

# THE BODY AS AN ARCHIVE

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VISUAL AIDS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript: Curtis Carman + Milton Garcia Ninja

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**[00:00:23.770] - Milton**

Thank you for inviting me to your home and inviting me to, for your hospitality, for making part of this actually happen and possible. So I'm really grateful and very enthusiastic about today. I was really looking forward to today with such fervor and anticipation so thank you.

**[00:00:49.360] - Curtsy**

Well, you're much cooler than I am. I was nervous, but upon meeting you, because we hadn't actually met, and so all I did was say yes. So I don't know that it's my doing. But I'm so happy to have you here with me.

**[00:01:04.840] - Milton**

You've heard of me, but you haven't actually met me until today.

**[00:01:08.470] - Curtsy**

Well, I don't know. In my world, the House of Ninja is really yeah, it's just a lot of legacy, a lot of history. And it's a history that it was in my lifetime. It was part of my circles.

**[00:01:25.530] - Milton**

It's still a legacy that I want to uphold, you know. We still try to remember Willi as he was and the person that he was. And that it's important for almost every member of the clan of the House of Ninja to recognize his contribution to community and to, you know, dance community, to the ball community, to all these aspects of community that helped me forge who I've become in terms of me and my artwork and how I express myself through the channels of my cartoons. And he was always very supportive of whatever endeavors we all pursued, you know, so there are members of the House of Ninja that are professional dancers and the background dancers for artists and stuff like that. And some of the older members have discrepancy about that, using the name to catapult their name in the dance world. But those are issues that happen in every house in every ballroom scene. So we're trying to be more cutting edge, cutting edge and being more setting the trends for other for other groups to follow, you know. And I'm just very fortunate that I have the house surname because everything is coming full circle.

**[00:02:51.230] - Curtsy**

Well, I mean I know I said the House of Ninja from Willi Ninja, that's part of a history I recognize, and I thought it was awesome at the time and still do. But first off, you're Milton, and I think you're a force to be reckoned with too, I think so. You got a lot to bring a lot to the table.

**[00:03:16.990] - Milton**

It's been a journey, it's been an experience, and I'm still learning from the experience and I'm still growing from the experience. And hopefully I'm starting to see the remnants of those experiences being manifested in the lives of other people. So I don't see myself as an inspiration to others, but an inspiration to myself lately. And in these recent couple of days and weeks that I've been going through some personal stuff with kidney disease and dialysis treatments, you know, sometimes there are days when I question whether or not it's all worth it. But sometimes I have to find myself some private space and quiet time to really reflect on the impact that I'm having on my life and on the lives of other people, whether they

meet me for, like, a brief moment or they meet me for, you know, a season or a lifetime, you know. Poor is the person that decides to leave my life or decides to leave my influence in their lives so, and I've seen it happen. So I'm not bragging about it, I'm not being egotistical about it, but I'm just saying that, you know, you don't set the trends and you don't set, you know, aspirations and ambitions if, you know, you can't set them for yourself first.

**[00:04:49.920] - Curtsy**

Yeah and I hope you're very generous to yourself. You know, it's just part of particularly living in New York City, but you get caught up in things and sometimes forget to stop and breathe and be generous to yourself and be good to yourself. I find that, for me, that's one of the spaces with art that helps me a lot, at least with art making, because I can go into my own imagination and take a day off from whatever, but I do it for making for others. You know I don't know what other people see in things when they're looking at work, but I hope there's something in there to intrigue them and you know I think part of the job of an artist is to show the unseen. The role of the artist is to unfold and make visible some of the things that are not easily definable.

**[00:05:53.610] - Milton**

That's interesting you say that, because my viewpoint of being an artist, in my case a cartoonist, is that generally, for me, all artists, in regards to their medium that they use, we're all interpreters of society and that, you know, we have the functionable right to, you know, question and create questions for people to think about using our artwork as a vehicle to, you know, create subjects like, you know, political satire or things like that, that I can create some serious topic and make it fun and whimsical and colorful. So that way, not only the average, you know, gay, teenager, LBT teenager can understand that, but also anyone that can see it from an adult point of view or being an adult and see that point of view. So most of my political satires are edged that my opinion of a candidate or something like that. I try not to get too political because everybody has their opinion about politics and sexuality and all that and religion, but I try to not deviate from that. But when the subject is an idea for that and I create it, I don't usually receive negativity for that. You know I really get, like I said, we're interpreters of society, and it's my function as an artist to create a conversation around that, whether or not people want to speak about the subject or not.

