

2024 RESIDENT FACULTY LECTURE, July 9, 2024

Pallavi Sen [with slide on screen behind the podium] Tonight's speaker will be Dave McKenzie. [applause, cheering] Who I have the honor to introduce.

In 2017, when I was a participant here, Dave was back for his second summer as faculty. My friend Coleman Collins and Lauren Quinn [?] were on the sign-making team, I wasn't, and made a knockoff of one of Dave's paintings, *Proposal*, to announce the lecture. The original read, 'This painting is a proposal. I propose we meet once a year every year until one of us can't or won't.' I have never seen this painting, but I have seen Coleman and Lauren's version of it that day, seven years ago, and every day, of the last two summers, all of this June, and two days of July. The black painted letters approximate a severe and ubiquitous modern sans serif, and the tan of Dave's canvas is replaced with a bright white gesso. When I look at it, I think first of our summer together. How beautiful it was, so beautiful that it was almost painful to think about it afterwards. Because, how can something so wonderful be behind us? And can we ever anticipate such togetherness again, in the future?

Then, I think of Dave, who I picture always slightly smiling. I think of a book he seconded as a recommendation, though I now know that that is not exactly what happened, but something I have made up, [laughter] and then I think of this painting made in 2007, by Dave, and the promise it offers, if you are willing.

In making a sign for a lecture, a sign maker can look at anything, choose anything. Often, signs are funny, or they're dedications, like from a fan. They are variations of an artist's work, portraits, or none of these things. I love this sign, and I love this painting, because it reveals what we love so much about attempts at utopia, like the school Skowhegan. We come here and encounter a proposition, to be here together, to be here willingly, to eat together, today, tomorrow, next week. To talk to each other tonight, the next morning, next month, in August. And to do it from the most loving part of ourselves, our best self. The option of ceasing engagement always within reach.

To visit this Skowhegan any other time of year, or another summer, is to immediately realize that everything one loves about this place has felt by others too. A school being perhaps the best model of a polyamorous entanglement. [laughter] Dave's proposal, too, exists in editions. There are many of them, and both owners and onlookers and viewers of its knockoffs can look at it and feel the reality of the multiple selves feeling and believing a shared sense and emotion. The weight of a promise, the fruits of obligation, and also the reality, as is made visible in many marriages and insurance plans, that a promise of today ensures nothing tomorrow. It's best if there's already a way out. Until one of us cannot, because we're no longer there; until one of us will not, because we do not want to.

In his project titled *I'll Be There*, Dave distributes day planners that have inside them details of where you can find him on such and such date, and this particular time. On

Sunday the 6th, he will be at MOMA at 1 PM for Jeff Walls' *Milk*. He arrives early, and at least as of 2017, no one comes, and is it still true, Dave? [laughter]

Dave McKenzie [PHRASE UNCLEAR]

Sen It doesn't matter that no one comes! There is something electric and substantial in the material of anticipation, in preparation, in waiting, in maintaining eye contact, looking away, and looking at, and looking away, at the stranger walking towards you. Could he be here to meet you?

Yesterday, Peggy, Alexis and I, we were talking about reliable people, the ones who help you move houses, wait with you at the emergency room, keep appointments. It would be so nice if every such person had an equally dependable person to count on. Reciprocity is a wonder, but even in its absence, is it meaningful, in our relationship to ourself, to bring our selves, get ready, leave our homes, take the subway, walk to the museum, and be where you said you would be a year ago. A kind of large lunation in the universe of oneself.

One of Dave's students, who is here with us today, told me yesterday that what he loved most about Dave was that he was completely without cynicism in his encounter with your work and your intentions. This is not merely an artist statement, this is not just a title, you really do mean it, and I believe you. It is not easy to have eyes and hearts that remain open for so long in a world that is, at least in this country, funded almost entirely by individuals with dubious intent, and often in ethical standings which might be the quite the opposite of the sum of your own work, discussion, and values. Perhaps this openness is possible because Dave, and you, and me, need to do this to survive. We make our work to get through the day, to translate it, while doing, in Dave's words, the least amount of damage we can.

I wish Dave was my teacher. And I don't have to wish too hard, because he really was briefly, and he continues to be, through his work, and its copy that sits behind me in the office. This reminds me of something Dave said about what it takes to keep art alive. Art is born and perhaps you name it. You create parameters for its existence, and then you can repeat it, make editions of itself, until it makes sense, or until it doesn't make any more sense. You are past it, you are another person. Then the work dies. Sometimes, unaware of it ourselves, art wakes up while being looked at, while being adored, while being remembered, and breathes deeper, and deeper, its ghost looming in Maine while you are in Brooklyn. Dave in *Fight Club*, Dave in *The Usual Suspects*, Dave as a giant float in Aspen, Dave as a bobblehead, Dave in papier-mâché, Dave as a piñata, Dave as Bill Clinton with Dave inside, Dave with Henry Kissinger, Dave McKenzie, teacher, artist, and friend, please take the podium, and thank you for loving us and for loving Skowhegan as much as anyone can. [applause, cheering]

McKenzie Hey. [laughs] Thank you so much, that was more introduction than I deserve, and, yeah, I feel like [laughing] - sorry, gotta take a second. Thank you, I'm just really moved. Yeah, thank you.

I really wanted, and want to, and will, I hope, begin with gratitude. One for that really beautiful introduction, and two for right here and right now. I think anyone who knows me, and has heard me talk about Skowhegan, knows that my, my feelings about it are probably a little romantic. And a lot of it is because it, I, I fell into this place when I was really young, and it imprinted itself on me. And I have been fortunate enough to make my way back in some way, shape, and form. You know, the first time I left, you sort of think it's the last time you'll ever see this place again, and it means a lot to me that it lives within me, in a variety of ways.

And I, I want to thank all of you, in many different ways. One, the participants who allow me into your studio spaces. Many of us don't know each other, and I take that moment really seriously, and know that you don't really have to. Yes, there's the kind of, like, form that's set out, but you really don't have to. And, you know, Skowhegan is a school, although it doesn't function the way many of the school spaces that we attend do. But I have learned a lot here, and am learning a lot this summer, even in only two weeks.

