



Media Art Xploration Presents *MAXlive 2023:*

Where is My Body?

A Festival of Works Expanding Performance with Science and Technology,

November 8–11

***MAXlive 2023* Features Work from Lisa Jamhoury, Modesto “Flako” Jimenez, Musicians from The Knights and Paula Matthusen, Kate Ladenheim, Paul Pinto and Kameron Neal, Matt Romein with Peter Mills Weiss and Julia Mounsey, Sister Sylvester, Mike Tyus and Luca Renzi**

Co-Presented with National Sawdust and ONX Studio

Media Art Xploration (MAX) presents ***MAXlive 2023: Where Is My Body?***, a festival of premiere and new performances grappling with some of the most pressing questions opened up by scientific and technological advancements, and how they’ve reshaped our relationship to our bodies and minds. ***MAXlive 2023*** includes works developed by artists in the **MAXmachina** laboratory program, the organization’s incubator for new work at the intersection of performance, science, and technology. The festival productions will be presented at **National Sawdust** (80 N 6th Street, Brooklyn) and **ONX Studio** (645 5th Avenue, Lower Level, Manhattan), two sites of bold artistic experimentation, November 8-11.

The performances that emerged in MAXmachina this year bear a shared interest in examining the status of the body in this moment when technology creates opportunities to fragment, replicate, erase, exaggerate, and give and deny agency to our physical forms. Through the inquiries artists make here, they reveal the psychological, environmental, and social impacts of the shifting nature of embodiment.

Media Art Xploration Founder and Artistic Director **Kay Matschullat** says, “The body and its various manifestations and ‘realities’ in the digital age are artfully and thoughtfully explored in all the festival works. Consistent with how MAX has always approached our growing inseparability from science and technology, the festival as a whole is neither doomsaying nor naively optimistic—but rather explores, with curiosity and criticality, both the possibilities and the dangers of the new worlds we’re finding ourselves in.”

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The rich and often disquieting symbolic and real-life implications of avatars pervades numerous pieces—in imitation, contrast, illumination, and obfuscation of their tangible counterparts. In **Matt Romein's *Bag of Worms*** (November 10–11), performers **Julia Mounsey** and **Peter Mills Weiss** move in motion capture suits with their avatars transposed into new environments. They are joined by a tyrannical disembodied head named Matt who leads the audience in a disarming satire of video games, violence and American internet culture. **Lisa Jamhoury's *Maquette*** (November 10–11) similarly uses avatars to investigate the body's slippage and multiple existences between the physical and virtual world. Inspired by Norma, the 1940s statue of a "normal" body created from averaged measurements of 15,000 white women aged 21-25 and used throughout media and medicine, it engages the struggle of the fleshy human wishing to thrive in an increasingly averaged, virtual existence. In **Kate Ladenheim's *COMMIT!*** (November 9), the dancer-choreographer turns herself into a playable avatar. She falls repeatedly, meticulously collecting data about the force and impact of each fall, while the audience rates and judges her "commitment" and she edits her action in real time.

The relationship between music and the body is also explored through technology. **Mike Tyus** and **Luca Renzi's** world premiere ***My Body Is an Instrument*** (November 8), with dancers **Layne Paradis Willis** and **Gretchen Ackerman**, inverts the typical relationship between sound and movement in performance, wherein sound/music often acts as the causal force for a body's action. Musicians from **The Knights** perform the world premiere of ***making the whole world a sky*** (November 11), featuring songs and dances that either directly or indirectly take cues from birds, butterflies, and other natural emblems of flight. *making the whole world a sky* includes a newly commissioned composition from **Paula Matthusen**, in collaboration with researchers from the Cornell Ornithology Lab. In **Paul Pinto** and **Kameron Neal's** cantata ***Whiteness*** (November 7 festival preview; excerpts from the forthcoming live adaptation of their film), a chorus of floating heads evoke the silliness and anxieties of skin color.

