

frieze

GESTURING PERSONAE

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

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

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

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

ANDREW DURBIN is senior editor of *frieze*.

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

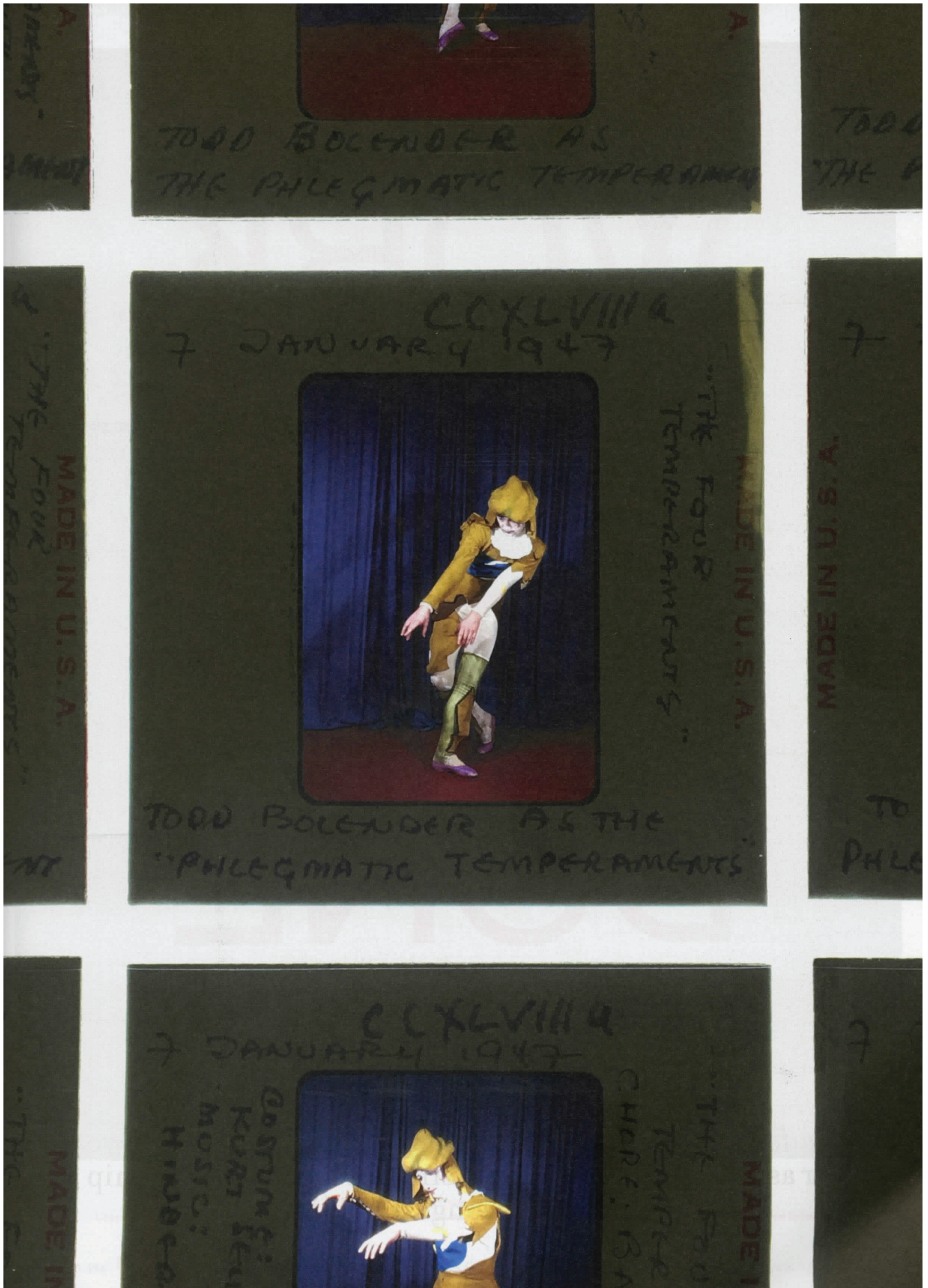
PHOTOGRAPHY: Nick Mauss (pp. 183 & 187), Ken Okiishi (p. 184–85) and Ron Amstutz (p. 186).











TODD BOLENDER AS
THE PHLEGMATIC TEMPERAMENTS

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7 JANUARY 1947



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TEMPERAMENTS"

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TODD BOLENDER AS THE
"PHLEGMATIC TEMPERAMENTS"

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7 JANUARY 1947



"THE FOUR
TEMPERAMENTS"

MADE IN U.S.A.

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