

# Bizarre Silks, Private Imaginings and Narrative Facts, etc.

An exhibition by  
Nick Mauss

With works by

Gretchen Bender, \* 1951 in Seaford, US  
† 2004 in New York, US

Felix Bernstein and Gabe Rubin:  
both \* 1992 in New York, US  
both live and work in New York, US

William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin:  
William S. Burroughs, \* 1914 in St. Louis, US  
† 1997 in Lawrence, US  
Brion Gysin, \* 1916 in Taplow, UK  
† 1986 in Paris

James Ensor, \* 1860 in Ostende, NL  
† 1949 in Ostende

Hannah Höch, \* 1889 in Gotha, DE  
† 1978 in Berlin

Ray Johnson, \* 1927 in Detroit, US  
† 1995 near Sag Harbor, US

Ketty La Rocca, \* 1938 in La Spezia, IT  
† 1976 in Florence, IT

Rosemary Mayer, \* 1943 in Ridgewood, US  
† 2014 in New York, US

Nick Mauss, \* 1980 in New York, US  
lives and works in New York

Robert Morris, \* 1931 in Kansas City, US  
† 2018 in Kingston, US

Ken Okiishi, \* 1978 in Ames, US  
lives and works in New York, US

Edward Owens, \* 1949 in Chicago, US  
† 2009 in Chicago

Anton Perich, \* 1945 in Dubrovnik, HR  
lives and works in New York, US

Georgia Sagri, \* 1979 in Athens  
lives and works in Athens and New York, US

Bea Schlingelhoff, \* 1971 in Waiblingen, DE  
lives and works in Zurich, CH

Megan Francis Sullivan, \* 1975 in Stamford, US  
lives and works in Berlin

and further anonymous works

## Kunsthalle Basel 7.2. — 20.9.2020

# EN

Invited to stage an exhibition at Kunsthalle Basel, artist Nick Mauss has conceived *Bizarre Silks, Private Imaginings and Narrative Facts, etc.* in which scenographic, conceptual, and curatorial concerns coincide. The act is in keeping with Mauss's longstanding interest in the form of the exhibition as an artistic medium in its own right. *Bizarre Silks...* unfolds as a series of unexpected encounters in which the artist draws out each artwork's distinct presence while heightening the relationships between them. Here, as in so many of his exhibitions, Mauss deliberately reacts to the conditions of a given space, paying attention to pacing and architecture, as well as creating devices for display, framing, and visual obstruction, which include a folding screen and a series of painted thresholds that reorient the viewer's approach to what, and how, they are seeing.

How do you maintain a radical subjectivity?

Bea Schlingelhoff's 2018 *Typeface dedicated to and named after Anne-Marie (Im Hof-) Pignet* in acknowledgment of the Swiss activist, addresses political consciousness as a means to surface a public memory.

Ray Johnson's artist's book *Ray Gives a Party* (ca. 1955) illustrates the pandemonium of costumed guests who attend an imagined party, including intimate and annoying friends, literary and artistic celebrities, an uninvited totalitarian ruler, and the police.

A hanging textile mesh subdivides the first space of the Kunsthalle Basel and catches all that lies beyond in its grid, like Leon Battista Alberti's veil, invented to impose order on the flux of things in the world so as to render it as a picture plane. Staggered around this visual field, a configuration of folding screens and a large hanging fabric banner are painted with motifs that collapse the functions of drawing, writing, and decoration.

Felix Bernstein and Gabe Rubin's *Memory, La MaMa* (2014), documenting a performance at La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club in New York City, shows how an overdone Broadway musical standard might be transformed into a Trojan horse, a vehicle that destroys social scripts in plain sight.

Ketty La Rocca's freestanding letter "J" (*J*, 1970) figures the French *je* (Eng. I) as a shiny, impermeable thing, while her *Comma with 3 dots* (1970) isolates the punctuation marks from any normative sound or "sense" to which they are meant to give structure.