**[00:07:31.250] - Milton**

So there are moments that I'll implicitly put in imagery in my cartoons I'll, you know, show in a t-shirt to show the Ukraine flag, to say that I stand with Ukraine or things like that. Simple little things can make the most, you know, impactful opinions, you know, and create conversations and dialogue that are important, you know, no matter what age.

**[00:07:59.760] - Curtsy**

When we met earlier, you were talking about being open. I think that's one of the things with art, creating a, there's no answers, it's only questions. And so you hopefully creating some platform. I don't know where people take it. I try to give as much leeway to the viewer to go wherever they like with it, you know, I don't have like, this, oh, this is the way it is and this is what it's about. And so I think from looking at your work a little bit and mine, it's abstract, you know, it's not concrete, it's not one dimensional way of looking at things. It doesn't always make sense, I don't think it has to always make sense.

**[00:08:46.550] - Milton**

Mhm. We can be interpreters of a society. We can also create chaos and confusion in our society.

**[00:08:53.730] - Curtsy**

I have that my life a lot.

**[00:08:55.580] - Milton**

If we have that in our lives a lot, I try not to manifest that. And in my world, you know, I come from the ballroom culture in the gay community, so you know everybody is dressed to the nines, everybody is like done in labels, everybody looks fabulous. And that's one of the reasons why when we have real events, the balls and stuff like that, you know, until the commentators come and set the place on fire when they speak, commentating is like rapping. Rap. You know it's the same thing. They use their words to bring a person's self esteem up or down, and they get paid for it. You know? So why can I make that decision? When I started my artwork, my career in my artwork, when I was vaguely ill with HIV, and then I got tired of seeing reruns of *All My Children* on television in the hospital, and I asked my parents, can you please send me my art supplies? Bring me my art supplies the next time you visit. And I started drawing the nurses and the doctors and word spread around in the ward, you know especially with the nurses, because they can be quite gossipy when, you know, they change their shifts "Mr. Garcia drew this, Mr.

**[00:10:14.930] - Milton**

Garcia, drew this, drew this for me." And I'm not going to think about the business aspect of it because I'm in the hospital, I'm trying to get out and get well, and I'm not gonna like charge a person money, you know when they're helping me get well. So those are conflicting issues that I was beginning to understand in the beginning. So now it's like I'm really inspired to revamp my website again and things of that nature that are becoming a reality for me. And in this day and age, with COVID and all these other presumptuous kind of things that are just attacking us from everywhere, I think it's important for us as artists to express ourselves in any way possible. And the dynamics have changed also from mostly thinking about death and HIV and AIDS to, like, you know other subjects and other political, non political subjects that are important.

**[00:11:14.550] - Curtsy**

Yeah, you mentioned about COVID It was like we were forced into this lockdown, but also it was like a chill out time. And it brought back, for me, some memories about HIV. And there were things I related to around it. And so part of it was reliving an old traumatic experience which wasn't really pleasant, but it gave time to be by yourself, you know I don't.. you know, for me, at the end of the day, making art is a selfish thing. I'm doing it for myself because I understand what it is for myself, but it makes no sense to me when I show it to other people necessarily. I don't know.

**[00:12:07.670] - Milton**

Do you feel offended at times when you feel you have to explain some of your pieces of artwork to others that may not be so savvy with art and culture like that?

**[00:12:21.050] - Curtsy**

No, you know I think simple as like a title can give someone at least a gateway or an entranceway just to point them in a direction or at least to acknowledge where I take it or where it goes from me. I started with some idea and I usually just go with that idea, even though later I go, this is not a good idea. But I go with the process of making the things and let it sort of speak to me where it wants to go or, you know, accept the mistakes in it.

**[00:12:57.450] - Milton**

Do you at times have that notion that for me, when I was creating the artwork, I was literally creating like a pictorial diary of my work because I was unsure whether or not I was going to live or die. I mean, at that time, when I was diagnosed in 1992, I had AIDS. And it was, if I could come out of four T cells and 89 pounds and in a wheelchair, living with my deceased grandmother in her living room, in her nursing home and rise above all that, and 40 pills a day. 40 pills a day, medications a day, and rise from all of that and, you know, to be somewhat self independent and living alone and even in the midst of COVID still being able to pay my rent and at times bragging about my indulgences in my private life, which, you know I realize that wasn't helping me, that was hindering me and that all in all, it's been that my artwork has always kept me in a baseline of self security and a sense of self awareness, that through all of the ups and downs and the roller coasters that I've been through in these past, now almost 52 years of my life in New York City, my life is a pictorial diary in itself.

