Check Out the AIDS Writers Among These LGBT Portraits [SLIDESHOW]

They're part of an exhibit of post-Stonewall photographs from Robert Giard's "Particular Voices" series.

June 7, 2019 By Trent Straube

Between 1985 and 2002, photographer Robert Giard created a series of over 600 portraits of writers, artists and activists. In 1997, a selection was published in a volume titled Particular Voices: Portraits of Gay and Lesbian Writers. The following year, they were displayed in an exhibit at the New York Public Library. This summer, Girard's work returns to the public spotlight, this time at Daniel Cooney Fine Art in Manhattan, for an exhibit titled Robert Giard Particular Voices: Photographs of LGBTQ Writers, Artists and Activists, 1980's–90's.

It's no surprise that many of the portraits include HIV and AIDS activists. According to the Robert Giard Foundation, he started his Particular Voices series after seeing Larry Kramer's AIDS play The Normal Heart.

POZ spoke with gallery owner and director Daniel Cooney about the Giard portraits. In our slideshow below, we include a selection of photographs from the exhibit, specifically highlighting people whose work addressed HIV/AIDS.



Vito Russo, New York City, 1987. 15" x 15" gelatin silver print.“Particular Voices” photographs by Robert Giard/courtesy of Daniel Cooney Fine Art

This is the second time you’ve shown Robert Giard’s work. How does this collection differ from the previous exhibition, and why show another selection of portraits at this point in time?

The first show was in September of 2005 and focused on Giard’s beautiful male nudes. My choices of what to show today tend to be more political and historical, and with the worldwide celebration of Stonewall 50, it feels like the perfect time to share this important work.

Does an underlying principle or theme unite this exhibition?

The portraits are very much about the post-Stonewall literary movement and the AIDS crisis. Robert photographed over 600 people for this two-decades-long series. He was as committed to

emphasizing the importance of the writers and work that was not being promoted and published in those days as he was to the work that was given cultural significance. I've tried to honor that vision with the edit of 53 photographs presented in the exhibition.

In your opinion, what are the qualities that make a Giard portrait unique to him and this series?

I think the unique qualities of the portraits lie in the heart and mind of the photographer. Robert had a unique connection with literature and specifically gay literature that comes through in the intimacy and respect for his sitters. He also knew he was producing something historic and of great importance and that he was representing the individuals at an important moment in time.

What do you hope viewers take away from the show?

I hope people realize that queer history is all around us and if we want to know about it we will have to teach it to ourselves. Mainstream education is not going to offer it, so we must search it out. It's our responsibility to carry the message and share it with our communities. This is especially important because many of the sitters in Robert's portraits are not very well known, but their work is hugely important.

The people pictured here represent queer history, and they fought for the freedoms our community now enjoys, at least in the United States. The people pictured by Robert are fighters and visionaries who deserve to be celebrated.

Finally, can you tell us about any author in this series whom you read and who influenced you and you were particularly excited to see in the series?

Great question. I love Paul Monette, Eileen Myles, Edmund White and Michael Cunningham, of course. But I have been even more excited to learn about the work of Pamela Sneed, Harry Kondoleon, Samuel Delany and so many others. This exhibition has involved an exciting journey of learning about so many writers and activists that I did not know about previously.

Robert Giard: Particular Voices runs June 6 through July 26 at Daniel Cooney Fine Art, 508 West 26th Street, Suite 9C, New York. For more information, visit DanielCooneyFineArt.com.

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