Georgia Sagri's oversized *Deep Cut, Open Wound, and Fresh Bruise* (all 2018) transform the exhibition and the building that houses it into a vulnerable organism in a state of crisis to which the viewer is a witness and tasked with rethinking their conception of care.

**ROOM 4**

Megan Francis Sullivan  
From the series  
*The Bathers (Inverted)*

- 1 *Quatre Baigneuses, 1890, New Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen (Inverted), 2016*  
73 × 95 cm
- 2 *Baigneur aux brax écartés, 1883, Collection Jasper Johns (Inverted), 2016*  
32 × 24 cm
- 3 *Cinq Baigneuses, 1885–1887, Kunstmuseum Basel (Inverted), 2015*  
65 × 65 cm
- 4 *Trois Baigneuses, 1876–1877, Musée du Petit-Palais, Paris (Inverted), 2016*  
53 × 55 cm
- 5 *Study of Bathers, 1902, Private Collection (Inverted), 2017*  
20 × 33 cm

All works oil on canvas  
Courtesy of the artist

6  
Gretchen Bender (1951–2004)  
*TV Text and Image (PEOPLE WITH AIDS), 1986–1993*  
2 metal shelves, 2 television sets, vinyl lettering  
Dimension variable  
Gretchen Bender Estate

7  
Robert Morris (1931–2018)  
in collaboration with  
The Fabric Workshop,  
Philadelphia  
*Restless Sleepers/Atomic Shroud, 1981*  
Pigment on linen  
2 sheets, each approx.  
290 × 229 cm; 2 pillowcases,  
each approx. 51 × 91 cm  
Collection of The Fabric  
Workshop and Museum

**ROOM 5**

- 1  
Ken Okiishi  
*Untitled, 2016*  
HD video, color, sound  
4 min. 50 sec.  
Courtesy of the artist; Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York/Los Angeles; Pilar Corrias, London; and Take Ninagawa, Tokyo
- 2  
Nick Mauss  
*Tresholds, 2020*  
Mixed media on canvas, metal  
6 parts; 220 × 220 cm,  
220 × 220 cm, 260 × 220 cm,  
270 × 220 cm, 290 × 200 cm,  
290 × 200 cm  
Courtesy of the artist, Campoli Presti, London/Paris, and 303 Gallery, New York

- 3  
Anton Perich  
*Victor Hugo Rojas, 1978*  
Video, color, sound  
13 min. 51 sec.  
Courtesy of the artist
- 4  
Video documentation of  
William S. Burroughs and  
Brion Gysin's two scrapbooks,  
untitled, 1964–70 and 1979,  
from the collection of  
Phil Aarons  
Video, color, no sound  
28 min. 35 sec.
- 5  
Rosemary Mayer, "reenactment"  
by Nick Mauss in collaboration  
with the Estate of Rosemary Mayer  
*February Ghosts (Monoceros, Auriga, and Orion), 1981/2020*  
Cellophane, glassine, hemp,  
paint, silk ribbon, twine, wooden  
dowels, yarn  
Dimensions variable  
With kind permission of the  
Estate of Rosemary Mayer

**ROOM 2**

- 1  
Georgia Sagri  
*Deep Cut, 2018*  
Laser print on 3M vinyl sticker  
151 × 337 cm  
Courtesy of the artist and The  
Breeder, Athens
- 2  
James Ensor (1860–1949)  
*Peste dessous, peste dessus,  
peste partout, 1904*  
Etching on paper  
19 × 29 cm; 59 × 74 cm, framed  
Private collection
- 3  
Georgia Sagri  
*Open Wound, 2018*  
Laser print on 3M vinyl sticker  
106.68 × 391.16 cm  
Courtesy of the artist and The  
Breeder, Athens
- 4  
Georgia Sagri  
*Fresh Bruise, 2018*  
Laser print on 3M vinyl sticker  
195.58 × 142.24 cm  
Courtesy of the artist and The  
Breeder, Athens