Two works use distinct means of bringing audiences into their worlds. In ***Mercedes*** (November 11), **Modesto "Flako" Jimenez** virtually reconstructs his grandmother's Bushwick home, in a poignant VR story of matriarchal influence and multigenerational care. **Sister Sylvester's *Good Genes*** (November 10) is a performance that takes place within the biological matter of the audience, turning DNA from a hat that used to be a costume at the Berliner Ensemble, into a genetically-modified cocktail-party cabaret.

MAXlive 2023 is a cornerstone of the organization's model for developing, producing, and presenting compelling and artistically sophisticated new work that brings important questions surrounding scientific research and emerging technology to the public in an accessible format. MAX has produced two previous festivals: *MAXlive 2019: A Space Festival*, on the topic of space exploration, and *MAXlive 2021: The*



Neuroverse, which presented performances and interactive experiences examining cognition and neuroscience. The young organization, founded by Kay Matschullat in 2017, has commissioned and premiered works that have gone on to have runs at large institutions: in 2022, the Museum of Science, Boston presented Nuum Collective's *Doppelgänger*, a duet between a performer and themselves; also in 2022, MASS MoCA presented sound artist Annie Lewandowski, artist and coder Kyle McDonald, and scenic designer Amy Rubin's *Siren*, a dive into the creative minds of humpback whales. Beginning September 15, Theatre for a New Audience will present Annie Dorsen's algorithmic theater lecture-performance *Prometheus Firebringer*.

MAXlive 2023: *Where Is My Body?* Schedule and Descriptions

Paul Pinto and Kameron Neal

***Whiteness* (Excerpts)**

Tuesday, November 7, 2pm, Festival Preview

ONX Studio

Paul Pinto and Kameron Neal are recreating and adapting their film *Whiteness* into poignant and uproariously funny live performance. In the festival, they share excerpts from the forthcoming adaptation. Paul's live body, electrifying voice, and a chorus of floating heads harmoniously muse on privilege, appropriation, and the history of "whiteness" in the United States through chants, loops, micro-pop songs, and green screen trickery. In their MAXmachina residency they further explore the inner thoughts of a mixed-race American trying to navigate the complexities of being visibly brown and invisibly white. *Whiteness* perfectly captures the ridiculousness and anxieties of constructing our identities in the public eye. RSVP required.

Mike Tyus and Luca Renzi

My Body Is an Instrument

Wednesday, November 8, 7:30pm

National Sawdust

What if a body's movement creates the score? Mike Tyus and Luca Renzi make breathtaking use of choreography to generate a score in real-time, flipping the typical relationship between movement and music. With the body's architecture as the driving force of the score, this performance challenges and extends how movement is communicated across different modes of artistic expression. Collaborating with dancers Layne Paradis Willis and Gretchen Ackerman, as well as renowned German music and electronics company Instrument of Things, Tyus and Renzi bring this groundbreaking experience to life using motion sensors.

Modesto "Flako" Jimenez

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Mercedes

Directed by Kevin Torres

Saturday, November 11 6-10pm (at 15 minute intervals)

Followed by a Community Gathering

ONX Studio

This tale of Mercedes Viñales, the grandmother of the artist Modesto “Flako” Jimenez, is a story of an immigration journey to America, a life of community service, and a descent into dementia. *Mercedes* is a visually arresting recreation of Mercedes' Bushwick home as a VR experience led by Mercedes' “voice,” inviting viewers to journey through the tangible objects and emotional depths of the house. Through this new VR format, Flako, director Kevin Torres, and their team reveal the intimate nature of caring for a loved one with memory loss, and highlight the challenges those living with dementia and their caregivers face finding support and community.

Kate Ladenheim

COMMIT!