So, I remember a conversation, I believe with Steven and Lacie, in the hill, walking up the hill, talking about drawing, and if the line is wrong, you just move the line. And there were so many small moments like that, that I have to remind myself that this is knowledge, and knowledge exists a variety of ways: sometimes it's spoken, and sometimes it's carried with a body. (00:09:57) So I want to say thank you.

I want to thank the staff, always always always, cause you do incredible labor, and it is appreciated. I feel like I could just do this. [laughs] Just [laughter] be grateful and thankful, but honestly, I really do mean it.

What you're looking at here is an image of me and the artist Jeanine Oleson, from my summer, which is 2000. We're clearly at some bar in town, and I think I, I must be a little drunk, but [laughter], and apparently we're about to arm wrestle – I don't, I don't really remember that. But, you know, it's one of those kinds of things.

Someone in the office, also, [laughs] I, I think they must know something about just the way I think I tend to operate, and so they sent me the dear Skowhegan letter that you'll write, hopefully, at the end of the summer. And it's a little strange to meet your former self, you know, some, like, two decades plus later, but this is what I wrote:

Dear Skowhegan, This letter won't be very long, because it just isn't possible to put all my feelings about nine amazing weeks into a simple letter. Perhaps that is why it has taken me this long just to try. I may be falling victim to sentimentality and exaggeration by saying this, but spending the summer in Maine was nothing short of divine intervention. Which is funny, because I don't believe in divine intervention. [laughter]

Skowhegan put my four years of college to shame. Skowhegan was everything I needed, and at the right moment. The period after graduating can be difficult to adjust to, but Skowhegan made the change a pleasure. I've always believed that I've gone out on a

limb in my work, but the first, but for the first time I actually believed it was okay to fall off it.

[video plays 00:11:52 – 00:13:47] To the governors and trustees who might see this, let me say that the faculty and staff were beyond excellent. I'm jumping ahead a little bit, even though it was a short letter. PS, I don't like to dwell on anything negative, but I'll just say this: burrito night isn't needed once a week. Variety is the spice. Spices are a very important part of life. [laughter] I think you know what I mean.

So, again, I thank the staff, cause the food is amazing, and the work that has gone into this place, I really, really, really appreciate so much of it, so, so thank you.

So I have a kind of like contractual promise to myself, and to you. This lecture might be slightly different than some I've given before, but weirdly enough, Skowhegan is a place that actually has a couple of versions of me on file [laughs] which is actually kind of terrifying. [laughter] You know, usually, like, I descend on a place, I give a talk, and then I leave, and I, it's like it's over. And maybe they recorded it, maybe they haven't, but Skowhegan is famous for having a lecture archive, so at any point in the future, you can like compare and contrast and re-engage with all these things.

I also, since this lecture is a little different from me, I don't really know its length. I only promise you that I won't go over what I think is my time, and if I feel like it's going too long, I'll just stop. Like, it's okay. Like, we all, we're around each other; we can continue conversations in a variety of ways.

I've written a little bit of what I want to say, and I will also try, in my way, to also be silent, so I just sort of wanna, like, lay some of that out there for, for myself, and for us. [video stops]

[video plays 00:13:50 – 00:52:29; mutes at 00:18:23] One story goes something like this. We leave Jamaica, and end up first in Springfield, Massachusetts, United States of America. Springfield, a place that quite frankly still pokes me. Glad in retrospect to have only been bullied by those kids during the summers that I spent with my grandmother. But mostly, I grew up in white suburbs outside of Philadelphia.

One of the things that I remember from that time is driving. Some distance, in the early morning hours, to a Black neighborhood. Parked, I remember waiting in the car for the barber, who also happens to be a preacher, to open the shop and let us in, so that we could be among the first customers. I remember one of those trips, and the anecdote it produced, because it held me, and plays a distorted loop in my brain when I need to summon touchstones for understanding myself, and why I do things in the manner in which I do them.

On this morning, although we are among the first to enter the barbershop as usual, another customer takes the chair ahead of me. In my memory, he does so with confidence, and a right to his position. The barber asked, 'Who's next?' And he decided that he is. He did

this all with a skill that I already knew I would never have, or maybe he simply inserted himself into the gap that my indecision and hesitation had created. (00:20:08)

And here we really begin: my father, who sees the situation clearly, tells me to speak up for myself, and to let that man, any man, anyone, know that it's my turn. My father wants me to speak. He wants me to assert myself, for myself, for here and now, but also for when he is not there. He wants me to speak, although this is a type of voice that has never been allowed at home. He wants me to speak, he wants me to be fast when I am slow.

My speed is my crisis. A paradox known as Zeno's dichotomy goes something like this: you want to go from point A to point B, and every time you advance, you must move half the remaining distance. How do you ever arrive at a point B when there is always some half-distance to travel? Distance to destination decreases, and the time to travel the half-distance also decreases. But in the paradox, the numbers never add up to one. Half, plus a quarter, plus an eighth, plus a sixteenth, plus a thirty-second. They remain just a fraction short, somehow always out of reach, through the proposition of the infinite. Yet bodies, more than mere lines in space, must cross infinite sets, even in their finitude.

Another problem I think I have in sometimes expressing the way that I want the work to exist is that the thing is rarely ever the thing. Which I think we all know, from our own practices, and yet has to always be explained, and I will try to explain that through some of the work. But so often, I find that we want more. And I probably am guilty of this myself, in thinking about another's work. I had been in a position where, like many of you, I would sometimes be asked to contribute a work to an organization that maybe supported me, or that I liked or believed in. And, I'll be honest, I never felt like I had something to give them. And was always weirdly feeling like there wasn't enough. And so I started making these paintings so that they would be a thing that I could give. But I couldn't just give the thing, even though the thing is so often, honestly, enough. And what I decided I needed and wanted was to produce the potential for a relationship, and an object that in its production and in its distribution would, would knock, right? My sense is always to imagine a kind of other life, and so when I imagine the painting and its reception, whatever happens to it, which I can talk about at another point, the painting knocks, right? It makes a sound. It makes a sound when it's in a crate. It makes its sound when it's in a box. It makes a sound when it's on a wall. And for me, the sound is a possibility. The possibility that the painting suggests, yes, but also a possibility that could be forged and formed by us coming together differently. We could ignore the painting, and choose to meet every half-year. Whatever it is, it could be dialogue, it could be discussion, but it is produced by a thing wanting to be more than it knows it should be or could be.

