Fighting for Your Right...to Donate Blood!

Jordan Eagles creates art with human blood and superheroes.

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He may be faster than a speeding bullet, but does Superman have the power to stop a discriminatory blood donation policy? Artist Jordan Eagles incorporates numerous images of the Man of Steel and other superheroes along with actual blood into the artworks on display in the solo exhibit Can You Save Superman? II, on view at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. The blood Eagles uses was donated by people with HIV and gay men on pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP).

The artworks draw attention to a U.S. policy that requires gay and bisexual men, but not heterosexuals, to abstain from sex for three months before they can donate blood, regardless of their risk of having HIV or the fact that donated blood is screened for the virus. Until the COVID-19 pandemic heightened the need for blood donors, the policy required a year of celibacy. The Food and Drug Administration recently launched a study to explore further easing the rules. The United Kingdom enforces a similar three-month requirement, but beginning this summer, the country will allow gay and bisexual men to donate if they've been in a long-term monogamous relationship for at least three months before the donation.

Discriminatory and unnecessary deferral periods prevent [gay and bisexual men] from helping to save lives," says New York City–based Eagles, who for over two decades has been creating works exploring the ethics of blood. The current exhibit includes a virtual gallery at CanYouSaveSuperman.com that features an essay by Andy Warhol scholar Eric Shiner.

Eagles's latest pieces build on comics with blood-donor themes, such as the 1971 Action Comics cover showing Superman on a gurney, infected with a "micro-murderer" virus and in need of blood transfusions from the countless people eagerly waiting in line to donate. In one version that's included in the Alabama show, an enlarged image is splattered with the blood of a gay man on PrEP to illustrate that in 1971 a gay man could have helped save Superman—but not in 2021.



Artist Jordan Eagles in the studio with “American Carnage 6/14”Courtesy of Jordan Eagles Studio

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