Thursday, November 9, 7:30pm

National Sawdust

In *COMMIT!*, dancer-choreographer Kate Ladenheim repeatedly falls until she can fall no more, her movements monitored by motion capture and sensors discerning velocity and impact force. This performance of dare and endurance takes audience participation to the next level—audiences rate Ladenheim's commitment, and Ladenheim takes their feedback into account as she attempts to improve her falling, making herself into a playful avatar. All the while data visualizations measure just how hard the artist actually falls. As technological surveillance and gamified interaction systems come to life, they reveal the social patterns of the judge-audience's expectations—and the illusion of embodied agency in a technologically mediated world.

Sister Sylvester

Good Genes

Friday, November 10, 7:30pm

National Sawdust

A bio-art performance that uses DNA extracted from a hat worn—and never washed— by actors in Bertolt Brecht's Berliner Ensemble, *Good Genes* is a genetically modified cocktail party that explores the history of genetics through the journey of the people who left their DNA on that hat. The work takes place in the

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audience's small intestine, and through a celebration of thieves, biohackers and cannibals, ingests worn-out scientific narratives and turns them into a science for the people.

Lisa Jamhoury

Maquette

Friday, November 10, 7:30pm

Saturday, November 11, 2pm

Presented as Part of a Double Bill with Matt Romein's *Bag of Worms*

ONX

Lisa Jamhoury's live interactive performance *Maquette* leverages motion capture technology, avatars, and dance to explore the parallel histories of averaging and idealism in art and society. Live performers' movements drive avatars in a projected virtual world, creating a genre-bending story that unfolds both physically and digitally, and traces the body's passage between realms.

Matt Romein

Bag of Worms

With Julia Mounsey and Peter Mills Weiss

Friday, November 10, 7:30pm

Saturday, November 11, 2pm

Presented as Part of a Double Bill with Lisa Jamhoury's *Maquette*

ONX

In this irreverent and unsettling live motion capture theatrical performance, creator Matt Romein plays a tyrannical disembodied head, leading performers Peter Mills Weiss and Julia Mounsey through a series of increasingly violent and over-the-top scenarios. Inspired by video game modding and body horror, *Bag of Worms* considers the human body as something that can become possessed, deformed, and broken, eliciting discomfort and questioning how we should treat bodies in digital and physical spaces.

In *Bag of Worms*, Weiss and Mousney wear motion capture suits and use technology to create a real-time digital playground. Satirizing video game violence and social media, the performance explores the cumulative trauma we experience through constant media exposure, and asks what happens when we reach our breaking point.

Musicians from The Knights and Composer Paula Matthusen

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making the whole world a sky
Saturday, November 11, 7:30pm
National Sawdust

Composer Paula Matthusen and musicians from *The Knights* unite for this world premiere event that celebrates birds as a timeless source of inspiration for humanity. From serving as symbolic representations of freedom and creativity to serenading us with birdsong, birds have always had both metaphorical and direct relationships to human emotion and meaning-making. Bringing together birdsong and music, *making the whole world a sky* rhapsodically joins these two worlds.

Matthusen's spellbinding new composition draws on recent and historical research from Cornell Ornithology, bringing recordings of birds' songs and the technologies used to interact with them – including *The Knights'* musical instruments – into a shared realm. What starts as a song may emerge as a space to be interrupted, negotiated, and savored.

Credits

The MAXlive festival is supported in part by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in Partnership with the City Council and the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature.

The MAXlive festival and the MAXmachina laboratory program are supported in part by Science Sandbox, an initiative of the Simons Foundation, and by the Ettinger Foundation.

About Media Art Xploration

Media Art Xploration (MAX) is a NYC-based non-profit production company founded in 2017 by Artistic Director Kay Matschullat. The organization supports the development, production, and presentation of compelling and artistically sophisticated new work that brings important questions surrounding scientific discovery and emerging technology to the public in an accessible format. As accelerating climate change, technologies such as artificial intelligence chatbots and AI surveillance, and new research into animal intelligence and perception call into question our role as humans, we believe that it is imperative that artists working in live performance and immersive installation are given adequate resources to explore these developments.



