaker 2]**
I love this, I'm going to tell you quickly, I worked at an institution in Philadelphia, a museum, and my boss once gave me Tom of Finland bed sheets as a gift, and so I knew Tom of Finland was over at that point.

[00:44:44.930] - **Jarrett Earnest**
Your boss who was a curator?

[00:44:46.550] - **[unknown speaker 2]**
She was actually the registrar. I was the assistant registrar. But, you know, very institutional kind of grandmother figure, and she gave me Tom of Finland sheets.

[00:44:53.160] - **Jarrett Earnest**
That's both touching and horrifying.

[00:44:56.240] - **[unknown speaker 1]**
So, little addition to that, the folks who made those sheets, Avram Finkelstein, who was one of the designers of the Silence Equals Death triangle.

[00:45:13.150] - **Jarrett Earnest**
Yeah, one of my favorite people. Any other questions? Come on. Yeah, Luke.

[00:45:19.750] - **Luke Whittaker**
Yeah, I guess I could ask this early on because when you're presenting your own work and your own like performance pieces and stuff you had in that experimental space that now only exist as photographs. How do you feel about that now as the only way to interact with them, given what you said about performance and its relationship to documentation, and whether or not you're experiencing it as a glorified form because you can imagine it and you can envision it? I guess just because it's your own work.

[00:45:48.250] - **Jarrett Earnest**
Well, I think the reason it's important to me was because it was my life, and I think that as such it might be interesting material with which to write, but I also think like it was about disappearing, and it's okay if it disappears. Like all the things that we love disappear, and then the question is like, well then, "how does it become present with us?" And often things remain present in extremely oblique and transmuted forms. And so I think that's a little bit of the reason I didn't realize I was going to get so into talking about One-to-One because it was the entire lecture. But I was like, "oh, this would be such a fun, an interesting way for me to think of as a lens onto what otherwise looks like very high-profile and very fancy and elegantly organized historical shows." But to me, they are related in terms of like questions about thinking. There was almost no text, explanatory text in this Young and Evil show because I wanted to see how people received it. And because my focus, one of my expertise is on contemporary art writing. And so it was a novel experience experience to say like, "okay, I have all these thoughts about what writing about art is, its histories, how people do it," and then to say, "well, now I'm putting all of these ideas into what I conceive of as like an argument in the form of a show, and now I get to see how people interpret it as writing," and I didn't want it to be too overdetermined, so it would be open, and frankly, what was a little embarrassing to me was that all the reviews were just, affirmative and simple-minded.

[00:47:45.240] - **Jarrett Earnest**
The few that weren't, that were like a little bitch, just a little bitchy, just a condiment of bitchiness, was like a review in Four Columns I remember that was like, it's as though the Leslie Lohmann, which is the gay museum, had been transposed into David Zwirner. And I read this, and that was a diss, and I read the sentence, I was like, "do you not understand how radical that is, what you just said? Like this art that humiliates everyone, like all gay people who are smart and cool, that they like think like this is the loser museum, and it has all, this is the stuff they have in the basement because it isn't like trans people like doing Barbie hair or whatever, like this is the stuff they're trying to move away from." So to put that into one of the most powerful galleries in the world, where

like other people have permission to think it's chic and cool and be inspired by it, like that was the project. And also, furthermore, this was implicated into a discourse that emerged around queer figurative painting, which were all people that I'd known for a decade and were my friends, and even though they're my friends and they're making work, I have questions, I had doubts about it, where it's like, "who cares if you're making naked paintings of some guy you f***** in Bushwick?"

[00:48:56.480] - **Jarrett Earnest**
These guys were doing it when it was literally illegal, and you couldn't show it to anybody. You could show the weird sailor one maybe, but then that was like a national scandal. And so I was like, a little bit, it was a little bit of a troll, which was like, this is the artwork that was produced at the emergence of gay, modern gay identity that was deeply the product of legal and social repression. And this is one expression of that sublimation. It was like returning to really weird, finicky old masters techniques like tempera painting and silverpoint and like fastidious, archaic, performatively archaic references. And somebody did write and said, later was writing about a show of Doron Langberg and somebody else and said, "oh, I understand now this is what The Young and Evil was about." But to me, these shows were about the present. They're not about the past. The past is something else. As you were saying, the past is over. There are things that we can draw forward. There are needs and questions that I have in the present that the past is a way to think about, or a way to question, or a way to challenge.

[00:50:19.610] - **[unknown speaker 4]**
I went to Doron's lecture on Fire Island?

[00:50:24.960] - **Jarrett Earnest**
Uh-huh. Was I there too?

[00:50:26.320] - **[unknown speaker 3]**
I think maybe.

[00:50:27.210] - **Jarrett Earnest**
I was there. I was there.

[00:50:29.430] - **[unknown speaker 2]**
So, you know, he was talking about--he makes these paintings on Fire Island that are largely of people he's having sex with or whatever. And also flowers, which he called a florid painting. And I thought that was kind of nice. But what do you— I mean, are you critical of that kind of work?

[00:50:44.040] - **Jarrett Earnest**
I mean, Doron is a good friend of mine. And I'm very critical of it.

