

Stonewall 50/50

Curated by Bill Arning

Exhibition Dates:

June 21–July 28, 2019

Opening Reception:

Friday, June 21, 2019, 6–8pm

Queer Poetry and Stand Up Comedy Evening

Saturday, June 22, 2019, 8pm



Scooter LaForge, "Epic Stonewall" (2018), oil on canvas, 60 x 72 inches

1969 Gallery presents *Stonewall 50/50*, curated by Bill Arning, which opens Friday, June 21, and runs through Sunday, July 28, 2019. The exhibition features works by Jayne County, Christeene, Angela Dufresne, Karen Heagle, Rachel Hecker, Wes Holloway, Philip Karjeker, Katherine Kuharic, Scooter LaForge, Steve Locke, Keith Mayerson, Lovie Olivia, Carl Palazzolo, Rajab Ali Sayed, and Billy Sullivan.

Stonewall 50/50 is an appreciation of the dual nature of the 2019's nationwide celebration of the half century mark after a street riot occurred in Greenwich Village, that is widely considered the origin moment for gay and lesbian rights in the USA. Museums, galleries, concert halls, literary and film festivals will be full of celebratory events, and it is a story well worth celebrating. Until the last decade the idea of a sexual minority achieving a full and broad spectrum of civil liberties was unthinkable. It's hard to watch teary eyed long term gay couples getting legally married revealing that for the first 4 decades of their relationships they were 100 percent convinced that legal marriage would never be a possibility and think that five decades was not that long to wait and we should just remain quietly grateful.

Yet the nature of an historic event like this is to contrast the glowing public face with the private responses. The idea that all queer people regardless of race or economic and educational levels marched proudly into the sunlight, arm in arm with their gay brethren found a partner, adopted kids and dogs and pursued their career dreams and lived happily ever after, invited counter narratives and refusals. And the post Stonewall events of AIDS, the mass shooting in Orlando and the ongoing attacks from the right, as well as the desperate situation gay folks face in Chechnya, Uganda, much of the Caribbean, the Middle East and Sub Saharan Africa remind us how far we have to go.

Stonewall 50/50 intends to be half celebration and half counter narratives, not necessarily critical of the standard history but personalizing and complicating it reminding us that there is no universal story. As the curator of the exhibition I was 8 years old and lived in a politically progressive household less than 20 blocks away from the inn. I have no memory of Stonewall occurring and while my school was even nearer and had many gay teachers there was no sense history had happened nearby. But 5 years later at 13 puberty hit, my older sister's

magical fabulous gay friends started cluing me in that not everyone was straight and when I was 14 I became aware that the gay pride march would go near my house. At 15 I joined the march and seeing my parents' friends watching I started to hide, and then waved back to their appreciative smiles.

In 2009 I relocated to Houston TX and I for the first time in my life I heard gay men my age tell a very different coming out story, ones that seemed excruciating and impossible to me. For this exhibition I am mixing artists from Texas with those from NYC, and with work based on very very different life experiences. I hope the title 50/50 indicates the perpetually incomplete nature of trying to summarize this half century of progress and setbacks.

One of the sub-themes Arning feels is crucial in 2019 is explicit joyful and fun sexuality. As each crisis occurred in the last 50 years there has been a sex panic, when AIDS hit the game was shame the sexual experimenters of the '70s when 50 partners a week was normal, and the master narrative became point blame at the diseased fuckers and pretend you were different.

Today the crisis is slightly different. The success with getting access to marriage required the creation of the "good monogamous gay." That creature creates in its shadow the "bad gay" without sexual self-control. Curatorially, Arning calls bullshit and as he knows the invention of a PreExposure Prophelaxis Treatment or PREP allows for the era of "liberation trough erotic exploration" that was crucial to Arning's youth to begin again. Gay men across America are rejoices and joyfully fucking, attending play parties and forming a huge network of comrades in cum. Hence there are a dozens of throbbing cocks on the walls of the show and hopefully in the audience as well.

Bill Arning was director and curator at White Columns in New York City from 1984-1993, exhibitions curator at the MIT Visual Arts Center and director and chief curator at the Contemporary Art Museum Houston from 2009-2018. He has curated or organized many significant LGBTQ focused shows in his 35 years of curating including ACT-UP at White Columns (1985), first shows of Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Keith Mayerson, and Jim Hodges, AA Bronson Mirror Mirror at MIT List, 2004 and Maricas (Faggots) at the Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas, Buenos Aires Argentina, (1993) and Powerful Babies, Keith Haring's Impact on Art Today at the Spritmuseum, Stockholm Sweden in 2016 co-curated with Rick Herron.