**[00:14:29.910] - Milton**

And that I could just have the artwork as a representation of that, or I could choose to just have my creative process, just be a representation of that and just create as limitless as I possibly can and be appreciated for it, you know, and for me, I don't see like, it takes a lot of people to appreciate what I do. I have a fan base. I have a group of people, you know, that will follow my artwork to the ends of the earth, you know but they're not like stalkers or anything or anything like that, but you know like rock stars. But, you know, if I can be somebody of an inspiration to somebody else that's really going through something and I may not be of trans experience, but I can be an ally to that person for trans experience. That's the kind of mature gay man I'm learning to aspire to become and that I am becoming, you know. And yes, I have my issues around the separatism of the gay community as a whole, you know, but I don't appreciate this like kumbaya Pride attitude everybody's together just on that month, on that day. But the rest of the year, everybody's like the circuit party queens versus the drag queens versus the bears versus, you know, I was never raised to be that person, to kind of hinder the possibilities of friendships with all these other communities and apply my artwork and my aesthetic to all those other communities including the ballroom scene.

**[00:16:15.630] - Curtsy**

Well, if I may suggest, I think what you describing to me you're a cultural ambassador, you're the diplomat that goes about and you mentioned earlier about having art as a safe place or a place of respite for yourself, but then using it as an extension of yourself or into the community and for the community. I mean, that's pretty powerful stuff. You must be a very strong person, it's a privilege to be able to speak with you.

**[00:16:48.840] - Milton**

Thank you.

**[00:16:49.650] - Curtsy**

Yeah, I think when I talk about my art, I'm very self conscious, you know, because it's something personal to me. And at some point I thought, oh, you know, I should be talking about AIDS, HIV, because that's my personal history and my relationship to that. And then I thought, oh I'm not an activist, I'm not an activist. I'm not good at that. There are people that are really good at that, and I wasn't that good at it. And then I thought, you know what? I think it's going to come out in my work no matter what I do. It's just part of me. It's right there and I see it. It's maybe not so obvious to other people, but I see it for myself. Little symbols and things that to me symbolize. Yeah. And I'm from 96. That was my HIV diagnosis. So yours is even before me, which I think is incredible, you know, because I remember the cocktail coming. I was always trying to hide and not deal with it. And then you're forced into it.

**[00:17:59.030] - Milton**

In my diagnosis, in August of 92, I was in college, and my career path was headed towards learning about the business of the fashion industry. So I knew I could be a good designer. I knew I could sketch a creation, you know and I could sew, but not sew like on a sewing machine, but sew by couture, like by hand. But you know I wanted to learn the business side. And my college, LIM on 53rd in Madison is a private college, and I got in through scholarship and I got in, you know, through TAP and Pell, and they saw more of a talent in me after graduating from my school of art design. So they..

**[00:18:46.470] - Curtsy**

Tell me again, what school was that?

**[00:18:48.260] - Milton**

LIM is an acronym for Laboratory Institute of Merchandising. And I found out that I really had a real situation with having HIV becoming full blown AIDS when I was interning as a manager for the department of the seasonal department at Saks Fifth Avenue. So I'm in a two three piece suit and I'm selling inventory and I'm selling Christopher Radko homemade ornaments for Christmas trees. And, you know I couldn't understand why I couldn't hold my food in after lunch and getting diarrhea every five minutes and I couldn't understand why I couldn't be able to perform my duties as an assistant manager in that department. And I oversaw three, eight employees under my wing, and I was so ill that I had to request for the dean to you know give me pardon. And so because of my medical issues, they decided to remove me from the internship and just pursue classes. I am the only Hispanic gay man out of two gay men in the entire college at that time. So it was groundbreaking and it was emotional because when I graduated, I had AIDS, so I couldn't go back into the fashion industry as demanding and cutthroat as it seems that it is.

