

# WIDEWALLS

## How Patrick Angus Portrayed the Gay Experience in 1980s New York



Patrick Angus - *Untitled*, 1980s. Watercolor on paper, 14 1/2 x 22 1/2 in (36.8 x 57 cm). Courtesy of Bortolami Gallery, New York.

The Reagan era was marked by the increasing class discrepancy, housing crises, cultural wars, but also the AIDS epidemics. New York City, where a large portion of the queer community lived, was hit hard by this horrific virus that caused widespread fear and panic in the early 1980s. The situation was very intense since New Yorkers were insufficiently informed about the disease, and the homophobic rhetoric blamed the marginalized social groups for spreading AIDS. Nevertheless, the community had to organize itself and respond to the epidemic by developing help and advocacy organizations, lobbying and funding them, and conducting radical activist and other initiatives.

Now, this process was hard to conduct and an enormous number of young people died from AIDS-related consequences, among them numerous artists such as Patrick Angus (1953-1992), who managed to capture the essence of gay desire amid the AIDS crisis in 1980s New York.

To revisit his poetic, erotically charged yet subtle works made during the mentioned period, Bortolami Gallery organized an exhibition of Angus' paintings and works on paper.

### Documenting Queer Lives

Patrick Angus grew up in the California suburb of Santa Barbara where he developed an early interest in art and began lessons in portraiture at age thirteen. During the time spent in college, Angus discovered captivating depictions of glamorous gay life in Los Angeles by David Hockney which empowered him to pursue his personal liberation and move to the same city in 1975. As the artist was unable to become part of elite creative communities and the world of the rich, he spent time exploring the male portrait as his central preoccupation.

In 1980, Angus moved to New York where a radical transition in subject matter occurred as started visiting venues such as the Gaiety Theatre and The Prince, the famous gay theaters frequented by

the artist in Times Square.

Although he was devoted to his delicate portraits and still lifes, as well as occasional designs of stage settings, Angus is mostly saluted for the works featuring the young male erotic dancers at New York showplaces produced in 1981.

## **The Works**

The exhibition brings three paintings and an impressive selection of works on paper made by Angus from the late 1970s until his untimely death in 1992. He was a keen observer, and his early portraits nicely illustrate the fine rendering executed in graphite, colored pencil, pastel, watercolor, and oil. The subjects are portrayed while sleeping, lounging, or posing in domestic interiors in a form of expressive social realism.

One of the highlights is the *Self-Portrait as Picasso* (1980) which features the artist contemplating upon his mirror reflection, framed by a fireplace mantle and a group of objects including a classical bust. This painting, as well as his other works, reflect Angus' determination to become part of a new, queer art history canon.

## **Patrick Angus at Bortolami Gallery**

The current exhibition will relight the domains of Patrick Angus, especially the way he used light for his version of tonal figuration. The artist barely saw the rise of his career before he succumbed to AIDS at the age of 39, so the displayed works stand as an homage to the artist's vision, but also a significant contribution to the mapping of queer art-making in America.

*Patrick Angus will be on display at Bortolami Gallery in New York until 27 February 2021.*