R.I.P. Hunter Reynolds, an Artist and Activist Who Explored AIDS and Gender

An HIV-positive gay man who performed as Patina du Prey, Hunter Reynolds was a member of ACT UP. Here's his latest art book.

July 18, 2022 By Trent Straube

Hunter Reynolds, an HIV-positive artist and member of AIDS activist group ACT UP, died June 12 at his home in New York City's East Village, reports ARTnews. He was 62.

His work explored gender, sexuality, HIV and AIDS, politics and censorship. "Reynolds used his visual and performance art practice to spread a message of survival, hope, and healing, and to reify queer histories so often marginalized, sterilized, and forgotten," writes PPOW gallery, which represents him.

> The artist Hunter Reynolds has died at 62. One of his most moving pieces was a black satin gown printed with the names of 25,000 AIDS victims taken from the AIDS Quilt catalog, which he made in 1993 as a living memorial. https://t.co/DgFzjeaLPr
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> — New York Times Arts (@nytimesarts) July 4, 2022

The PPOW biography continues: "After discovering in 1989 that he had been HIV positive since 1984, Reynolds was inspired by the advice of his friend, the artist Ray Navarro, to not let his disease control him. It was at this point that Reynolds 'realized that my work had to do with this experience of death, emotions, and that I wanted people to feel, to experience pain and loss, but also to have hope in life.'"

POZ profiled Reynolds, just weeks before his death, for the June 2022 issue, writing:

> Hunter Reynolds, a deeply gifted and prolific artist and activist, has been documenting his journey as a gay man living through the AIDS epidemic since he was diagnosed with HIV in the initial days of the crisis. An early member of ACT UP and a cofounder of ART+ Positive, an ACT UP affinity group that battles homophobia and censorship in the arts, Reynolds, 62, has expressed his experiences to the world via photography, video, performance and installation.
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> For his alter ego, Patina du Prey, Reynolds's creative articulation erupts in the designing and donning of sculptural gowns, including the epic Memorial Dress (1994), a black strapless ball gown with a hoopskirt that bears the names of 25,000 people who died of causes related to HIV. His work is profound, beautiful, at times startling and always ferociously honest.

Reynolds died of squamous cell carcinoma, an aggressive skin cancer made worse by his HIV. As Reynolds told POZ, in recent years, the cancer required the removal of his nose, his right eye and teeth. "Anyone going through this sort of thing," he said, "you just have to find the strength in yourself to have hope."

Reynolds was also a longtime and active member of Visual AIDS, a nonprofit that supports HIV-positive artists and uses art to fight HIV. To honor Reynolds, Visual AIDS is selling his recently published book, I-DEA, The Goddess Within.

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A post shared by Visual AIDS (@visual_aids)

The 54-page art book features photographs of Reynolds by Maxine Henryson and an essay by Julie Ault. The book documents a collaboration, between 1993 and 2000, in which Reynolds and

Henryson traveled to various cities and created guerrilla-like street performances: Reynolds, as Patina du Prey in a white dress, would spin like a shamanistic dervish and disrupt gender norms.

Visit VisualAIDS.org to view a gallery of work by Reynolds along a statement by the artist.

Reynolds's kindness and optimism touched many. As POZ reader Enid Vazquez commented on the profile: "Whatever a person's accomplishments, what matters more to me is who they are as a human being. I met Hunter Reynolds when he performed Survival AIDS ACT UP Chicago—A Revolution at Expo Chicago in 2015. He was full of warmth and kindness. He lifted my spirits with the way he signed his email messages: 'Glitter kisses!' A million glitter kisses to you, beloved Hunter. You are a gift to this world."

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