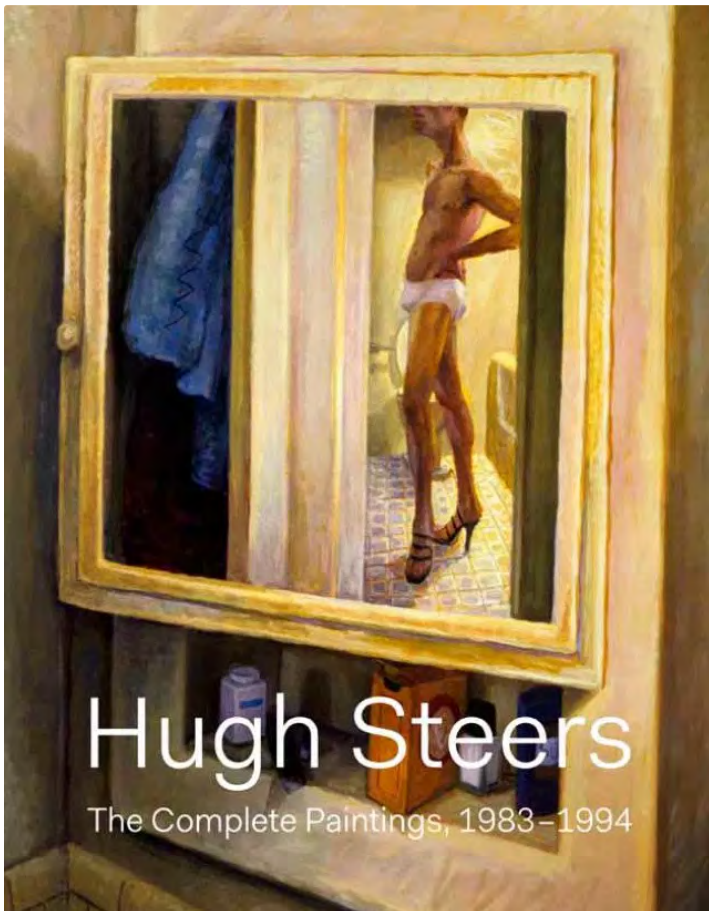




3/16/16 O&A NYC WITH Tod Roulette- ART: 20 Years of Bearing Witness of AIDS In The Paintings Of Hugh Steers

By Tod Roulette



Wednesday, March 8th at 6PM Alexander Gray Associates, which represents the estate of the late artist, Hugh Steers hosted a probing discussion on the artists paintings. The 600 pictures completed over eleven years are found in Hugh Steers:

The Complete Paintings, 1983-1994. The book tirelessly assembled for over five years by the nonprofit AIDS organization, Visual AIDS whose offices are doors away from the gallery.



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Preface by Nelson Santos, forward by Dale Peck and essays by Cynthia Carr and James Smalls. Designed by Bethany Johns. Managed by Dancing Foxes Press. Published by Visual AIDS. The gallery staged two large paintings and two smaller works on its walls for the discussion on the life of Steers. In 2015, Alexander Gray

staged a show titled: "Daylight" which examined the use of light in Steers works whose subject deals with intimacy, AIDS, exclusion, gay defiance and camp. This was the second public discussions about the painters works by Visual AIDS educating and engaging in social and art history speak 26 years since AIDS.

A crowd of about sixty persons gathered to hear exposes by American novelist, critic, and columnist, Dale Peck, artist Julie Heffernan and historian James Smalls. Slide by slide the three took those who know well the work of this fertile astute painter whose young life was folded into a book like a pressed flower in 1995 of AIDS. Hugh Steers was 32 years old.

As stated by Heffernan, his Yale painting instructor during her presentation about her personal interaction with Steers, "Painting saved his life while he was losing his." His work was steeped in art historical references and the scourge of HIV, AIDS, it's stigma, the resistance of the federal government, the medical community and religious institutions to address the suffering and loss of a generation because it was a 'gay disease'.



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While showing a series of images of mostly couples in many emotionally attenuated embraces, acts of assistance for the sick from a loved one or friend, Peck throws out a series of possible inner monologues or verbalized miseries. The author reminds us that Steers works are not those of a passive witness but give evidence to what it means to bear witness— the strength to feel, record and relate to future people. Steers was a visual voice in the East Village crying belying his young Ivy League educated privilege and patrician celebrity (his uncle was author and political

pundit, Gore Vidal and step-aunt, Jackie Bouvier Kennedy Onassis). Artist who became one of thousands of young creative gay activists mowed down in the midst of their prime.

Professor John Smalls of the University of Maryland informs the audience that Steers work takes a profound turn after the artist is hospitalized with pneumonia in 1991 with a character he calls, 'Hospital Man' a defiantly and odd high-heeled hospital gowned care taker who appears repeatedly aiding and watching over the pained and dying in Steers, small cramped bathrooms and bedrooms and corners of living spaces. By comparing paintings such as "Hospital Bed, 1993" (oil on canvas, 61 1/4x65inches) next to a sculpture of the Pieta the viewer realizes how many of the contemporary poses Steers places his characters reference classical paintings by artists as Edouard Vuillard's "Model Removing her Stockings" (c. 1903, oil on board 21 5/8x19) or Edouard Manet's "Olympia" (1863) which Steers transforms into "Bed Pan", 1993 (oil on canvas, 65 5/28 x 72 1/8 inches) where Manet's black maid displays flowers for the shameless prostitute lying nude in the bed, Steers black caretaker holds a bedpan. Although there is no full exhibit on view of the artists works, you should stop by to see the four that are on the walls in addition to the current exhibit.

Visual AIDS, the HIV+ arts organization dedicated the work of artists with HIV/AIDS continuing workshops hopefully will encompass a college and even high school target group so that more forming visual artists will be exposed to this artists works. Alexander Gray Associates and Visual AIDS have served the legacy of this artist well. Buy the book. Purchase Hugh Steers: The Complete Paintings for \$45 on the Visual AIDS website www.visualAIDS.org