I, I told a gallerist once that I'm slow. To this he replied, 'All artists say that.' He had heard it all before, I guess. And he may of course be right. Even in this room full of artists, many of you may describe yourselves as slow makers too. But it is strange, though it is far from rare, to speak and not be heard. To say what seems like a simple statement of fact, and yet be dismissed, as if you can't possibly know your own self.

Needless to say, although many of you don't know me, so I will say it, we, this gallerist and I, didn't work together. But even now I flash back to what I could have said, or should have said in that moment. In your head, the conversation goes the way you need it to, as you provide both questions and answers. And time, once again, takes the shape of some FPS, isn't necessarily cinema's time, but is simply yours. You are frames per second.

[drinks water] This is obviously a work by Yvonne Rainer, *Trio A*, and I'm just gonna read the description I found on MOMA's website, as I tend to sometimes only remember the parts that I wanna remember of a project or a practice, and wanna do justice to, to the work. '*Trio A* consists of a four-and-a-half to five-minute sequence of discrete movements that with the exception of walking are never repeated. Although it appears effortless, the dance is painstaking to learn, in its precise articulation of hands, arms, shoulder, feet, and legs. It is a signature work by Rainer, who in the 1960's transposed to dance the idea that we were then giving shape to the era's minimalist sculpture and painting, abandoning the aesthetics of classical and modern dance, which were rooted in virtuosic technique and expression, in favor of an unenhanced physicality and uninflected continuity of emotion, of motion. The deceptive ordinariness of many of the individual movements in *Trio A* had a profound impact on the development of post-modern dance.'

So I'm, I'm not a student of dance, although I am interested in moments and histories of all sorts, but I don't consider myself, certainly not in an embodied way, to be a student of dance. Any number of its histories. But I have recently been thinking about largely kind of like Judson, and these moments where artists of any number of traditions, or from any number of traditions, need to or feel an obligation to break free from tradition. I know I've had a jillion conversations with painters who need or feel a desire to get away or out of some, if not histories, some expectation of what the painting is. Photographers, I've certainly spoken to many of you who feel similarly. And of course there are moments where we also really embrace the tradition, to keep it alive, to push it forward, and for me, in my kind of casual observation of things like Judson, all of this effort and labor is really understandable from the sense of feeling like you have to find another path, another way of thinking.

But I am also interested in movement. Mostly as a person who just likes to, to dance. [laughs] And I'm also interested in movement as someone interested in a certain type of body performance art. It can be called many things, obviously. And I'm thinking about it now from this project that I did called *Furtive Movements*. And it's somewhat difficult to describe, but I'll give you like a brief summary.

So, as many of you know, although I know everyone comes from many different places, in New York City, and other places, there is a policy procedure of stop and frisk. And stop and frisk, without going too deep into how it operates, you can be stopped and you are essentially searched. And stop and frisk, or what is sometimes called, it's stop and search – the police don't really call it stop and frisk. Stop and frisk, its main problem, and it has many problems, but its legal problem is the way that stop and frisk was implemented. So, stop and frisk is technically, or constitutionally, legal in some instances. (00:30:02) But stop and frisk becomes a, illegal, and this has been, thankfully, clarified in court proceedings,

when it is applied to Black and brown people. And it's really easy to find in the data. And that in and of itself may be any, or may be reason enough to think through what that means, or talk about it, or write about it, or deal with it. But I found in my own thinking, I came to it through hearing it spoken aloud, and learning of the rationale that stop and frisk operates under.

So often in stop and frisk, where the police stop you, maybe put you up against a wall, and search you, they are required to say why. Why, why was this stop necessary? And one of the rationales for stop and frisk is a concept of a furtive movement. And so in the court case *Floyd v. New York* of 2013, there's a summary about this, right? And in testimony, it essentially boils down to this. One officer explained that a furtive movement is a very broad concept. And could include a person changing direction, walking a certain way, acting a little suspicious, making a move that is not regular, being very fidgety, going in and out of pockets, going in and out of a location, looking back and forth constantly, looking over their shoulder, adjusting their hip or their belt, moving into and out of a car too quickly, turning a part of their body away from you, grabbing at a certain pocket or something at their waist. Getting a little nervous, maybe shaking and stuttering. But usually, a furtive movement is someone hanging out in front of a building, sitting on the benches, or something like that, and then making a quick movement, such as bending down, and then quickly standing back up; going inside the lobby of a building, then quickly coming back out; or all of a sudden becoming very nervous, very aware.

And I think about this in relationship to dance, and Judson, and choreography, and, although I feel like there's much I could say about it at the moment, part of me could only laugh, right? In humor, there is also pain, as we know. But I want to laugh, because for the first time, I realized I had been choreographed. [laughs] And, not only had I been potentially choreographed, I couldn't get out of the choreography. Right? That yes, the police may or may not stop and frisk me – and I've never been stopped and frisked. But I find myself waiting for it, right? Or maybe it's around the corner, or the neighborhood that I walk through isn't a high enough crime rate, or maybe it's my privilege as a certain class position, or, who knows. But it doesn't matter, because I didn't create the choreography, and the choreographer, whoever they are, in the system that they are, or represent, they have decided that sitting is enough of a movement to produce an effect and an affect. And in this, I have to find ways of laughing, resisting, thinking, problematizing, and also dealing with complications and conflicts without resolution.

So I produced my own furtive movement, which is sort of weird and strange, to make an artwork that tries to produce a furtive movement, that was already a furtive movement, that is unspectacular in, also in its documentation and presentation, where every photograph reveals nothing. And yet the logistics of the performance are things that I try to turn on and off, and yet the system under which it all operates is said to be perpetual, right? And so it's a furtive movement inside a furtive movement, and even now I'm doing furtive movements, maybe, depending. And some of you are too.

