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PRESS RELEASE

New York City AIDS Memorial Announces Spring Arts & Cultural Programming

Free, public programs include commissions and presentations of sculpture, dance, poetry, live music, and performances by Ishmael Houston-Jones, Miguel Gutierrez, Nick Hallett, Peter Cramer, Jack Waters, NYOBS, Jim Hodges, Pamela Sneed, Mazz Swift, Natalie Greffel, and the Legends of Drag

New York, NY—Thursday, May 17 – The New York City AIDS Memorial announces its upcoming season of free, public arts and cultural programming for May and June 2023, organized alongside artist, musician, and curator Nick Hallett.

As a community site of remembrance, particularly for those impacted by the ongoing AIDS epidemic, the Memorial honors and acknowledges a complex history by serving as a platform for dialogue, advocacy, and, recently, programming that examines the multidimensional themes surrounding HIV/AIDS, including joy, mourning, and remembrance. This season's programming contextualizes the stories of HIV/AIDS, highlighting both contemporary and historical voices, and conveys engaging and inclusive examinations of how AIDS has shaped—and is shaping—our current world. Through the presentation of visionary works, many by creators whose lives and practices are rooted in response to the epidemic, the New York City AIDS Memorial seeks to expand its reach to engage a wider audience.

“We are pleased to be expanding the cultural offerings at the New York City AIDS Memorial, especially after the tremendous response to last year’s programs,” says **Dave Harper, Executive Director of the New York City AIDS Memorial**. “We are grateful to all of the participating artists and are excited to welcome audiences to the Memorial, not only to remember, but also to renew this living and breathing site with creative energy, and to reflect on the stories of our past to inspire our future.”

“One of my favorite things about being a New Yorker is the experience of radical culture during Pride Month,” says the season’s **Guest Curator, Nick Hallett**. “It makes the annual celebration of LGBTQ identity more inclusive, distinguishes the institutions that make space for queer artists to rail against conformity, and reminds marginalized folk of our chosen families. As a child of the 1980s, so much of the defining spirit of this culture emerges for me from the survivalist techniques seeded by artists ‘acting up’ at the height of the AIDS epidemic—protest, humor, rawness, and cerebral beauty. I’d like to think that the programs represented in the Memorial’s spring season will heighten the mood and visibility of the month for all.”

All events will take place at the New York City AIDS Memorial at St. Vincent’s Triangle, located at Greenwich Avenue and West 12th Street in New York City’s West Village. For additional information and directions, please visit nycaidsmemorial.org.

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John Bernd Variations: Open Rehearsal: Ishmael Houston-Jones, Miguel Gutierrez, and Nick Hallett

with Raha Behnam, Toni Carlson, Alvaro Gonzalez, Charles Gowin, Kris Lee, Johnnie Cruise Mercer, and Alex Rodabaugh, co-presented with Danspace Project

Thursday, May 18, 2023, 6 PM, Free

John Bernd (1953–1988) was a trans-disciplinarian in Downtown New York’s hyperactive art world of the 1980s, combining original movement, music, and text to make performances that merged experimentalism and personal narratives of living with AIDS. In 2016, choreographers Ishmael Houston-Jones and Miguel Gutierrez collaborated with musician Nick Hallett to adapt excerpts from Bernd’s celebrated works into a striking montage for a new generation of performers.

This open rehearsal is presented by the New York City AIDS Memorial in partnership with **Danspace Project** and precedes a series of performances of *Variations on Themes from Lost and Found: Scenes from a Life and Other Works by John Bernd*, co-directed by Miguel Gutierrez and Ishmael Houston-Jones, with music by Nick Hallett, at Danspace Project, May 25–27 and June 1–3 at 7:30 PM. In addition, *Conversations Without Walls*, a related, day-long symposium, including panels and film screenings, will be held at Danspace Project on May 20. For more information on the performances, please visit danspaceproject.org.

Craig’s closet: Jim Hodges

On view June 9, 2023– May 31, 2024, Free

For those of us with the good fortune to have a place to hang our things, a closet is a magical container, a collection of materials, arranged by each of us that at a glance can reveal our values, desires, cares, and even our deepest secrets. Time itself is frozen inside a closet in contrasting meters and timelines, fragmented in things accumulated and arranged in juxtaposed order, stacked and aligned, quickly thrown or casually dropped there to be taken care of later. The scene is set, and the narratives that blossom come alive whenever the doors swing open, giving us a reading, a reminder, an understanding of who we are, where we have been, secrets, and dreams we hold. Boxes concealing our heart’s contours, scribbled messages scratched on folded notes and cards, photos, records, files, all the stuff worth saving for the reason that each thing signifies, all these choices contained in the holding space, the closet.

Craig’s closet is a newly created artwork by Jim Hodges. On view beginning June 9, is sited within New York City AIDS Memorial Park, which lies in the shadow of the former St. Vincent’s hospital and in proximity to many sites central to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. This exact replica of a domestic bedroom closet in granite with additions of painted bronze, invites viewers to forge personal connections between complex histories and individual and collective memories.

Craig’s closet is a continuation of the New York City AIDS Memorial’s public art program, which has included installations and events by Steven Evans, Jean-Michel Othoniel, Jenny Holzer, and others. The sculpture will be on view for one year beginning June 9, 2023, and is exhibited as a part of NYC Parks’ Art in the Parks program.

