

LOUD!

"Your silence will not protect you." - Audre Lorde

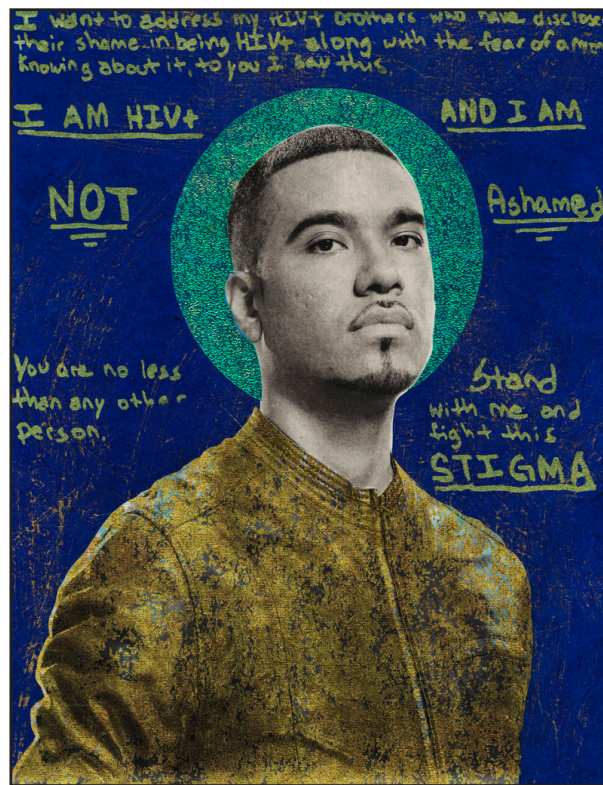
CELEBRATING LATINX HERITAGE MONTH

GABRIEL GARCIA ROMAN, QUEER ICONS IN ART

By Giselle Sanchez Huerta

Gabriel Garcia Roman is a New York City-based artist best known for his work highlighting Queer and Trans People of Color (QTPOC). Born in the high desert of Zacatecas, Mexico, Garcia Roman migrated with his family at two years old to the north side of Chicago. In his early 20s, he moved to New York City, where he graduated with a bachelor's degree from City College of New York and immersed himself in the New York City QTPOC community.

After attending art school, he noticed the lack of representation of QTPOC in art spaces and felt it necessary to create our seat at the table. One of his most famous art series includes Queer Icons, a series of portraits recognized by the likes of NPR and Huffington Post. These portraits highlight QTPOC activists, organizers, poets, and artists. Each piece spotlights the subject as someone to look up to, as a queer role model. Garcia Roman's muses range in gender, size, ability, experience, and community, highlighting the complexity and depth of the QTPOC community. These intersectional identities are so easily marginalized today, and Garcia Roman offers a chance to represent the community as it truly deserves to be seen – full of icons and idols who are pillars of representation for us. Additionally, most portraits feature writing from the portrait subject to the larger QTPOC community, as Garcia Roman says, "to highlight or amplify their voice using their words" in a world of systemic racism. Garcia Roman calls on the power of his subjects by saying "I wanted to highlight members



"I wanted to highlight members of the community that were doing something for the community as I see them as the modern-day saints. They are going above and beyond their call for the betterment of the community."

of the community that were doing something for the community as I see them as the modern-day saints. They are going above and beyond their call for the betterment of the community."

As we celebrate Latinx Heritage Month, others might relate to Roman's experience, growing up going to church with other Mexican Catholic families, which he exquisitely reflects in his artwork. As he says, "I always saw religious art as my introduction to art, you know, going to the church and seeing all the paintings and murals."1 We see different religious motifs, the most noticeable being the halo around each icon. This halo symbolizes the divinity of each person and supports the depiction of them, as Garcia Roman intended, as QTPOC "modern-day saints." As stated by Garcia Roman, "I see halos as a badge of honor. Saints are human beings that went above and beyond their call as humans for the betterment of mankind. They earned their halos." Garcia Roman truly highlights the ways QTPOC give to their communities through these religious motifs. He is also influenced by Northern European Renaissance painters, that embody

religious motifs in their work, including Jan Van Eyck, Rogier van der Weyden, and Albrecht Durer. You can see this influence in how the person holds a stoic gaze with soft hands, like much religious art, and in line with the way QTPOC must be strong and yet stay soft in our communities. He continues to emulate religion in these paintings by creating custom

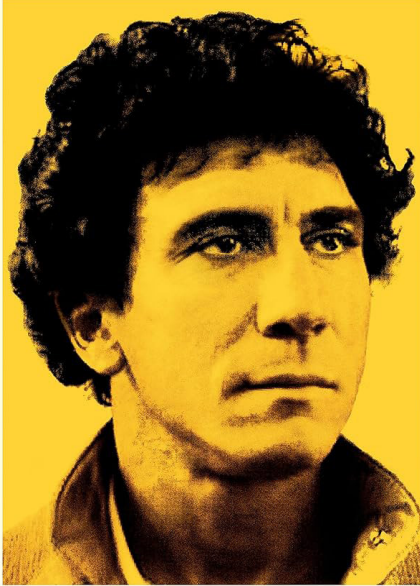
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- RAINBOW READING ROOM -

with Edwin Roman

BEFORE NIGHT FALLS *by* REINALDO ARENAS

REINALDO ARENAS **BEFORE NIGHT FALLS**
with a new foreword by Garth Greenwell



'One of the most shattering testimonials ever written on the subject of oppression and defiance' Mario Vargas Llosa

"AIDS is a perfect illness because it is so alien to human nature and has as its function to destroy life in the most cruel and systematic way. Never before has such a formidable calamity affected mankind.

