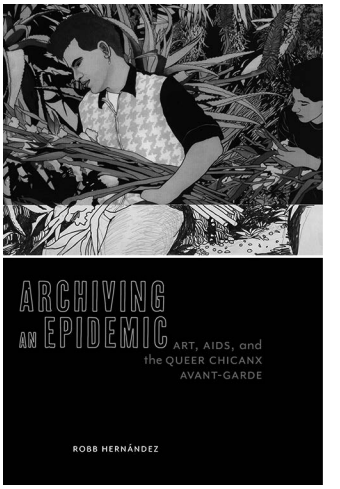
Archiving an Epidemic: Art, AIDS, and the Queer Chicanx Avant-Garde. By Robb Hernández. New York: NYU Press, 2019; 320 pp.; illustrations. $89.00 cloth, $29.00 paper, e-book available.



In the first chapter of *Archiving an Epidemic: Art, AIDS, and the Queer Chicanx Avant-Garde*, Robb Hernández describes the performance of *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends* (1969) by the artist Robert Legorreta, which is famous for causing the audience to supposedly riot, set trash cans on fire, and call the police. Written by the Chicanx artist "Gronk," the performance text mixed the metaphors of "caca," Spanish for excrement, and "cockroach"—a violent racial slur for Mexican Americans. Dressed as his alter ego drag persona Cyclona, Legorreta sarcastically fused the terms, confronting their social repulsion and symbolism, for an audience in East Los Angeles. Over the course of the performance, the artist exposed his greasy armpit hair to the audience, simulated an orgy, and bit water balloons over his boyfriend who was tied up in ropes on a theatrical set that evoked a normal domestic setting. Connecting this piece to the artistic language of works by a number of other important artists who embody violent racial vernaculars and who have been left out of the canon of Chicanx art history, Hernández writes that this piece conjoined a "transnational queer visual lineage [...] defined by the incendiary vision of a Mexican man in a dress" (57).

Throughout *Archiving an Epidemic*, Hernández surveys a wide range of incendiary visions in performance, visual art, actions, print media, and other ephemera by queer Chicanx artists from Southern California. Hernández meticulously attends to their affective qualities and to artists' unique strategies to provoke and agitate through nonconformity, and to address trauma and loss often associated with the social and cultural inequities of the ongoing AIDS crisis. To achieve this, Hernández combines performance studies, visual culture studies, queer theory, and Latinx theory in a highly original approach that reveals how queer Chicanx practices have long challenged institutional hierarchies of collection and preservation as well as dominant ideologies of Chicanx art and culture. Hernández's imperative is powerful and arresting: queer Chicanx artists have been left out of major art historical canons and legacies of AIDS cultural production, and critically, they represent "an ethos of sexual alienation, and a bolstering spirit of political dissent" (5) that is central to an otherwise heteronormative genealogy of avantgarde "Chicano art" since the 1960s.

To elucidate this alternate archival formation, Hernández actively resists archival strategies that follow an institutional logic of preservation and organization. Instead, he constellates scrapbooks, records, word-of-mouth stories, and other disorderly objects to embrace "detritus as an episteme to rethink archive as failure" (23). Hernández has created a methodology that is built from an understanding that archives are always flawed endeavors, especially given that so much art and performance created in response to AIDS has been lost or destroyed. Instead, he utilizes an approach that embraces degradation and incompletion. By meticulously attending to absences and failures in the work he studies, Hernández's book offers an innovative new methodology for archival practice.

What results is a luminous, fleshy, and spatial experience of ephemera and ephemeral performances centered in artists' vulnerabilities and disruptive repertoires. In chapter 1, "The Iconoclasts of Queer Aztlán," Hernández considers how the work of Chicanx artists and their collaborators, including Legorreta, Mundo Meza, Ronnie Carrillo, Jack Vargas, Joey Terrill, and Teddy Sandoval embody an iconoclastic sensibility that reactively disrupts heteronormative museum and collection discourses, showing how Legorreta (and others) "interjects a queer iconoclastic vocabulary into an ostensible static object-centered Chicano visual field"

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(35). Chapter 2, "Looking for Mundo Meza," pieces together the "queer detritus" of Mundo Meza's body of work, locating a synergy of the artist's avantgarde innovations, which are deeply imprinted by AIDS. Hernández equally emphasizes Meza's paintings and works on paper as well as fragments from scrapbooks and his commercial Hollywood projects, which included window dressing and acting in films. Looking to public art projects, ceramic objects in private collections, and other "archival spaces" that contain traces of work by artist Teddy Sandoval, Hernández expands the scope of what is considered AIDS memorialization to include a Latinx perspective in chapter 3, "A Roll/Role of the Dice." Unlike many "post-AIDS" memorials, this perspective also highlights colonialism and the ongoing impact of AIDS on people of color. Hernández pays particular attention to how Sandoval's partner, Paul Polubinskas, preserved Sandoval's work and negotiated it in public space after the artist's AIDS-related death, creating an alternative archive built around dead spaces, fractures, and dispersions.

Chapter 4, "Viral Delay/Viral Display," focuses on the testimonial paintings and photographs by the artist Joey Terrill. Hernández considers how Terrill's work offers the unique perspective of a long-term survivor who has watched the destruction caused by AIDS in queer and Chicanx communities. From this vantage, he explores the environmental and biomedical conditions that have shaped Terrill's artistic practice, in particular the effect of acquiring HIV during his seroconversion in 1989. He describes Terrill's "archival body" as occupying past and present temporalities at once, such as in a photograph of the artist in a mirror looking at a self-portrait he made in 1989 not long after his HIV diagnosis.

Unlike mainstream literature, exhibitions, and documentaries about AIDS produced over the past 10 years, which tend to focus on the initial outbreak of AIDS in the 1980s and 1990s, *Archiving an Epidemic* takes a more expansive approach to the temporality of trauma and loss caused by AIDS. It begins in the 1960s around the time of the boom in the Chicano art movement, through the early AIDS crisis, and continues to the present day. Because so much of the cultural history of AIDS is oriented from a white gay male perspective, Hernández's book provides a critical archive of political dissent that reveals how Chicanx creative communities "have found ways to negotiate AIDS loss from a barrio perspective" (120). In some sections I wanted to hear Hernández discuss how this important work has contributed to—or challenged—cultural platforms beyond the visual art world. Still, Hernández's examination of queer Chicanx avantgarde practices is urgent and long overdue, as they have gone unnoticed within dominant art historical cannons. Moving beyond the typical registers of visual and performance analysis, he examines a rich world of artistic practice that is marked by ruin, loss, and disappearance to expertly reveal the afterlives of queer Chicanx art and performance that continue to impact the present.

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