**ROOM 3**

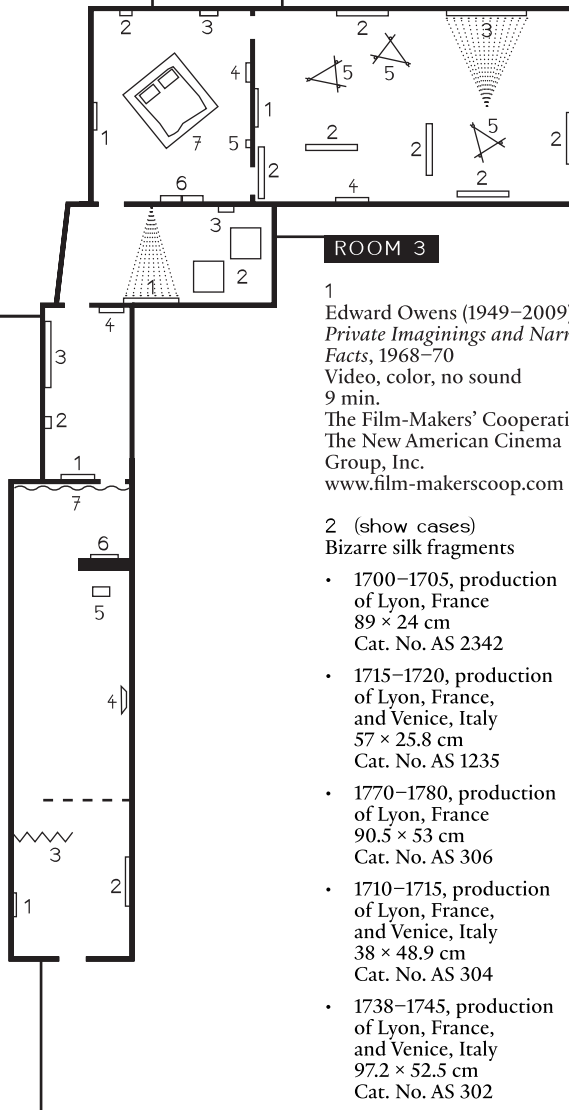
- 1  
Edward Owens (1949–2009)  
*Private Imaginings and Narrative Facts, 1968–70*  
Video, color, no sound  
9 min.  
The Film-Makers' Cooperative/  
The New American Cinema  
Group, Inc.  
[www.film-makerscoop.com](http://www.film-makerscoop.com)
- 2 (show cases)  
Bizarre silk fragments
  - 1700–1705, production of Lyon, France  
89 × 24 cm  
Cat. No. AS 2342
  - 1715–1720, production of Lyon, France, and Venice, Italy  
57 × 25.8 cm  
Cat. No. AS 1235
  - 1770–1780, production of Lyon, France  
90.5 × 53 cm  
Cat. No. AS 306
  - 1710–1715, production of Lyon, France, and Venice, Italy  
38 × 48.9 cm  
Cat. No. AS 304
  - 1738–1745, production of Lyon, France, and Venice, Italy  
97.2 × 52.5 cm  
Cat. No. AS 302

- 1700–1710, production of Lyon, France, and Italy  
49.4 × 51.7 cm  
Cat. No. AS 186
  - 1700–1705, production of Lyon, France, and Venice, Italy  
64.5 × 36.5 cm  
Cat. No. AS 135
  - 1700–1712, production of Lyon, France, and Venice, Italy  
62.7 × 52.3 cm  
Cat. No. AS 11
  - 1700–1710, production of Lyon, France  
39 × 62.3 cm  
Cat. No. AS 2
- All fragments silk brocade  
Fondazione Antonio Ratti, Como
- 3  
Hannah Höch (1889–1978)  
*Ich bin ein armes Tier, 1959*  
Gouache and pencil on paper  
36.3 × 50 cm;  
72.5 × 102.5 × 3 cm, framed  
BERLINISCHE GALERIE –  
LANDESMUSEUM  
FÜR MODERNE KUNST,  
FOTOGRAFIE UND  
ARCHITEKTUR