[00:50:50.300] - **[unknown speaker 4]**
I mean, can you say a bit more about it, maybe? I don't mind being pretty blunt.

[00:50:57.410] - **Jarrett Earnest**
I thought that lecture was really strange, that particular lecture, because it was like, "it's radical that I'm making paintings of naked guys, and that's enough," you know? First of all, I'm not necessarily interested in subject matter in those terms. I'm more interested in content in the sense that I think of content as being like what the thing means out in the world in between people, the object and the people and the culture and how that changes. Subject matter is what it depicts. And so I'm not even sure that that's really his content. I think that's his subject matter. And then there's the other question of how the thing is painted, what it means as a painting. Like how it makes meaning as a thing that you look at, and that's kind of what I'm more interested in, and in Doron's place, I feel like there's a disjuncture between those three terms, and those, I like to put my finger in it like a sore, and it's hard because we live in this world where everything is affirmative, or it's hysterical attack, nothing is like,"oh, what if I have a complicated ambivalent relationship to this thing in which I really like it and I don't like it," or "I like it in certain contexts but not others?"

[00:52:21.120] - **Jarrett Earnest**
And that is something that has disappeared from our discourse like the morning dew. It's very hard to maintain, especially contemporary art.

[00:52:35.910] - **[unknown speaker 2]**
The thing that struck me was how he moved so seamlessly between painting these very kind of explicit sex scenes and like his baby sister, you know, and like that lecture kind of wove those things together in this way that seemed to make perfect sense to him.

[00:52:51.070] - **Jarrett Earnest**
Well, and they're all extremely attractive and completely unthreatening for any kind of bourgeois interiority, with something that would look nice in your house, which, you know, nothing to sneeze at. Not everything looks nice. But also not everything should, but "is that all? Is that all there is?"I'm writing something right now about Sam McKinniss, we're all the same age, and we've all been friends for like a decade. And Sam, I think, has navigated this question in a really different way, in which his work is almost purely cultural. He takes images from popular culture and paints them, and I think there's a deeply queer project there, but I also think it is colder and more cynical. The thing about Doron is that he's sincere. He means it. And even though I mean it, I mean everything I'm saying, but also it's a joke. And there's more. Okay, last question, we cool?

[00:53:54.800] - **[unknow speaker 6]**
Jarrett, you were referring before, you had a photograph of a painting on screen.

[00:54:02.030] - **Jarrett Earnest**
Yeah.

[00:54:02.920] - **[unknow speaker 6]**
And you were calling it the real thing.

[00:54:04.890] - **Jarrett Earnest**
Mm-hmm. Oh, yeah.

[00:54:06.950] - **[unknow speaker 6]**
How does the relationship of photographs of paintings and words about paintings circulate around each other? What has more validity? If you have to see the real thing, a photograph isn't the real thing, what does everybody do?

[00:54:26.240] - **Jarrett Earnest**
Well, that's such an astute question. I mean, it's like a profound question, and I love that question because the thing about this group of artists is that they were all representing each other, and so there are George Platt lyne's photographs of the paintings in the background of the rooms, and I included those things because it really pointed to the thing that you were saying. I think that it has to do with something that's ontological about photography as a medium-- one of the reasons why photography is in crisis right now as a discourse, which I only say as someone who spent the morning with my last class of my seminar at Yale in the photography department; where I just think there's like a deep, deep--the wheels have come off the cart in terms of what a photograph is and what photographic history is and what it is that any of them think that they're doing. And partly I think it's because of this problem where it's like a photograph as an object, a photograph as an act, and a photograph as an image, and the way that the image is this thing that has, is able to be peeled and circulated as not the real thing out into all these disparate contextless contexts, and that's one of the reasons why I believe that painting has reemerged, especially representational, quote-on-quote, "figurative", quote- on- quote, painting has reemerged as a dominant force in contemporary art world is because that is the place where we confront the image as an object that discloses itself to us with our body in time that we can form a relationship with, that I believe that we form a different but more complex relationship with actual photographs as objects, or photographs in books,

[00:56:22.430] - **Jarrett Earnest**
which function differently, but it is an object. Primarily, I believe photo books are objects, and I think our love for them is so related to the materiality of them and why it's so important exactly the way they're printed, you know, it's not just like, "oh, this image is great in any form." And most people, probably 99% of the ways that they encounter images in their life, in their consciousness, is coming through this dematerialized screen, which is not real, you know, this is not the thing in the way that the lineage of photography that we might be talking about has historically historically functioned, or even theorized itself as it came into being. So it's not the thing that you hold next to your heart, of the picture of the beloved, or the picture in your wallet. And I think that there's actually a pretty profound psychic difference in them, but it's almost like this is the water that we're in, and it's almost impossible to ask that question. And that's why I feel like my experience with these photography students has been really confusing, because I think it is confusing.

[00:57:32.350] - **Jarrett Earnest**
And I would love to hear more, Neil, from you about how you relate to this, but—
Another time. Another time.

[00:57:40.670] - **Luke Whittaker**
Yeah, all right.

[00:57:42.110] - **Jarrett Earnest**
Thank you so much.