.... Moreover, all the rulers of the world, that reactionary class always in power, and the powerful within any system, must feel grateful to AIDS because a good part of the marginal population, whose only aspiration is to live and who therefore oppose all dogma and political hypocrisy, will be wiped out."

Reinaldo Arenas (1943-1990) was a Cuban poet and novelist who participated in the revolution that brought Fidel Castro to power in 1959. He later became critical of Castro's government and was imprisoned and brutally tortured for his writings and, of course, for being gay. He was a prolific writer, and it is estimated that more than half of what he wrote in Cuba was confiscated and is lost forever. While he was censored and persecuted in Cuba, overseas his books were being published and found acclaim.

Arenas was exiled in the United States as part of the Mariel Boatlift in 1980. He eventually moved to New York City and was diagnosed with AIDS in 1987, a cruel irony after finding freedom. Arenas overdosed and died by suicide on December 7, 1990. In his final letter, Arenas wrote, "I end my life voluntarily because I cannot continue working ... I do not want to convey to you a message of defeat but of continued struggle and of hope. Cuba will be free. I already am."

Before Night Falls is the posthumously published 1992 autobiography of Arenas, which he recorded on more than twenty cassette tapes. Exile shaped his writing and *Before Night Falls* bears this out as an amalgamation of writings that communicate his identity as a subversive gay author protesting Castro. Arenas envisioned a way to freedom through writing, sexuality, and individual risk and not in community. As a living embodiment of protest, he recorded the cruelty committed by the oppressive Cuban government. ("Public humiliation has always been one of Castro's favorite weapons: the degrading of people in front of a public always eager to make fun of any weakness in another, or of any person who lost favor.")

Before Night Falls covers the entire span of Arenas' life, from early childhood to the above-mentioned suicide letter blaming Castro for all of his misfortunes, including his death. We see Arenas forced to work in the roasting sugar cane fields and compelled to "convert" sexually and politically. He is bullied into signing contemptible confessions and is beaten by jailers and lovers. He describes all of this and more without a trace of self-pity.

In a 1983 interview with *The New Yorker*, Arenas noted that, "There's a very beautiful moment in the creation of something when you have no idea how far it will go."

Before Night Falls is recommended reading for anyone who wants to know about the struggles that writers have faced all over the world throughout history. It is a powerful part of the literature of dissent and exile as well as a final testament that demands freedom to live your authentic self. When asked by *The New Yorker* if a writer has a duty to himself and society, he responded "... the simple truth is that without freedom, the writer cannot exist. And the writer who is for freedom is, by definition, not for any totalitarian system. So the duty of the writer is to write well and champion freedom. And he champions freedom because he has an obligation—what better obligation than this?"

Additional Source:

Salter, Ann Tashi. "The Literature of Uprootedness: An Interview with Reinaldo Arenas." *The New Yorker*, 5 Dec. 2013.

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MISSION

The LGBTQI+ Resource Room at Bronx Community College works to foster an inclusive, safe, and welcoming environment for students, faculty, and staff of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions.

The LGBTQI+ Resource Room aims to sustain visibility and a sense of community by providing education, programming, and support services on campus.

In the News...

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

The Supreme Court Dealt A Blow to Trans Rights. Here's How to Take Action

In June the ACLU reported that the Supreme Court dealt a devastating blow to trans youth, their families and the communities that support them. In a 6-3 decision, the Supreme Court ruled in *Skrmetti v. U.S.* that SB1— Tennessee's ban on gender-affirming care for minors —does not illegally discriminate against individuals on the basis of sex or transgender status. This allows Tennessee, and any other states that may choose to follow its discriminatory lead, to ban medically-necessary health care for minors.

The Supreme Court's ruling does not impact youth in states that have not passed gender-affirming care bans.

Transgender youth deserve to be safe, loved, and respected—everywhere. The ACLU recommends taking the following actions:

- Connect with your state ACLU affiliate, PFLAG, or local LGBTQ organizations.
- Support the Trans Youth Emergency Project, a nationwide effort by the Campaign for Southern Equality helping families access the care their children need.
- Contact your members of Congress and demand they stand with transgender people and families—rejecting laws that let politicians dictate our personal health care decisions.

The fight for trans lives is far from over and it needs you. Every action, every voice, every ally matters. **Read more at: <https://shorturl.at/MPavb>**

THE ARTS

Reading Recommendation:

We Are Everywhere

Written by by Matthew Riemer and Leighton Brown, *We Are Everywhere* is a rich and sweeping photographic history of the Queer Liberation Movement, from the creators and curators of the popular Instagram account @lgbt_history, released in time for the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots.

Available to borrow from the New York Public Library (306.766 R) as well as the CUNY Library (2018049230).



THE LGBTQI+ RESOURCE ROOM IS LOCATED ON THE ANCESTRAL HOMELAND OF THE LENAPE AND SIWANoy PEOPLES (THE BRONX). WE HONOR THEM AND ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR DISPLACEMENT, DISPOSSESSION, AND CONTINUED PRESENCE.