**[00:20:30.650] - Milton**

I don't think my body could handle the demands of that anymore. And I was pursuing a career in menswear, so that would have been much more simpler in terms of selling inventory and stock, but I just couldn't have the physical energy to stand up and be on the selling floor in a three piece suit with that. And so the cartoons came as a result of drawing the doctors and nurses and the word spread around, and it became like the holy gospel, and you know, they were like Milton you've got the—I've always had the talent. I've been in high school and stuff like that, perfecting it with, you know airbrush work and things of that nature. So I even have portfolios from artwork that I've done in high school. So I'm amazed when I go through the years of artwork and how I've evolved to become just this base cartoonist and elevating

my cartoons to like a 3D pop up level, which is becoming quite popular among my constituents and my clientele and my base clientele, which is the ballroom community. And it's a feeling of reward and fulfillment that, you know, sometimes I'll surprise a member of the House of Revlon or the House of Extravaganza and create a cartoon that they're not aware that I'm creating you know.

**[00:21:58.070] - Milton**

So now I have to tell them it's a gift, I'm not charging them for it you know. And the joy on their face is just immeasurable, and it's like a kid in a candy store. And I feel so incredibly humbling to be a part of that so, and it just kind of manifests itself in my competition stage when I can physically have the energy to walk and compete. I always get a standing ovation because it's like they've seen my story, they hear my story and I'm open about my story transparently on Facebook and stuff you know. And last night when I went to the drag show at the church to benefit gay and lesbian homeless youth there, you know homeless youth shelter there, you know I'm taking pictures with the likes of Junior La Beija and Selvin Mizrahi, we've grew up together and we're not ashamed to be sitting in our walkers because we've reached that age that we've earned the right to be iconic and stuff. And it just humbles me to the point that I'm standing among these titans of the community. Junior still is pushing 64 years old and he was in *Paris Is Burning*, and he's gained a little weight.

**[00:23:20.440] - Milton**

He's a little porker now, but we give each other the same love as we give it to the younger generation. But sometimes the younger generation is not so apt to, you know accepting or really recognizing.

**[00:23:37.170] - Curtsy**

Well I think that dealing with young people, you don't know what sticks. They are like spaghetti against the wall and some of it sticks. It might be ten years from now someone's going to remember that. You know you'd be surprised. I have a lot of faith in young people and they do, you know.

**[00:23:55.420] - Milton**

Oh yeah. I'm very confident that although I'm not feeling that the direction of the community is headed in a positive direction as of lately. But there are certain members that will, certain kids and people of young adult stature and adult status that stand out, that will kind of salvage the community and make the community better for what it is now.

**[00:24:23.570] - Curtsy**

I think it's just one of these things that is so pervasive. Social media has changed a lot of communities, not just, you know, the gay or trans community or ballroom scene, you know whatever it is, the art scene, it's like spreading it out farther and diversifying it. But it also has that ... What's lost is that personal contact.

**[00:24:54.910] - Milton**

It can be as local as your local neighborhood gay bar. Because let's face it, think about it for just a moment that most of our lives are happening in the dark. When you're in a gay bar, you're in the dark. When you're cruising, you're in the dark. You know, the only time you come out in the light is when you're

in Gay Pride. And this Kumbaya spirit of we're all together going through different, you know, paths in our journey, but sometimes the paths are not respected among each other. That's why I have difficulty with and I chose not to participate in Gay Pride anymore because politically, when I had AIDS, I was dancing in the streets with the GMHC float and physically voguing and dancing from 53rd all the way down to Christopher Street without stopping. And the late Arbert Santana Ivisu, who used to be Mother Latex at the time, who recruited me to do this HIV prevention work in the House of Latex projects in the 80s and 90s when he died, it's just that all of that went with me. I got tired of the political spectrum at that time feeling like, okay, we're not respecting the people that have died, that have paved the way for us to live so freely and comfortably and see AIDS as a manageable disease.

**[00:26:16.940] - Milton**

I'm not comfortable with that. And to see young people talking during the moment of silence really infuriated me one year. And it infuriated me to the point where I'm like, shut the f up, you know. Do you know this is the moment of silence? Show some respect for your elders. And the kids are looking at me like, what the hell is wrong with this guy? Blah, blah, blah, blah. Even my ex partner who I broke up with was like what's the matter with you? And I'm like, it's not the fact that they're talking. It's the principle behind it you know, and I was infuriated. And after that year, I decided not to participate, at least in the parade itself anymore. Now I don't even think about going to the festival even because it's become so crowded that if I walk around with my walker, I'm seen as an invalid, as it's like, person with disability, like, get out of my way. You're stepping in my way, and things of that nature. So there are moments like that that I feel like they're treating me like less than human, and I'm not comfortable with that. So I choose to create my own sense of pride the way I want to have it and be around people that I define as community, that range a spectrum of people, gay and straight, Black and white, that I'm comfortable with, that I can foster as my community. And they come from very different backgrounds.

