

In Your Eyes: Healing HIV/AIDS Through Artistic Activism

April 6, 2015 By [Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.](#)

The [April/May 2015](#) issue of POZ magazine is online.

Here's an excerpt from my editor's letter:

The power of art to inspire--and even heal--was wielded quite well during the 1980s and '90s at the heights of the AIDS crisis. The efforts of HIV activists were arguably enhanced by the widespread adoption of the pink triangle and the red ribbon as symbols of the fight.

Countless artists during those years were lost to AIDS. The absence of an entire generation of painters, photographers, actors, dancers, singers, designers and other creative people is just too large to comprehend. As they left us, the once seemingly omnipresent voices of artists in the HIV fight grew quieter.

This distancing has manifested not only in the art itself, but also in institutional support from the arts for HIV/AIDS. However, the partnership between the arts and the fight against the virus is far from dead. This special issue on art and wellness explores the connections between creativity and health.

Artist and long-term survivor Eric Rhein embodies these connections. His ongoing Leaves piece--a collection started in 1996 of leaf portraits memorializing over 200 people lost to the virus--combines memory and activism, which hopefully provides healing in the process for Rhein and the rest of us.

The 2012 death of activist Spencer Cox was a reminder for many long-term survivors across the country of the ongoing costs of their collective achievements. In response, Rhein created a leaf for Cox. That leaf graces our cover. [Click here](#) to read more about how Rhein continues to expand his art.

To read my complete letter from the editor, [click here](#).

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