Weavers of the Daisy Chain Gang Chorus: Ties That Bond: Peter Cramer and Jack Waters

with NYOBS

Saturday, June 10, 2023, 12 PM, Free

Throughout their 40-year collaboration, Peter Cramer and Jack Waters have built a media-driven interdisciplinary practice that draws upon socio-political engagement with issues of sexual/gender identity and AIDS activism. For the Memorial, Cramer and Waters have conceived a durational performance/installation in collaboration with members of their “queer-skinned kitchen band,” NYOBS, featuring John Michael Swartz and Mike Cacciatore. For several hours, the ensemble will weave a tapestry of ribbons, sound, movement, music, and text throughout the Memorial site, evoking the tradition of springtime maypole celebrations. Inspired by the 1960s-era “Happenings,” musical instruments and art materials will be provided to the general public to activate the site as part of the event. In the spirit of an urban homestead, all attendees are encouraged to get involved in building together.

Named “New York City’s Most Radical Queers” by *i-D* magazine, multimedia artists Peter Cramer and Jack Waters are constantly in the process of creating performances, films, videos, installations, and works of social practice. They are co-founders and directors of Le Petit Versailles, a community art garden on the Lower East Side that organizes free screenings of experimental, underground movies outside under the trees.

Legends of Drag with Caracol de Cuba, Dina Jacobs, Egyptt LaBeija, Kelly Ray, Ruby Rims, and Simone; emceed by Linda Simpson

followed by ***Dance for a Memorial II*** with sets by Oscar Nñ, DJ CHES, Nikki Jax, and more to be announced

Wednesday, June 14, 2023, 6–9 PM, Free

In honor of NYC Pride Month, the New York City AIDS Memorial is partnering with the creative team behind the new portrait book *Legends of Drag* (Abrams, 2022) to present a live revue at the Memorial. The performance features seven fabulous drag elders—Caracol de Cuba, Dina Jacobs, Egyptt LaBeija, Kelly Ray, Ruby Rims, and Simone, with Linda Simpson serving as emcee—all of whom paved the way for the drag renaissance of today. Brave, campy, brash, witty, and most of all talented dancers, lip-synch artists, and live singers, these queens are survivors, thrivers, and cultural ambassadors. As both drag performers and trans folks have increasingly become political targets and scapegoats, uplifting these trailblazers and sharing in their wisdom and joy is one of the most potent antidotes available. The revue will begin at 6 PM and will be directly followed by *Dance for a Memorial II*.

Dance for a Memorial II is the New York City AIDS Memorial’s second annual silent disco featuring a line-up of incredible DJs, including Oscar Nñ (Papi Juice), DJ CHES, and resident sound guru DJ Nikki Jax, playing diverse and exciting music rooted in LGBTQ+ pride. This community event is a free, fun, and social way to celebrate our history, present, and future. Participation is easy: trade in collateral (a picture ID, credit card, etc.) to secure your wireless headphones and dance the night away under the stars in New York City AIDS Memorial Park. The full DJ lineup and host committee will be announced in April 2023. *Dance for a Memorial* will begin at 7 PM.

Head Back, Eyes to Sky: Pamela Sneed, Mazz Swift, and Natalie Greffel

Thursday, June 29, 2023, 6 PM, Free

A fitting coda to Pride Month, this experiment blends text, sound, and a passage through memory, bringing together influential poet and performer Pamela Sneed with the remarkable musicians Natalie Greffel and Mazz Swift. Sneed’s practice poignantly emerges from her service as an activist and caregiver during the height of the AIDS epidemic. Recognized for her compelling spoken voice, Sneed has recently entered more musical realms, which will be explored in this improvisatory context, with Greffel on bass and Swift on violin and electronics—three voices in song.

Support



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The New York City AIDS Memorial’s 2023 programs are made possible, in part, by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature.

Leadership support for Jim Hodges’ *Craig’s closet* is provided by the Flag Art Foundation; Gladstone Gallery; Amy and John Phelan; and Jennifer and John Eagle, with major support provided by Ron Pizzuti; and Cindy and Howard Rachofsky, and additional support provided by Anthony and Celeste Meier; Lisa and John Runyon; and Marguerite Hoffman. *Craig’s closet* is exhibited through NYC Parks’ Art in the Parks program and is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.

Support for *Legends of Drag* and *Dance for a Memorial II* is provided, in part, by the Ralph Lauren Corporate Foundation, Avenue 8, and Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS.

About the New York City AIDS Memorial

Founded as a grass-roots advocacy effort in early 2011, the New York City AIDS Memorial organization is now a 501(c)(3) corporation with an 18-person board.

The mission of the New York City AIDS Memorial is to honor the more than 100,000 New Yorkers who have died of AIDS and to acknowledge the contributions of caregivers and activists who mobilized to provide care for the ill, fight discrimination, lobby for medical research, and alter the drug approval process, ultimately changing the trajectory of the disease. The Memorial, dedicated on World AIDS Day, December 1, 2016, aims to inspire visitors to remember and reflect, and to empower current and future activists, health professionals, and people living with HIV in the continuing mission to end AIDS.

Today, the organization maintains the New York City AIDS Memorial as a highly-visible and architecturally significant landmark and a community space for reflection and the recognition of men, women, and children lost to, as well as long-term survivors of, HIV/AIDS; bears witness to the lessons of the epidemic through engagement and free, public community-centered educational, arts, and cultural programming at the Memorial site; and virtually extends the reach of the Memorial through digital content and interactivity. Previous programs have included Jenny Holzer's *#LightTheFight* in 2018; the exhibition *Visual Impact: On Art, AIDS, and Activism* in 2019; the site-specific soundscape installation *Hear Me: Voices of the Epidemic* in 2020; and Steven Evans' commissioned installation, *Songs for a Memorial*, in summer 2022.

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