In the barbershop, my father wanted, maybe even needed, me to have a response to that situation in the moment of the event, because that's what he knew, and understand of

the world, and its people. Its dynamics. Caught up as this minor episode was with any number of any other large ideas circling Blackness, masculinity, class, etcetera, my life cannot be atomic life, automatic life, excuse me – maybe it can be atomic, I don't know. Whatever I am, I hope to be more than automaton. I hope to live this more than, this space, the infinitely small, somehow prolonging the binary switch of zero equals off, and one equals on. Somewhere in the space where less than can produce more than. This more than can only be art's arts, and all its potentials to be more than even it knows itself capable of being.

For me, this is surplus. [video plays 00:35:57 – 00:40:46] And this is what I did with Kissinger. [reading captions] 'I find myself in a room with Henry Kissinger. For the people around me, this is a tense moment. I am equal parts amazed – amazed to find myself in this predicament, and amazed to realize that Kissinger is still alive.' This is no longer true, by the way. He's dead. 'I reach for my camera. The camera being the tool that allows distance and creates a wall of operator and subject, documentarian and document, me and you. For my friends who spent more formative years with Kissinger, Nixon, and the wars in South East Asia' – and elsewhere, I hadn't heard [PHRASE UNCLEAR] – 'the questions swirling all have to do with a relationship created by touch. *Do you shake his hand or don't you?* I reach for my camera, the camera being the tool that allows distance and creates a wall of operator and subject, documentarian and document, me and you. I reach for a camera and a wall is created and I never have to answer the question *Do you shake his hand or don't you?* I would like to make a work out of this encounter. An encounter that was never really an encounter. I only have a few minutes of digital video which may or may not be enough to construct anything. I dream of another encounter and the title of a work, *Washing Henry* - not watching but washing. It's a film with a feeble Kissinger, a younger me, and a bathtub. I spend a few days thinking about how to make this ple – piece. My reflections on it cross a threshold from excitement and fear to fear and distraction. You should picture the scene of a feeble man and a younger me in a bathtub. Anything can happen in a bathtub. [Whitney Houston's "I Wanna Dance with Somebody" begins to play] I wanna feel the heat. I wanna take a bath with somebody.' You can turn it up. [video continues playing, with captions]

[video switches to a still slide] This is a drawing by Olav Westphalen, and it's from a book, *Ü*, I'll read a description here. 'Ü' – or 'oo,' maybe? I don't know – 'brings together for the first time Westphalen's satirical drawings and cartoons, which have appeared individually in art magazines for the last decade. The drawings, which are always printed within publications, and never exhibited on their own, explore the distinctions between high and low culture, art and entertainment, and critical and commercial art.' And so on. And it's a drawing that has really stuck with me, the one on the left. Since I saw it, it's like, I think about it randomly a lot. You know, 'What our village needs now is a biennial.' It's really, it's really cutting, and true. I am playing with this thing on the podium.

So I'm gonna talk about this work. [screen shows the text *I'll Be Back, 2008 – 2018*, with alternating backgrounds 00:41:45 – 00:47:35] Unfortunately it has no image, or fortunately, depending on your point of view – from me, it's really important. And I was invited to be in the first Prospect Biennial, which was a large-scale exhibition that happened, and in many ways it was an exhibition that happened in response to the kind of

failures of imagination and government post-Katrina, so sort of post-flooding New Orleans. And the invitation to participate was couched in such a way that I felt I was going to be asked, and we artists were going to be asked, to produce a work that dealt with the politics of a city that had been damaged by indifference. And at the same time, I think, like, for so many of us, an invitation to do is an invitation to think, or launch thinking, right, you can, you need no invitation to think, and yet sometimes, the circumstances produce the way the thoughts can materialize. And I was also really interested and troubled in one thinking that I couldn't just make anything, like, couldn't just put a thing on a wall [laughs] which I don't know is true, actually, but we could talk about that, too.

And also, feeling like the politics of 'this town needs a biennial' are really deep, and so, in this invitation to participate, a lot of things happened that are pretty typical for us when we get invited to these kind of like large-scale shows, where they fly you down, and you can just look, which is amazing, and also, especially at that moment, deeply disturbing, that in a place where residents were essentially forced to flee, right, to go to higher ground, to go to new ground, to go abroad, to go afield, that you, an artist, in a biennial that is about bringing people back to New Orleans, that you could be flown in to just look, [laughs] right? Which is, again, kind of amazing.

And I decided that in my way, it's, which is so usual, I think, is that I don't, I couldn't resolve it. I, I think it could be resolved, like, we each live our own lives, and have our own ethics, but for me, what I needed to do was to make the relationship different. So, I decided to turn that biennial, and my participation in it, into a kind of annual. And what I demanded of myself was to keep New Orleans on my mind, right? And so every year, at some point in the year, usually late in the year, I would just go there. And when I talk about this work, something that is really difficult for me always, to get to, or to deal with, is for the most part, when I share this work with people, because it is very much about speech, like a speech act, right? There is what's from me, which is a moving act, and a thinking act, but everyone wants to know, what did you do? And it's the most painful question, even though I would ask it too, probably, [laughs] right? It's like a starter question, right?

And the thing is, they always want to know what did I do, as if to do is not enough already. I said I would go there for a decade, and I'm going. And I went. And I kept this place present in my mind, right? And, the truth is, I didn't have anything to offer New Orleans, [laughs] like, it's a beautiful, amazing, complicated space; if anything, all I could do was take. All I could do was go there, and experience it. So what I do? I do what every tourist does. I like, eat. And I walk around. And I look at things, and then I get back on the plane. Next year, I come, and I eat things, and I look around, and I walk, and I walk, and I eat, and I eat. And there, there is this sense, I think so often, of like, what else, what else, what else, what else? Make it make sense, make it the thing that is presentable, that is, like, shiny. And when I try to do that, I only have one way of really talking about it, and it's this: that when my father died, it was in November of 2010, my mother was, as you might imagine, like, floored with an unexpected death, and dealing with all the things that she was dealing with, and I was dealing with, and the whole family was dealing with, there was a part of my brain that said, it's November, and you haven't gone yet. And I have to go! That in X number of days, weeks, whatever it is, before the end of the year, I'm going to have to explain to my

mother that I promised myself I would do this thing, even though nobody is waiting for me on the other side of me doing it. And that, for me, was in so many ways the thing that I like to do with parts of my work. I can't always do it, right? But it's to forge a relationship with something, even if it's myself.

