



The curator of *About Face* is Jonathan David Katz, Ph.D., visiting professor of gender, sexuality and women's studies at the University of Pennsylvania and chair of the doctoral program in visual studies at the University at Buffalo. The show will be on view through Aug. 3, 2019.

Chicago residents and visitors are urged not to miss it!

In the words of the curator:

“This is an exhibition about metamorphosis. Fifty years after Stonewall, we're still very much a community in progress. The traditional view, that Stonewall represents the birth of a gay and lesbian movement, couldn't be further from the truth on at least two counts: it hardly represents the beginning and it was never just gay and lesbian. On the contrary, we have always embraced a trans politics, in the sense of working to variously transgress, transfigure, transpose, transform, and finally, transcend a world of binary options, whether they be gay/straight, male/female, minority/majority, or conformist/nonconformist. Not for nothing were trans folk of various stripes the literal spark that ignited the Stonewall flame. This exhibition thus focuses on art in which boundaries blur, forms mutate, the natural is denaturalized, and the transgressive and transcendent are linked. In the works on view in *About Face*, sexuality, gender, ethnicity, and race—far from being clear categories—hybridize and overlap to the point that ‘queer’ becomes a verb, not a noun.”

Katz adds that “this new queerer world isn't about creating a more modern, stable identity, but the perpetuation of a continuously hybrid one, a recognition that we are all an amalgam of many identities, that the problem with ‘identity politics’ is that it's written in the singular. This recognition was modeled in art long before it could be brought to life.”

The artists featured in *About Face* are a diverse group originating from Colombia, India, Cuba, the UK, Sweden, South Africa, China, France, Indonesia, the United States, and Canada. I would add Argentina, but I will explain.

The artists Katz has included are Carlos Alfonzo, Ralph Arnold, Shimon Attie, Amos Badertscher, Joan E. Biren, Rashayla Marie Brown in collaboration with Brianna McIntyre, Roger Brown, Jerome Caja, Nick Cave, Tianzhuo Chen, Patricia Cronin, John Dugdale, Bob Faust, Gilbert & George, Maria Elena Gonzalez, Hervé Guibert, Harmony Hammond, Keith Haring, Lyle Ashton Harris, Sharon Hayes, Richard Hofmann, Peter Hujar, Bill Jacobson, Deborah Kass, Greer Lankton, Attila Richard Lukacs, Harvey Milk, Kent Monkman, Carlos Motta, Zanele Muholi, Alice O'Malley, Carl Pope, Marlon Riggs, Jacolby Satterwhite, Leonard Suryajaya, Gail Thacker, Keijaun Thomas, Arthur Tress, Del LaGrace Volcano, Sophia Wallace, and Martin Wong.

I have written in *People's World* about my late partner [Rick Barnett](#), who was a New York gallery director and curator in the 1980s. It's where we met in 1986. He knew several of the featured artists in *About Face*, represented them in galleries, and acquired works by several of them. After he died, I inherited them. The exhibition includes a group of photographs by the late Peter Hujar. One is captioned as "a man" painting a mural on the New York piers, a popular cruising spot at the time. But I knew that man, and own a couple of his works. He painted in an unmistakable style characterized by armless classical torsos. His name was Luis Frangella (1944-90) and he was from Argentina.

As it happens, Rick's sister Sandy lives in Chicago, and I paid her a visit Sunday afternoon after the convention. She owns a couple of Frangellas also. I photographed both hers and mine and emailed them to the Wrightwood curatorial staff. So a *PW* journalist's assignment to a queer art show unexpectedly solved a little mystery buried in Peter Hujar's oeuvre, restoring a significant name to the pantheon.

As Katz says, queer art did not start with Stonewall. Among American artists, we can count forerunners such as Romaine Brooks, Marsden Hartley, Paul Cadmus, and almost certainly Thomas Eakins. Yet after Stonewall, artists felt a new spirit of exhilaration and freedom and expressed it in the multimedia formats we see here. There is a sudden irrepressibility of lust and desire, rejection of bourgeois patriarchy, confrontation, and demand, as well as, starting in the early 1980s, the poignant, urgent need to document and to be remembered in the face of premature death.



*Photo of Luis Frangella by Peter Hujar. | Eric Gordon / PW*

Among the artists I did not anticipate seeing was Harvey Milk (1930-78), mostly known for his political and community leadership. But as the owner of a camera shop in San Francisco, he was also an avid art photographer himself. His work here elegantly captures some of his friends, and presumably lovers.

Martin Wong (1946-99), a Chinese-American painter, was drawn to depict the gritty urban environment populated by beefy firemen and prisoners. He often incorporated American Sign Language in his frames to broaden his horizons of communication. Joan E. Biren has long documented the lesbian community with her unabashed group nude studies shown in *About Face*. Deborah Kass is represented by large colorful pop art canvases featuring stylized lettering. Set aside at least a couple of hours for this stimulating show.

Wrightwood 659 is located at 659 W. Wrightwood, Chicago 60614. Their phone number is (773) 437-6601. For complete information as to directions, hours, related programming, and ticketing, go to <https://wrightwood659.org>.