**[00:27:45.110] - Curtsy**

I noticed in your statement on the visual AIDS page, you talked about a sense of a little bit of alienation or not fitting into the construct or the conformity, which I think it's called being a trendsetter. You're ahead of the crowd, and maybe that's ... you just don't want to go along with the mainstream. I think that's a beautiful thing.

**[00:28:13.990] - Milton**

My attitude has always been that. I've always been a person that thinks outside the box. And I'm like, some days I want the box to be, you know, fuzzy pink, fuzzy pink with material. Then the next day, I want it to be glittery, glittery, good silver. You know what I mean? Like it's my mentality, I've learned in this city, in all that time since the epidemic of AIDS and now with the pandemic of COVID I've learned to become a chameleon and just learn to adapt and use my Gemini traits, as many others I know here presently are Geminis, and I'm happy for that. Geminis rule the world, right? So I like to say that being part of a community that is the precursor to popular culture, you know, it's very important to me and to be able to, you know, acknowledge that history is vital. I mean, like, you wouldn't see RuPaul's Drag Race if they didn't have the reading challenge that came from *Paris Is Burning*, you know? Those are aspects that came from our subculture of being GLBT Black and Latinos that I'm so proud to be a part of. And now that it's worldwide, it really humbles my heart. I mean, Curtis, it really humbles my heart to really have seen me at the Latex Ball, competing on video on the runway, and days later, some kid with HIV that lives in Brazil, you know is contacting me, saying, you're my inspiration.



**[00:29:54.870] - Milton**

I want to perform like you. You're so talented. Blah, blah, blah, blah. Can you be my gay father? Things of that nature. Words can't describe those feelings that I belong to feel like I needed to be a paternal figure or to adopt a kid, which I can't really do, but I would love to do. In my world, I can do that. In my cartoon world, I can do that. And in my cartoon world, you always dressed into the nines in the clothes from the shops on Fifth Avenue where when I could walk down the street at Fifth Avenue and walk inside Armani and be clocked and noticed by the security guard because of racial profiling for fear that I might be stealing something. So, you know, I like to contradict with my artwork in my world, what the society imposes on me as a gay Latino man in the city and try to circumvent those feelings that, you know pushed upon me and try to see it from a much more broader, wider, more beautiful perspective.

**[00:31:03.610] - Curtsy**

I love the cabaret motto of change outfits as often as possible as a metaphor you know, not changing modes of dress. But you know people's perceptions of you are based on the visual so much, but also relating to different communities, different tribes you know, and I like to go along with whatever's going on in those different places. I like those and how to bring it all together into one. I don't know how to do those things. And also, I like being a shapeshifter, being able to change. But it also does create a little bit of alienation like, you don't fit in. Like the cogs of the wheel don't fit in perfectly.

**[00:31:51.490] - Milton**

Uhuh and that's okay, that's okay.

**[00:31:53.370] - Curtsy**

Sometimes it's it's frustrating, but you have to remember to tell yourself, yes, it's okay, and be all right with that. Be accepting of it. With the age of my experience a big part of it is accepting that I have a lot of anger and just it's anger against something you can't fight so just acknowledging it and accepting it, you have to live with it every day. It's an everyday experience. It's not like something outside yourself that you can rationally make sense of. So you just play it by ear. I roll like hell and pray a lot.

**[00:32:44.010] - Milton**

Mhm and I think the whole basis of all of that is also to ... You're also teaching me today, if anything else, to be kind to myself and that...

**[00:32:53.150] - Curtsy**

Oh, yes, please.

**[00:32:54.060] - Milton**

And that I have a difficult time being kind to myself because I've always seen myself as a person that lacked something or that felt like I always lacked something. And I've had this conversation with my ex therapist in which I discussed my life being that all my life I've always felt like I needed a partner or boyfriend or something to complete me. And at this time in my life it would be nice to have a companion to share my life with. But I've defined my life as, you know, I've gotten to the point in my life where I may not need that feeling of wanting to feel completed by another person. I'm complete as I am. And I've learned

to become accepting of the fact that I'm sufficient as I am. And if I don't meet anybody of like, you know interests or you know, companionship values or anything like that, I'm okay with that, you know. And I'm okay with my sense of pure self. And this is not coming from a very selfish point of view, it's coming from a survival point of view. And that I find that I get things done better by myself than having to work. Because when I love, I love hard, and when I love hard, it's like, you know, my focus changes from me and my personal things to that person and their personal things or their issues, you know.