**ROOM 1**

- 1  
Video documentation of  
Ray Johnson's artist book  
*Ray Gives a Party, ca. 1955,*  
from the collection of Phil Aarons  
Video, color, no sound  
2 min. 39 sec.
- 2  
Bea Schlingelhoff  
*Typeface dedicated to and  
named after Anne-Marie  
(Im Hof-)Piguet, 2018*  
Digital typeface, paper, vinyl  
Dimension variable  
Courtesy of the artist
- 3  
Nick Mauss  
*Transcript, 2020*  
Mixed media on canvas, metal  
250 × 400 cm  
Courtesy of the artist, Campoli  
Presti, London/Paris, and 303  
Gallery, New York
- 4  
Felix Bernstein and Gabe Rubín  
*Memory, La MaMa, 2014*  
Performance documentation  
Video, color, sound  
5 min. 36 sec  
Courtesy of the artists and  
David Lewis, New York

- 5  
Ketty La Rocca (1938–1976)  
*J, 1970*  
PVC plastic  
89 × 38 × 11 cm  
The Estate Ketty La Rocca and  
Kadel Willborn, Dusseldorf
- 6  
Ketty La Rocca (1938–1976)  
*Comma with 3 dots, 1970*  
PVC plastic  
4 parts, approx. 55 × 115 cm  
The Estate Ketty La Rocca and  
Kadel Willborn, Dusseldorf
- 7  
Nick Mauss  
*Untitled Banner, 2020*  
Ink on cotton  
400 × 667 cm  
Courtesy of the artist, Campoli  
Presti, London/Paris, and 303  
Gallery, New York



In the same room, James Ensor's etching from 1904 speaks directly to our new sensorium: a vigilant attention to aerosols propelled by speech, or breath. Rendering the materiality of air in gleefully paranoid detail, *Peste dessous, peste dessus, peste partout* (Eng. plague below, plague above, plague everywhere) comes to us in the present from the artist who self-described as a "nasty, wicked, incapable, ignorant... cream puff gone rotten."

*Private Imaginings and Narrative Facts* (1968–70) is the work of Edward Owens—a precocious filmmaker whose career was cut short early on. He made all four of his surviving films when he was not yet twenty. Decades later, Jonas Mekas, in conversation with fellow filmmaker M.M. Serra, recalled Owens as "the first gay African American experimental filmmaker." Ostensibly a portrait of Owens' mother, Mildred, the film intercuts tender, lingering shots of a regal Mildred Owens with sudden glimpses of other subjects—an androgynous face, a Black Panther button, the dirty tip of a boot. Never arriving at a narrative, Owens' miniature swirls fragments of aborted films and "real life" together with "fantasy" into a distillation of a lifetime's yearnings.

A type of woven textile called "bizarre silks," born out of the traffic in motifs kindled by the trade in textiles during the 17th and 18th centuries, constitutes a kind of ornamental feedback loop of industrial silk production and early global capitalism. These fabrics transport an erratic synthesis of various styles and origins: memories plucked from rococo, chinoiserie, the baroque, Persian quotations, and Japanese graphics collide to produce irrational flaming grotesques that anticipate, almost hallucinate, art nouveau.

Hannah Höch's postwar gouache *Ich bin ein armes Tier* (Eng. I am a poor animal, 1959) at first looks like a child's grammatical exercise. Conjugating a condition of being through every grammatical person, she transforms a feeling of utter abandonment into a statement of condemnation.

A 1986 work from Gretchen Bender's series *TV Text and Image* (1986–1993) superimposes the statement "PEOPLE WITH AIDS" over a local TV channel broadcast. The harshness of the "message" fused to the surface of the TV "message" exaggerates a perverse dissonance between two irreconcilable (but simultaneous) planes of fact.

Similarly, Megan Francis Sullivan's paintings from the series *The Bathers (Inverted)* (2015–2017) render Paul Cézanne's bathers at a confounding distance, flipping their color scheme, as if one were seeing them in negative. Inciting optical and conceptual reversals that are hard to hold in equilibrium, Sullivan's doubled afterimages gain an additional charge here in proximity to Cézanne's *Cinq baigneuses* (Eng. Five Bathers, 1885/1887) on view at the Kunstmuseum Basel, just down the street.

