



POZ Awards 2025

POZ editors compiled the winners, as voted on by readers, of the 10th Annual POZ Awards, which spotlight HIV and AIDS in media and culture.

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BEST CELEBRITY ADVOCATE

Paul Reubens

Though Paul Reubens, better known to the world as Pee-wee Herman, died in 2023, his story is told more roundly in the documentary *Pee-wee as Himself*, which was released last year via HBO. In the film, Reubens speaks openly about visiting his former partner Guy in the hospital as he was dying of AIDS-related complications. Reubens also underscores that Guy inspired the iconic character Pee-wee Herman and that many of his quirky and unique vocalizations were homages 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 the man. In this two-part documentary, we learn that Reubens lost his first partner, Guy, to AIDS-related causes. 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 who was living with HIV. Reubens's story serves as a reminder that the virus is often with us in invisible ways, undergirding much of what we consume in pop culture.

BEST IN LITERATURE

Outliving Michael by Steven Reigns

Outliving Michael, a follow-up to *A Quilt for David*, is a memoir told through poetry that details Reigns'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 ripe for further exploration. This School of Visual Arts exhibition, which took place on the 40th anniversary of the AIDS Quilt and was made in collaboration with the New York City AIDS Memorial, focused on art as a form of survival during 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 hosted 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

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 published by The New York Times, several former CDC directors wrote that Kennedy's reign 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.