So, I'm gonna end with one more piece, actually, cause I feel like I'm getting close enough to my time. And maybe it's okay. And it's a piece that was spoken about a little bit, but will I think further [video ends and changes to a slide 00:47:35] explain. I was invited by the Whitney to give a talk, this is back in their old space, it was this weird kind of setup called IPO, or Initial Public Offerings. [switches slide] And they told me that all I had to do was make a multiple. And it could be anything, it could be a t-shirt, it could be a sticker, it could be a button, we don't really care, all that really matters is like, people will come to your talk, and you will give them a thing. And I was like, cool.

And in my way of like a painting that [knocking on podium] knocks, I decided to make this day planner. It was sort of just on the cusp of when someone might still use a, kind of, one of these day planners. [switches slide] And in the day planner, all I did was stamp in, into this edition of, say, two hundred, places where I'd be throughout the year. And if you were using the day planner like a normal day planner, you would realize that on this date, that I was at MOMA. Or I was getting on [switches slide] a subway car, or I was on a particular corner of a street. [switches slide] And the thing that I talk about, and was, was briefly touched upon, is that there is something in the setup of certain art works that produces for ourselves, I think, a critical questioning of what our own ethics are at any moment in the day, right?

So, as I'm standing on this street corner, waiting, right? I'm doing it, I'll be there. I'm waiting. As I do that, there's someone who's walking towards me, and I know, they were not not only at the lecture that I gave, they have never been to the Whitney. Right? Or I make that assumption, right? Maybe I don't know that. But I assume that. And we all make these assumptions, right, and I think so many of us are just trying to rid ourselves of these assumptions. But then, as you're standing there, or as I was standing there, my body has to do something with this other knowledge, right? So how do I turn towards them, and look at them, right? As, as human, right? (00:49:57) As more than human, as human as human, right? How do I look at you and think, maybe, right? It's not really about me, but how do I, for some small fraction of time, not rely on all the kinds of ways of seeing someone that have to do with class, and gender, and race – what if I just assume that you and I might fall into a dialogue, or relationship?

And most of the time, no one arrives, right? Occasionally friends arrive, actually. And it's okay. Because so much of the work that I am, I, you know, I think maybe most invested in, or, or can talk about in ways, because it stays with me, is with acknowledgement of this idea that as an artist, as a maker, sometimes it's enough to be the only viewer. Right? That you are enough for the thing that you make. I mean, of course, we all love an audience in various ways, but sometimes it's enough. I made a thing, I said a thing, I presented a thing, I did a thing, and it opened up something else from me that is more than I can explain to you, and so a quarter, eighth, sixteenth, they don't add up to one, and yet somehow always less

than can produce more than. Right? And so, I don't maybe reach the destination as much as I would like to, but I do think that in finitude we cross infinities.

And so, I'm just gonna close by showing a few images. I don't really have [laughing] that much more to say, honestly. Even though I think I had prepared other things, but, as I said, it's okay. [slideshow plays 00:51:43 – 00:52:48]

Thank you. [applause, cheering]

So, I'm happy to take questions, but also, don't feel obligated. [laughs] But I'm happy to take questions, or answer things up and down a hill as well, or around a dinner/lunch table.

Audience member Could you talk a little bit about how you think of movement, for, I guess, your video work, where you appear in it, and perform?

McKenzie Mmhmm.

Audience member And do you choreograph it, or do you improvise, or do you think about what you're going to do?

McKenzie Yeah. I mean, one of the things about not having training is – and also, you know, in, in difference of one's body, there are certain limits, and so a lot is improvised, I guess I would say. Some things are things that my body remembers itself doing. I think, you know, each of us has a way of carrying ourselves, and it can become really important to re-train ourselves.

One of the things I started doing for back pain, which often comes up in my thinking, is I do like pilates once a week, and the instructor is, like, always reminding me of things that I'm doing that I, are just out of habit. So, like a lot of us, I, I have kind of like New York neck, and I'm sure it exists in many other cities. [laughter] So a lot of things are done with an idea of, like, how do I keep go, how do I keep going, and like, how do I do something new? But also with an acknowledgement that, like, this is my body, and whatever it's capable of producing is also okay. So I'm trying to simultaneously do two things.

I think in that one video with me and the glass, I've made quite a few of those works, in different ways, and I think at the end of that one I, I break the glass, it just sort of slips out of my hands. But yes, there's a little bit of choreography, and then it's like, sometimes, with the glass, or other movements, it's, it really is like kind of feeling out. Like one of the last performances, I was so reminded of Bruce Nauman's *Body Pressure*, where it's like, this may become erotic. And I was like, ooh! This is becoming erotic. And I didn't intend for that, but like, oh, we're here now. So, some things are, like, associations triggering other associations. Yeah. Hope, hope that makes sense.

Audience member Hi.

McKenzie Hey.

Audience member Speaking about associations, there is a certain level of opacity in the work that I think has to do with maybe you being okay with not knowing everything about the work --

McKenzie Mmhmm.

Audience member -- so I wonder if you can --

McKenzie Yeah.

Audience member -- guide us more about the limits of knowledge about one's practice?

McKenzie Yeah, sure. So, I don't know if this is exactly a good answer to your question, which is always what happens in these things, I'm, like, tired, and then I'm like, ohhh, that's a really interesting question, and now my brain has to expend sugar or something.
[laughter]

I, you know, in the lectures and things that I've done, I always come up against this wall where there's the work that actually, I can explain, from now until the end of time, right? Even if my explanations are, like, silly [laughing] or whatever, like, I'm like, I've thought so many things about this thing, and it's so present, and I could just fall into a kind of, like, saying the same things over and over again. Where I'm like, oh, I'm actually, I've thought, just -- even if I haven't actually thought everything, I've thought so much about it, like, over and over again. And then there's other work where I'm like, I, I just can't talk about it. Right? And it has no, I can begin to say what I was thinking, and feeling, and what I'm excited about, but I will not do a good job of, like, quote unquote explaining it, or talking more clearly about its problems, its failings, its issues, its successes, the things that are, like, I don't know, I don't know that they're textbook, but there's just work that I am happier if I just show you an image. Right?