During his "decadent" phase of the 1980s, sculptor Robert Morris produced *Restless Sleepers/Atomic Shroud* (1981), a set of bed linens printed with text and images of atom bomb explosions and skeletons. A text can be found on each pillowcase that describes the detonation of several nuclear bombs distributed over the globe "to achieve erasure."

Ken Okiishi's *Untitled* video from 2016 records a historically specific point of view: An unknown 21st century car's approach into New York City as seen through the windshield. The banality of this episode quickly flips into surreality, resembling something photographer Eugène Atget (1857–1927) would have captured if he had had a smartphone, a car, and lived in New York City.

Two untitled scrapbooks (1964–70, 1979) collaboratively made by William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin are shown here as film, emphasizing their duration, tactility, and sequential illogic.

Victor Hugo Rojas (1942–93), a stylist of subversive luxury retail window displays and fashion designer Halston's lover, was also a performance artist, captured here by artist Anton Perich in 1978 for his public access television show *Anton Perich Presents*. Hugo Rojas' performances were marked by ritual sacrifice—here Andy Warhol's portrait of Hugo Rojas that is destroyed among heaps of plastic sheeting, gamboling kittens, clouds of baby powder, and attendants nodding to disco music.

Hugo Rojas' performance shares a space with "reenactments" of works from Rosemary Mayer's series *Ghosts* (1981), staged specifically for this exhibition in collaboration with Mayer's estate. Educated first as a classicist and later as an artist, Mayer was a founding member of A.I.R. Gallery, the first all-female cooperative gallery established in the United States in 1972. Over the course of her life she made works uneasily categorizable as either painting or sculpture, embracing drawing, writing, translation, temporary architectures, and events, all of which departed from the strict imperatives of minimalism and conceptual art. Mayer's art aspires to a meeting she termed "Object-as-Visitation": Casting artwork and viewer in a symbolic confrontation, Mayer elicits a kind of stunned wonder through works that appear at once alien and ravishing.

The "miraculous encounter" finds an analog in "radical juxtaposition" throughout the exhibition, as it shuttles between text, texture, textility, transfiguration, and the fleshy reality of the body seen across works of decisively different epochs and genres. Constructing a temporary logic of proximities between specific artworks, gestures, and artifacts, *Bizarre Silks...* does not generate a cohesive synthesis, but allows them to exist in a voided present akin to the first time you see someone or something you are drawn to and you don't know why.

—Nick Mauss

Text set in the Anne-Marie Piguet typeface

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Nick Mauss additionally acknowledges:

Owens's films have been preserved thanks to The Film-Maker's Cooperative in New York City and the commitment of the cooperative's director M.M. Serra.

Mayer's work is presented here thanks to the devotion of Marie Warsh and Max Warsh. The "reenactments" of Mayer's *Ghosts* were made specifically for this exhibition in collaboration with Mayer's estate and artist Amanda Friedman, following careful study of materials, and the artist's notes about her works.

Bender's work is here presented on a pair of monitors, following Bender's one-time installation for a 1988 exhibition. I am grateful to Kenta Murakami, co-curator of the 2019 Bender retrospective at Red Bull Arts New York, for bringing this presentation to my attention.

A visit to the archives of the Fondazione Antonio Ratti in 2019, where Maddalena Terragni's exhibition of bizarre silks was presented, inspired their inclusion in this exhibition.

#### GUIDED TOURS THROUGH THE EXHIBITION

Every Sunday at 3 pm guided tour, in German, except on Sundays when the curator's tour takes place

Curator's tour with Elena Filipovic, in English  
6.9.2020, Sunday, 3 pm  
20.9.2020, Sunday, 3 pm

Guided tour, in English  
27.8.2020, Thursday, 6:30 pm

In the Kunsthalle Basel library you will find a selection of publications related to Nick Mauss and the other participating artists.

Follow us on Facebook and Instagram and share your photos and impressions with #kunsthallebasel.

More information at [kunsthallebasel.ch](http://kunsthallebasel.ch)