

# THE BODY AS AN ARCHIVE

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VISUAL AIDS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript: A Closer Look With Curtis Carman

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**[00:00:25.170] - Curtsy**

I'll share some of my work with you. I guess this is older work and I use found objects. I like happenstance. So it's things you come across and make or reuse or recycle them. So I came across this book of hairstyles and I am interested in aspects of identity. And I always think identity is really--I think socially we tend to put things into boxes and quantify it in flat terms.

**[00:01:02.680] - Curtsy**

But I see it as being, identity, as being multifaceted. So just the hairstyles alone and appropriating the sense of culture and how much visual representations mean for people's identity. And I just thought they were gorgeous and stylish. So I took that and collaged it with these candy wrappers and they're chocolate bar wrappers, chocolate bar called Divine. So I thought, oh, that's a little bit of my sense of spirituality and bringing that in there and marrying, because they came in different flavors, different flavors with the different hairstyles.

**[00:01:47.410] - Curtsy**

And then to sort of subvert the straight up narrative, I added my own little polka dots. And I spoke earlier, for me the influence of HIV is very much centered around the pharmaceutical regimen that I have to adhere to. And so I didn't want to be confined or trapped into this medicalized way of being. So I was like, well, how to put a positive spin on it?

**[00:02:27.580] - Curtsy**

And I remember the little candy drops that came on paper when I was a child. So I said, oh, it turns into like it's candy and to give it a colorful and happy experience. And I don't know what other people see in it. I hope they find something in it for themselves. And I like to have people take it wherever they like to go with it and enjoy that.

**[00:03:03.070] - Curtsy**

So then, much later, like during the pandemic, I came up with this, I thought was a crazy idea. And I said, oh, I'll make these little--I had using leftover drag. I had brooches and I had lots of sunglasses. And then I thought, well, I don't want it to be too graphic, so I just use this foam and glitter thing and then using old nail polish. And it was at the time, at the beginning of the pandemic we start with the masks.

**[00:03:34.470] - Curtsy**

And then I said, well, it's kind of covering up our voice, our speaking ability. And I made this, well, I had the idea and went with it, but it didn't work out quite as...

**[00:03:50.810] - Curtsy**

I don't know, it had a grotesque nature to it. I'm like oh, gosh. And I stopped doing that and then I couldn't think of anything. And then later I came up with the idea to deal with the brooches and using the sparkle. I like shiny things.

**[00:04:07.200] - Curtsy**

I like things that pop and cause intrigue. And it's not straightforward, but different elements of identity, different characters. And one of the things from my own HIV experience was a sense of spirituality. And I thought, well, why can't you have, like, queer religiosity. Queer queer religions or queer queer just embracing that as a spiritual outlet, queer community. And so one of my favorite icons is Marsha P. Johnson, and I love the line she says, "Oh, the P stands for pay it no mind."

**[00:04:44.760] - Curtsy**

Just go about what you're doing and not let other people figure it out for you, man. It's just using the vitrine as a platform just to put the two things together. And I definitely elevate people in drag history, transgender history, to sainthood.

**[00:05:14.770] - Curtsy**

Yeah. I think she had a philosophy and ideology and a sense of community and spirituality that was something to be adored and worshiped. So I put up with an old school Bible where they just had the word on it, "testament," and it's about to give witness to...I don't know if the term is right, but to pay homage to those that came before us.

**[00:05:44.510] - Curtsy**

You had asked me about the painting here. After my initial illness, and then coming through that a short time afterwards in recovery, I wanted to go back to school, and I studied art, and they had these lessons for you to paint this size or scale up, how to make it big.

**[00:06:07.220] - Curtsy**

But mostly I did drag portraits, or I started doing by doing portraits of drag queens. And the first one in my voice was my boyfriend, Jack Doroshov, who was Flawless Sabrina.

**[00:06:20.410] - Curtsy**

I'm a...I like big, and I like gestural, and I like expressive faces. And I was, you know, the lesson was how you do grid lines and then you scale it up. And I was, oh, I didn't bother erasing the grid lines. I was like, no, that's part of it. I like to show process, really.

**[00:06:40.190] - Curtsy**

I'm just a messy painter. I'm a messy drag queen. I'm messy. I don't know. I like to see behind the scenes and see behind the screen.

**[00:06:49.810] - Curtsy**

And mostly it was the love of my life, so that was an easy one. The other ones sometimes were harder because people become self conscious about it. One of the things with Jack and Sabrina, he was like you know, whatever you do is perfect. It's fine. So he gave you a lot of license, and so I took it.

**[00:07:08.810] - Curtsy**

Yeah. And he was always very kind, kept it in his house forever and always had it on display and shared with it. So it's kind of had its own life, and now it's come home to rest here with me.

**[00:07:26.910] - Curtsy**

One of the things, along with found objects, physical things, too, I also like to appropriate from culture. So the titles on these works this series is called Trademark Kissing In The Dark. And it was an appropriation. It's sort of old culture, but it was a blues song, Memphis Minnie, who sang a song Kissing In The Dark, and it's a song about promiscuous or working girls and working with scars of STDs.

**[00:08:00.430] - Curtsy**

And I appropriated the idea because of the sense of stigma and for myself, it's more with HIV stigma. But that sense of--my takeaway from the song is it's about owning it and taking, well, recognizing and not letting it hold you back and keep going forward and keep kissing in the dark.

**[00:08:28.880] - Curtsy**

And I've had quite a full day here with Milton Garcia Ninja and Constantine and Kaz. The Oral Histories Project, I think, is very exciting and really important to do. It's through the intelligence and the wisdom of Visual AIDS to have this opportunity. And it's been a very humbling experience because trying to keep up with Milton, he's a lot of energy and it's just wow, it's totally enriched my life. And so thank you very much.