And so, when it comes to knowledge and things, I think so much happens after a thing is made, that I'm a better thinker when a thing is, I've done a thing, and then I can think about it as a living thing out in the universe. So, the *Proposal* painting, for example, is something that I only ever intended to go through the system of these, like, give us a, like, donate a work. And then a curator asked if she could show it in a show, and I was like, I don't know. Like, I just, that's [laughing] not what I had in mind, and she sort of convinced me. And, you know, then, I will be honest, it's one of the few times where I'm like, the, the, this condition of showing it in this way really unlocked something for me, where it's like, oh, the person who, like, all of a sudden there's a relationship from the person coming to the gallery to see it, that could also be -- it doesn't need to be owned, right? To produce this relationship.

And so, when I think about, you know, levels of opacity, I am also very much thinking that there are things that end up being hidden, right? Like hidden away from me, and I'm, I'm comfortable with that. But also, at the same time, in an act of trying to keep an artwork alive, desperately wanting to know it more, and deeper, like, to keep living with it, so, I used to do this more, but things would really get shown, like, over and over again, in different configurations, as a way of sort of unlocking whatever knowledge I could gain from that.

So I don't know that that's a great answer to your question, but that's, yeah, that's where my head went, so, maybe we'll come back to it.

Audience member Thank you. Hi.

McKenzie Hey!

Audience member I have, kind of, I don't know if it's a question – I don't know if I can make this a question, but I guess it's more of an observation, and maybe you could respond to it.

McKenzie Sure.

Audience member I really love to think of the *Proposal* painting and the New Orleans piece, and the planner pieces, as kind of like scores for choreography –

McKenzie Uh-huh.

Audience member -- for your body moving through space, in these, like, kinda loose scores. And I'm thinking about your kind of bringing in Yvonne Rainer, into this, in dialogue with these pieces, in dialogue with your choreography. Or your scores, of sorts. And I'm thinking about how, like, important photography was to her dance, and to, like, I guess, like, Yvonne Rainer mythology in general, but also her collaboration –

McKenzie Mmhmm.

Audience member -- with photographers, and filmmakers –

McKenzie Yeah.

Audience member -- as an expansion of her choreography.

McKenzie Yeah.

Audience member And then the camera becomes a kind of choreographing device. So I guess I'm also – so I'm thinking about, I'm holding that, and then I'm holding the deliberate choice to not look through the camera, in New Orleans, to perform these choreographic acts. (01:00:04)

McKenzie Mmhmm.

Audience member But to remove the camera. And I am just kinda thinking, sitting with that triangulation, and enjoying it, and I would love for you to respond if you can –

McKenzie Sure.

Audience member -- or want to.

McKenzie Sure. I will try in, you know, whatever meager way I can. Yeah, you know, I think in, just in terms of being in New Orleans, and not having a camera, you know, the camera, in some ways it's like the camera version of things, for me, is, is the way stories travel, is a kind of – like, one thing that can't be pictured easily, if at all, is that there's a kind of documentation of the work that happened on site. So, I went to the opening of Prospect.1, and I had to do a lot of explaining. And in that explaining, I hit different audiences, right? And I had to accept certain difficulties of that. So, one, sometimes someone would just be like, would pull me aside to explain to the next person, like, it would just sort of travel down the road, right? So not too unlike an image. Like, we know a lot of performance work through documentation and scores.

There was a moment in New Orleans where a, there was a journalist who asked me about the project, and became really excited. And I was like, oh no. [laughter] Because the moment he became excited, I was like, oh, no, he's gonna write something! And when he writes something, I know how it's going to come across. Right? Like, not only is this biennial problematic for a lot of people, because of, sort of like the money, and the way that the city is being treated as a site, here's some guy, who all he's doing is saying he's gonna come back. And, you know, that also becomes a kind of, archives have come up so much lately, but, you know, that also becomes this kind of record-keeping act. And so part of my desire to remove the camera for this work, and also to think about it along the lines of maybe choreography or scores, is that I, I, I was happy for other people to tell other people. Right? Like for me – and not all artworks can be this, my own and others – like, I love platforms. Right? I love that a, someone makes a thing, or presents a thing, in such a way that it becomes a platform for a lot of other people. And in thinking about the kinds of itinerant works that are out there in the world, like, I love just thinking that someone else, maybe who just was an audience member in New Orleans, who came in a kind of art tourism way, to see the show, might come back to this site, or some other site, with a different relationship, not because I have made this piece, but because they remember that there is this important need to think about place in all the various ways that we can do, with either our mind, or our body, and whatever other tools we have.

And so, a lack of documentation, for me, strangely enough, I think, or hope, produces a kind of image. And the image is to imagine, like, what any of us would do, and already do, in the sites that we move through. So again, I don't know if that's a great answer to your question, but I, I, like, think circles are the only way for me to really think, like, to go around and around and around, so, I'll try better next time. Thank you.

Audience member I would like to hear more about your Skowhegan experience as a participant, cause you seem to have a special relationship with it, like, how did it shape the way you approach art, or like, life in general?

McKenzie Yeah, thank you. So, I, I think I told this story to someone already, so I'll, I'll condense. So I came to Skowhegan in 2000, after finishing my undergraduate education at the University of the Arts, which no longer exists. Interesting story. And I came thinking about performance, and video, as sort of new things for me. And I, maybe like some of you, when I arrived, I really freaked out. I had never, I don't even know if I had heard of a residency program.