From a science communication standpoint, MAX believes that works experienced live have a unique ability to catalyze deep emotional transformation and intellectual consideration. The company aims to bring both arts and science audiences together and strengthen the production capacity of the greater arts ecosystem by providing substantive production support to artists both familiar and new to engaging with science and emerging technologies. In addition to supporting new commissions, MAX produces a biennial live performance festival, MAXlive, featuring new works by choreographers, playwrights, composers, and technologists that grapple with the most pressing issues of our time; hosts a live conversation series MAXforum where artists and scientists share their processes with the public; and runs an open call performance laboratory where works are incubated and developed.

About National Sawdust

National Sawdust is a dynamic non-profit cultural institution that commissions, produces, and presents programming rooted in sound and supports multidisciplinary artists and arts organizations in the creation of innovative new work. Founded in 2015, National Sawdust operates out of an intimate space, equipped with a state-of-the-art Meyer spatial sound system, in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, where it is one of the few remaining cultural venues. *The New York Times* has described National Sawdust as “the city’s most vital new-music hall” and as “a triumphantly successful performance space that stands for a hip, sophisticated brand of new music.” Composer Paola Prestini, who co-founded National Sawdust, serves as its artistic director, alongside managing director Ana De Archuleta, making National Sawdust one of the few New York cultural institutions led by women.

National Sawdust provides artists across musical genres and artistic disciplines with comprehensive support including commissions, workshops, residencies, public performances, recording, mentorship, and professional development. It aims to be not only a home for its community of artists, but also a place for audiences to discover wide-ranging music at accessible ticket prices. The institution’s mentorship initiatives counteract industry barriers and the historic marginalization of diverse communities in the arts, providing artists and arts workers with guidance, resources, and relationships with established visionaries to accelerate their careers.

Designed by Brooklyn’s Bureau V, National Sawdust is constructed within the existing shell of a century-old sawdust factory, preserving the authenticity of Williamsburg’s industrial past while providing a refined and intimate setting for the exploration of new music. At the venue’s core is a flexible chamber hall, acoustically designed by renowned engineering firm Arup to provide the highest-quality experience of both unamplified and amplified music.

About ONX Studio

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ONX Studio, created by Onassis Culture is a hybrid experimentation, production and exhibition space, and a global community of members who create interactive and immersive XR and AI works. Located in the Olympic Tower in Midtown Manhattan, it was founded in 2020 in partnership between the Onassis Foundation and NEW INC. ONX Studio now exists as a project of Onassis Culture, working in partnership with organizations in New York, including New York University's Tandon School, Games for Change, NEW INC, Rhizome, and MAX, as well as with global institutions such as IDFA, CPHDOX, DiModa, and others. Its members have developed and presented works around the world, including (in 2022/23) SXSW, The Venice International Film Festival, ArsElectronica, Plásmata exhibitions in Athens and Ioannina, Tribeca Festival, Mutek, BAM's Next Wave Festival, and beyond.

Providing development funding, state-of-the-art facilities, advocacy, and community for New York and global XR / AI artists from a broad range of disciplines, ONX Studio has become an influential hub and manifestation of the dynamism of a new global interdisciplinary artistic ecosystem.

Onassis Culture, with the Onassis Stegi as its hub, encourages the talent and energy of local and international artists and starts conversations that aim to shake and shape society. Onassis Stegi is an emblematic venue in Athens but also a center of global contemporary culture that, through a series of initiatives and works, promotes dialogue about democracy, social and environmental justice, racial and gender equality, and LGBTQIA+ rights. Onassis Culture aims to strengthen the presence and status of artists in every corner of the world and, at the same time, forges innovative networks tightly intertwined with the nexus of the international scene. This is achieved with the coordination of international travels; the realization of co-productions in collaboration with cultural institutions worldwide; the participation of artists in international artistic networks; and the enhancement of their interpersonal contacts with international programming coordinators in influential cultural organizations and festivals.

Press Contact

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