

# Features

# #30

Nick

Mauss

# April 2024



**Fondazione Imago Mundi**  
magazine

## Features #30 – April 2024

### Nicolas Vamvouklis in conversation with Nick Mauss

*In his new exhibition “Close-fitting Night” at Galerie Chantal Crousel, Nick Mauss invites visitors into a mesmerizing exploration of materiality and memory. Through his innovative use of mediums such as ceramics, reverse-painted glass, and drapery, he orchestrates an evanescent simultaneity of images and connections. Drawing on intimate spaces and obscure histories, his works embody a delicate balance between spontaneity and meticulous craftsmanship. From the tactile allure of textured clay to the captivating depths of mirrored surfaces, the American artist creates a sensorial experience that transcends conventional boundaries.*

**Nick, for some reason, I vividly recall the day last October when Galerie Chantal Crousel announced your representation. This isn’t your first collaboration, is it?**

Yes, they announced it with a photo taken when I had just moved into my new studio in New York. I did participate in a group show at the gallery a long time ago, but this is really our first collaboration.

**Your inaugural solo show at the Parisian gallery has recently debuted. Could you share with us its essence?**

My instinct is to resist this question.

**Then, how about the title “Close-fitting Night”?**

It’s a sensorial time-image. Something we’ve all experienced but perhaps have not understood in that way. The phrase comes from Larry Eigner, a poet associated with the Black Mountain School, whose extremely precise and pared-down language crosses poetics of disability and ecology.

**The exhibition presents new works spanning various mediums like paper, ceramics, and fabric. How do these materials contribute to your continuous exploration of drawing?**

Every exhibition comes together in distinct strands of processes that develop over time. I treat drawing as an open text, an open medium

that resonates through other media and histories. The vulnerable directness of the drawn line, as a form of embodied inscription, is processed through particular materials, and often in ways that go against their inherent properties, to achieve a kind of material freeing.

At the core, I want to make a defamiliar experience — so that habitual ways of seeing or behaving are unsettled. That defamiliarization takes place for myself in the process of making as much as for the viewer in the process of engaging with the work. I transfer techniques and histories from one medium to another to achieve a kind of contamination: excited, highly active surfaces that engage multiple registers of reading and sensing.

You'll see this crossing of languages throughout the exhibition. For example, I've taken resist techniques that come from textile printing and applied them to stoneware murals. The reverse-painted glass works evoke the "development" of early photographic images, such as the conflation of drawing and photography in cliché-verre, where the drawing is scratched into a sheet of glass smoked by a candle to produce a negative from which prints can be pulled.

Almost subconsciously I tend to embed the image in the material support. For the first time I am showing works made using a process borrowed from couture called devoré, where the drawing literally "devours" the plant-based fibers of a length of satin, leaving the protein-based fibers behind. The works ask the viewer to reconsider how categories come into being, both material and historical.

**I admit I'm really impressed by the glazed stoneware. What motivates you to return to your studio time and again?**

Even though I live in my studio, I would say that much of my work takes place outside the notion of a permanent studio. Exterior sites that are generative for me include workshops, archives, exhibition sites, and classrooms where I collaborate with other artists, artisans, curators, performers, archivists, and art historians.

I studied at Cooper Union, a highly interdisciplinary school that emphasized self-education and the potential for dialogues across specialized fields, and in teaching I've also been most inspired when working across disciplines, in experimental programs such as the MFA program at Bard College. What motivates me is to put myself in an unfamiliar situation, to bring my specific practices into close contact with the specialized knowledges of others.

**I know you have a profound connection with dance. You posted a photo of Steve Paxton last month, a few days following his passing. I personally admired his perspective on how the body can interact with diverse objects. How do you perceive movement? Does this understanding influence your practice in any ways?**

I've worked with histories of performance and their false separation from histories of art. Over the past 10 years, I've made several exhibitions and books about the interdependence of dance and art histories ("Designing Dreams: A Celebration of Leon Bakst," "Transmissions," "Remembering a Dance: Parts of Some Sextets 1965-2019"), and I've collaborated with dancers and developed new methods of using archives to incite movement, and in the case of "Transmissions," at the Whitney Museum in New York, to reimagine the museum.

I've also been cast in the role of performer, most recently in the reconstruction of Yvonne Rainer's 1965 "Parts of Some Sextets," which hadn't been seen in over half a century, and in which Paxton, among others, originally performed. Working with Yvonne Rainer and her collaborator Emily Coates, we remembered the dance, live, in our bodies. This process deeply affected how I draw and what is transmitted through my body when I draw.

But perhaps this is where I can answer your second question — my work is fixated on the notion of trace, and questions of gesture related to both image and movement. The reverse-glass painted mirrors in this exhibition are never a still image, they shift in accordance with the viewer's field of vision and movement of the body and require a constant negotiation of oneself entangled with the work in movement.