The way I ended up at Skowhegan was this amazing student at the University of the Arts was like super savvy, I guess, [laughs] we would say, like kind of, you know, like, lived part-time in [laughing] New York, and like, was going to school in Philadelphia. I thought it was really cool. [laughter] And she said to me one day, she said, 'You know, Dave, I think you should apply for this thing, Skowhegan.' And I was, like, oh, okay. You know, if you're telling me I should do that, that must mean something. And I applied, and I got in. And then I told people, I was like, 'Oh, I got into Skowhegan.' And they were like, 'You did?' And I didn't even know what it was. Right? And so, I come here, and I'm like, freaking out. I'm like a real introvert, and I was just like, overwhelmed. I was walking up the hill, and the artist Paul Ramirez Jonas was like, 'You know, you should go look at, like,' like, he was already moving into his studio, cause he was faculty, and he was like, 'Oh, you should go look at studios over there,' and I was like, 'Oh, okay.' Like I just was like, I just didn't know what was going on. And so my first moments at Skowhegan are like, actually walking away. [laughter] And, like a, I don't know, like a minivan of participants were like driving back from like Wal-Mart or something, and they saw me walking, and they were like, 'Hey, do you need a ride?' And I was like, 'No.' And they thought it was so weird. And one of the people in the van, we were walking up the hill, as you do, when you sort of like, you know, meet your paces sometimes, and she said, 'You know, I had a dream that we collaborated.' And I latched onto it for my life. I was like, 'Oh, cool, we should do that.'

And, so, I was really interested in performance, she was interested in, you know, sort of community-based practices, or what would maybe be called later, social practice, and we tried to integrate these things. And so, I'm gonna try to address the question super specifically. In collaborating with her, I learned a ton about myself. And it's exactly the subject of much of what I've said. So, at one point, even though we were having a really great time collaborating together, it became apparent she needed more from me. And I was like, I can't tell you how satisfied I am. Like, something small has happened, and it's everything. And, you know, I, I do not think she was wrong, but in that moment it was something that like, she needed me to be doing differently, and I was like, so much has happened in the small.

And I think what I learned at Skowhegan is that, you know, so often, the thing that happens, or what can happen in a work of art, or can be the work itself, can be incredibly

small in its scale, in its visual impact, or sensibility, and it could be everything. And I learned that, I learned things about my body.

One of the works that I made – so I made two videos, essentially, while I was here, and one of the works that I made is essentially me getting on an old rickety bike, cause I had been trying to repair a bike, so I could flee Skowhegan. [laughter] Me on an old rickety bike, going down the hill, into town, and I performed in front of the Stop n Shop, or whatever it's called. And so, I guess, you know, in some ways I learned, I think, how to be in spaces with others. Right, like, when I say that Skowhegan in some way is, it didn't, like, replace another educational structure for me, but all the things that I was looking for when I was thinking, like, oh, I have to go to grad school next, because I want a certain type of conversation to, like, be part of that. Much of that happened here, at Skowhegan. Right? And so when I left Skowhegan, I was still probably thinking about grad school, but a lot of other things just sort of got in the way. And it was with this idea that, like, the things that happened at places like Skowhegan can be culled together and built in a number of ways. And grad school could be one of them.

So, I probably, this is what I learned: I learned, honestly, that I could be an artist. I went to school, and I didn't know that, and I didn't know anyone was an artist – I thought all artists were dead when I went to, like, art school. I, I, I never met, like, a living artist. And I came here, and I walked around, and I saw Janine Antoni, and I had recently seen her on the cover of, like, *Art in America*. And I was like, whoa, you're real! Like, and so here, I learned that, like, I could live as an artist. Whatever that meant, even if it didn't mean, obviously, like, supporting myself as an artist. [laughter] But I could live an artist, right? Which are two different things. So, that's what I learned. (01:09:57)

Audience member Dave, thanks so much. Amazing talk. I had a, a question about that piece that is based on the choreography of frisking, and the, I'm just thinking about that kind of frightening banality of that, and how much, when one actually traces that score, it, the movements are close to any movements anybody makes –

McKenzie [laughing] Yeah.

Audience member -- any time. So there is this, something incredible, almost like un, unavoidable about it, or kind of so ubiquitous that it's beyond even recognition.

McKenzie Mmhmm.

Audience member So I'm curious, in your sort of, like, life with that work, what do you expect happens when you reenact it based on that score?

McKenzie Mmhmm. That's a really wonderful question. I mean, I think it's really complicated for me, because when I initially did it, this is so weird, but it, it ends up being somehow part of my thinking about the work. So, I was invited to make a performance, or do a work at an art fair, like, live, like it's this – right? And I won't spend too much time on it, cause I could, I feel like I could go off on tangents about art fairs, but, you know, there

was something within me, that I think I'm interested sometimes in the perverse, right? And I love that, like, there's a booth, and there's a sign, and I, I sort of turn the sign so that it reads right side up. And I announce a thing that people are gonna come watch. Right? And what they're gonna come watch is so resistant, I think, to being watched. Nothing happens – like, I'm doing the piece now. We're, like, just, I'm like, add it to the CV, right?

So, for me, you know, the logic of these spaces, and, I think this came up in a red farm dinner, I think Rowan was saying something about moving through various spaces as an artist, and I think about this a lot, where you end up at like, you know, a gallery dinner, or museum, just like weird social spaces that artists travel through sometimes, and find themselves in, or elite institutions, right? It's like, really, they're like, really weird.

And so, for me, thinking about this fair, I'm like, oh my god, they're gonna watch me do this thing here. And then they're gonna go back to, like, browsing for art, or, you know, saying hello to their friends, and then this thing is gonna, like, like, come back and they're gonna re, like, witness it. Or, sometimes people are gonna take a photo. I'm like, a photo of what? Right?

In one of the *I'll Be There* pieces, I've done it in a couple of different ways – I actually did it in a series of, like, other performances, I guess. I actually did it at Performa, and, as I was sitting on a bench across from the Studio Museum, someone who was reading the Performa, you know, like, what's going on in the city kind of calendar comes by, and just takes a picture of me and keeps walking. [laughter] I was like, oh, that's weird. And so, within this kind of space, I'm like, these things – these things don't fully have resolution, right? And that isn't to say that that short circuits a criticism of them, but it's to say that, like, there's something – like when we use the term Kafka-esque, it is because, you know, we feel so trapped within a thing. But Kafka's work is amazing, [laughing] right? And yet to find yourself in a Kafka-esque situation is in many ways also unbearable. And so when I'm there, and I'm doing this thing, I'm like, on one hand, I'm like, I can't believe I'm getting away with this, but I'm also like, this is absurd. Right? And so, I feel like I have to kind of think my way through the absurdity, even though it's, again, not a perfect answer, because I don't, it wasn't about solution anyway, right?

