



POZ Awards 2025 / Winners

Here are the winners as voted by POZ readers!

December 9, 2025

BEST CELEBRITY ADVOCATE

Though Reubens, better known to the world as Pee-Wee Herman, died in 2023, his story was told more roundly in the documentary *Pee-Wee as Himself*, which was released this year via HBO. During the film, Herman spoke openly about visiting his former partner, Guy, in the hospital as he was dying from AIDS-related complications. But, Reubens also underscored that Guy served as inspiration for the iconic character Pee-Wee Herman, and that many of his quirky and unique vocalizations were homage to his earliest love.

BEST IN FILM OR TELEVISION

Pee-Wee as Himself

There's no doubt that Pee-Wee Herman is an enduring cultural icon. But, with Pee-Wee as Himself, director Matt Wolf brought us a portrait of the man behind the eccentric character. Though Paul Reubens may have been recognizable because he was Pee-Wee, very few people knew the story

behind him. In this two-part documentary, Ford tells Reubens' story, including the fact that this first partner, the love of his life, was a person who Reubens eventually lost to AIDS. That partner, Guy, was also the basis for many of Pee-Wee's mannerisms and eccentricities, underscoring that one of American culture's funniest and most enduring characters is based on the humor of a person living with HIV. Reubens' story serves as a reminder of the way that the virus is often with us in invisible ways, undergirding much of what we consume, even pop culture.

BEST IN LITERATURE

[Outliving Michael](#) by Steven Reigns

Outliving Michael, a follow-up to his book A Quilt for David, is a genre mash-up, a memoir told through poetry that tells of Reign's friendship with Michael Church, who died of AIDS-related illness in 2000. Hailed as a "disarmingly honest portrait" of a friend lost to the virus, as well as a "stunning elegy," the book ruminates on the many ways individuals leave lasting marks on our lives long after they are gone.

BEST IN VISUAL ARTS

[To Love-To Die; To Fight. To Live.: Art and Activism in the Time of AIDS](#)

The close relationship between art and the activist response to the AIDS epidemic is well-known, but always rife for further exploration. This exhibition, taking place on the 40th anniversary of the AIDS quilt, and made in collaboration with the New York City AIDS Memorial, focuses on art as a form of survival amidst the earliest days of AIDS. Aside from displaying patches of the quilt, as well as famous posters from collectives such as Gran Fury, the exhibition also put on open-to-the-public quilt-making workshops honoring the lives of New Yorkers, including the lives of School of Visual Arts alumni.

BEST REASON TO KEEP ACTING UP

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. Ringo Chiu/Shutterstock.com

[RFK Jr. and the CDC](#)

As pointed out by many former officials of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is endangering the health of every American. In an open letter written in The New York Times, several former CDC directors wrote that Kennedy's reign at the agency is "unlike anything we had ever seen at the agency and unlike anything our country had ever experienced." Not only has Kennedy gutted the agency at every level, but he has also minimized the importance of vaccines in favor of unproven treatments and replaced experts with people who embrace unscientific outlooks.