**...and how about the recent book "Body Language" you co-authored with Angela Miller?**

As I mentioned before, I am constantly in dialogue with other artists, performers, and art historians. This book grew very organically out of my conversations with Miller about specific practices that have resisted historicization. In writing about these particular artists — George Platt Lynes and the collective PaJaMa, an intimate group of artists who worked in painting, photography, fashion, and dance and developed a parallel practice of taking photographs of each other — we reconsidered how queer art histories are written. In my case, reading the work of George Platt Lynes through complex histories of sexuality and forms of intimacy, and in Angela's, centering a female queer perspective in a terrain that is normally described from the point of view of male desire.

Writing and drawing carry similar potentialities — with the ability to bring things into being and change what is possible. Over the years, I have written

many essays that have affected how we begin to form a contemporary art history and a relation to the past. Antonia Carrara and Benjamin Thorel from After 8 Books in Paris edited a volume of my selected essays titled "Dispersed Events" with an introduction by Lynne Cooke. The book is at the press at this very moment and will be available in late April.

**We're eagerly awaiting its release! Do you have any personal rituals you adhere to?**

Listening to music underwater while I swim.

Exhibition view: Nick Mauss, *Close-fitting Night*, 2024, Galerie Chantal Crousel  
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris  
Photo: Martin Argyroglo



Nick Mauss, *A Line That May Be Cut*, 2024, Satin dévoré, stoneware and manganese oxide on velvet

Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

Photo: Jiayun Deng — Galerie Chantal Crousel



Exhibition view: Nick Mauss, *Close-fitting Night*, 2024, Galerie Chantal Crousel  
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris  
Photo: Martin Argyroglo





Nick Mauss, *Of Another Nature I*, 2024, Glazed stoneware  
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris  
Photo: Jiayun Deng — Galerie Chantal Crousel



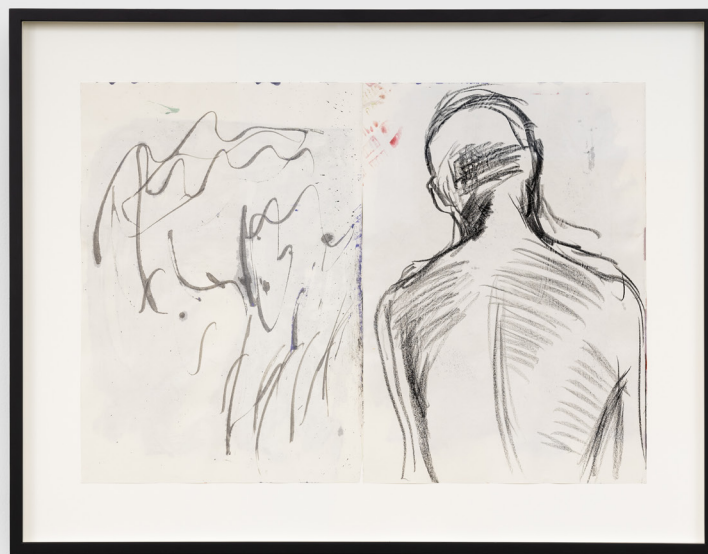
Exhibition view: Nick Mauss, *Close-fitting Night*, 2024, Galerie Chantal Crousel  
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris  
Photo: Martin Argyroglo



Nick Mauss, *Convergence*, 2023, Glazed stoneware  
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris  
Photo: Jiayun Deng — Galerie Chantal Crousel



Nick Mauss, *Untitled*, 2019, Ink, crayon and gouache on paper  
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris  
Photo: Jiayun Deng — Galerie Chantal Crousel



Exhibition view: Nick Mauss, *Close-fitting Night*, 2024, Galerie Chantal Crousel  
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris  
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## Nick Mauss

Nick Mauss (b. 1980, New York) develops a multidisciplinary practice situated at the intersections of established art histories. In his works, he utilizes drawing to navigate between mediums and spaces, transcending categorizations. The line expands into various formats such as reverse glass painting, ceramics, textiles, paper, sculpture, performance, and writing. He has exhibited in internationally renowned institutions such as the Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris, Kunsthalle Basel, Whitney Museum of American Art, Fondation Louis Vuitton, Museum Ludwig, and Serralves Museum. His works have joined the collections of The Museum of Modern Art, KADIST Art Foundation, The Walker Art Center, and M+ Museum.



Photo: Jiayun Deng – Galerie Chantal Crousel

**Features is an interview series that explores inspiring artistic and research stories in contemporary culture. Invited artists and practitioners from all over the world — acting within a multitude of initiatives, spaces and contexts — share their creative processes with curator Nicolas Vamvouklis.**

***The opinions expressed in the interviews are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Foundation.***

**Nicolas Vamvouklis**

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