A solution to the question of stop and frisk is to change a whole history that can't be changed, and also to change a mindset that certainly won't happen overnight, or, or quickly at all. Right? And people have already, like, they've already had time to change. So, it's not about, like, providing answer, but it's about the fact that I realized something farcical, but I am trying to make the farce more farcical, right? Or I'm trying to, like, I'm trying – I don't know. It's not lemons out of lemonade, certainly, but it's like, I'm trying to organize myself in relationship to a thing that I'm uncertain about how it's really processing me, right? Much like I move through the world and realize that I end up sometimes in spaces where I'm like, I don't know, I have to, like, look around. I have to make sure. Or I gotta, like, check out what's going on here.

So, shorter answer is just to, to stay in the perverse sometimes. Yeah.

Audience member Thank you so much for the talk. You said something that resonated with me, and then produced a question: what you said was talking about how sometimes the part of something can produce, like, the sixteenth, or the eighth, or the quarter –

McKenzie Yeah.

Audience member -- can actually be the thing, rather than the whole thing that you thought.

McKenzie Yeah.

Audience member And it resonated with something that is a mantra of mine, which is that the success is in the act of making, and everything else that happens after is excess.

McKenzie Yeah.

Audience member But then that brought up the question of audience, for you, and whether it's audience, or witness, or viewer, or reader?

McKenzie Yeah.

Audience member I'm curious how you conceptualize that, because the way you talked about the work tonight was very much about your relationship to the act of making.

McKenzie Sure.

Audience member And I'm curious how we bring in that, the audience.

McKenzie Yeah. It's a really great question. Audience has always been really tricky for me, or difficult to get my head, arms around. And I'm still gonna answer the question in the best way I can, but, so on the one hand, I think sometimes about my subject position, and I, the way I tend to frame it is like, you know, I walk through a historical museum, and, depending on time period, I realize that none of the people who made these things could have conceived of me as someone worthy of looking at what they've made. And here I am anyway, [laughing] right? So, I don't know, I got one over on them, I guess.

So, there's that. But then in like a more concrete sense of audience, the project that I didn't talk about, but just shared a little bit of the work that the Whitney documented, which was me on the windows, there were, so I did that work over several weeks, and there were people who came to the work because it was a performance. And they would, like, sit and wait. And every time I saw one of those people, who was clearly, like, when does the performance start? I would do a little of this, and then I would run away from them. And every time I was in the museum, and there was like a couple like, taking a photo through the windows, I would, like, plant myself there. And when they would move, I would

move with them. I would just move with them until they would run away from me. So in that way, like, I felt strangely like even though this is a performance, in a space where people are, some people are gonna acknowledge it as performance, I'm gonna do my best to engage and make an audience out of the people who are not thinking about it as performance, who it just becomes irritant, or I'm breaking up the photograph that they wanna take.

So in some ways, sometimes I have that kind of relationship with audience, it's sort of rare, but, sometimes. And mostly, I think, when I think about audience, I, it's probably, it's probably with an idea that they remain imaginary. You know, so, and also, there's some issues from me around what sometimes, or at least for me, sometimes get processed through a kind of spectatorship, right? So like, I performed at Performa a couple of times, and every time they've been like, 'Okay, like, how are we gonna do tickets and charging,' I'm like, 'There's no way.' Like, I can't charge anyone for this. Right? And it's, I'm not, I'm not sure that's like a correct position, [laughing] honestly, but it's, for me, it's with an acknowledgement that like, I don't want you to come with the expectation that you're going to be happy and satisfied. Right? [laughter] And if you're not paying anything - again, I'm not sure that this the correct position, by the way.

So sometimes my relationship to audience is like, they're there, but I don't really know where they are. In some of the glass videos, or at least one of the glass videos that I show, what I was actually doing was I had this show in Berlin, and I was both, I would livestream these performances, so I couldn't see the audience, but sometimes I would talk to them, but I wouldn't know if there was anyone in the space, on the other side. So sometimes, it's also about, like, imagining audience, and I'm like, who are you, how are you looking at me? But I, you know, I think it's also a question that, yeah, bears addressing, and thinking about, and I especially like thinking about your work, I know it's like audience, there's a real conversation there, from the little, like, scene. So, I'm excited to talk more, is really what I'm trying to say.

Audience member Hi, Dave. Thank you. I was really taken with the way that you structured your lecture even visually, with the layering of your works --

McKenzie Mmhmm.

Audience member -- on top of one another, and then how you talked about your childhood throughout, coming back to the same story. Can you talk a little bit about that layering decision? (01:20:04)

McKenzie Yeah. I mean, in one way, I, I guess I was feeling like I, there were certain things I just wasn't gonna talk about again, in, even though I did talk about some things again. And, you know, part of the layering, for me, also, I think was that there are relationships formed in seeing one thing next to, on top of, another thing, which is really obvious, and yet, if you don't even make that simple kind of like overlap, then it doesn't happen. And, you know, sometimes I was thinking, oh, what is this, yeah, I'm making it seem like glass is a really important, like, substance for me, which I don't fully think it is.

Like, opacity and transparency and visibility and hypervisibility are, but the glass isn't. And I think within the layering, also for me, it is with an acknowledgement that there are other things that I make, and other ways of making, again, in my attempt to answer Rodrigo, where I am not, like, capable of talking about it in a way that is super satisfying to me. And maybe I need not be. But the layering, I hope, in this moment, produces something that, like, things share space, or overlap, or touch.

Touch came up in a studio visit today. I think touch is such a, like, resonant idea, right, like when things touch, even if the touching isn't actually physical, right? I thought about hands today, and kind of the way that, or what was produced from me, in my thinking, and sort of touch earlier. So the layering is, you know, it's a strategy of, of touch, on one hand.

And then also, on a really basic level, I started thinking about layering when I was doing some things on Zoom, and I really wanted, in some of those moments, where I would show myself on Zoom, but then have an image overlap me, or like a text run over my face, and so, I found in those moments, on Zoom, you started to ask where you were, or like somehow, the Zoom box started to function differently, because all of a sudden text was scrolling up, like, *Star Wars* style, past you. And it was like, what? And, like, can I actually read this?

So, some of it's just, yeah, a question of attention, even for myself. Yeah. Sure.

Okay. Well – thank you. [applause, cheering]

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