**[00:34:28.990] - Milton**

And I lose myself in that whole world of, like you know, having to take care of my equal. And then when I recognize over time that that person was never my equal, I had to step out of that last relationship because even though it was the longest I've ever had, he had a lot of issues with his health. And I was eleven years younger than him. So I think the straw broke the camel's back the moment that I recognized that he had an issue with me sketching and drawing in his apartment you know, and why are you always drawing cartoons of us and why are you always drawing cartoons of us nude, blah, blah, blah. And I'm like, it's not like I'm creating erotic pieces by Robert Mapplethorpe for anybody like that, or Tom of Finland who are some of my muses and inspiration in terms of my art, you know, but I don't apply that in my cartoons unless the idea hits me. But like, if you have a problem with me creating cartoons and coloring cartoons in your home, then there's something about you that's just uncomfortable that you don't want to share with me as your "equal" in the relationship. So I had to acknowledge all that.

**[00:35:50.460] - Milton**

And you know, for me personally, I was being self destructive with medication, self medicating myself and getting myself out of that situation and justifying my self medication to make excuses for myself that are not healthy, you know. And now coming out of that and I'm feeling more sense of self awareness and utilizing my artwork as a positive platform not for myself, but for other people. So, Constantine can tell you. Constantine, when I came to the meeting you know, when we were discussing about doing the interview, I mean when I came in with my walker, I had, like, billows of new artwork because I literally create artwork almost on a daily basis. And back then, it was just like I didn't know if I was going to live or die. So I felt like I needed to create some sort of legacy and leave behind artwork or whatever and leave behind my imprint in terms of me being a cartoonist outside of the dance issue in the ballroom culture. And now it's not so rushed and reserved, and inspiration is where you confront it so.

**[00:37:03.950] - Curtsy**

Yeah, I try to as much as I can, or when I remember to think of it take life and its process or it's like a dance. When it's going good, it's like a dance. I imagine myself like Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers all together in one person.

**[00:37:20.780] - Milton**

I'm more like the Hustle guy, haha.

**[00:37:22.650] - Curtsy**

I do one step forward, one step back. But I have this short anecdote that I tell because I get in my own way a lot. I go up to read the sign on the wall, and the sign on the wall says, don't stick your foot in the

bucket. And I look down, and I go, oh, my gosh, I've got my foot stuck in the bucket. And so I turn around, and then there's another sign on the other wall. So I go.

**[00:37:50.350] - Curtsy**

Clump. Clump.

**[00:37:51.080] - Curtsy**

Clump. Clump. Walk over to the other wall, and I read that sign, and that sign says, don't stick your other foot in the bucket. And I look down and I go, oh, my gosh, I've got both my feet stuck in buckets. I don't always learn from my mistakes. I tend to do them over and over again, and that's okay. That's part of my ... I'm slow. I take that as part of the ... package.

**[00:38:13.910] - Milton**

But it shouldn't define you as an overall individual either.

**[00:38:18.470] - Curtsy**

I try to add it to, like that's one of the characteristics or traits of myself that no, it's okay. That's part of who I am. Try to be cute about it or silly or have a laugh, a little smile about it. And, you know, we talked about making art earlier, how it ends up being ... It's self involved. You know, nobody's making it for you, and it's out of your own imagination, but it's hard to share with somebody in that, you know.

**[00:38:54.050] - Milton**

Have you ever recently felt the impact of your work on other people's lives? How it's affected, how they've seen your artwork?

**[00:39:02.710] - Curtsy**

Well, I don't share it that much, except for online. I don't like online. I'm not an internet type person. I just I don't know why. I know it's there. No, I've never really had that experience. I don't have that experience. You know, I know because I was in school for a little while. Well, actually a long while, because it took me a long time, but that was a community that was very supportive and that was nice, and I respond to that and very much, but it doesn't happen that often. Yeah, it's kind of limited.

**[00:39:45.330] - Milton**

Yeah, I had mentioned briefly about being graduating from LIM and being like the only Latino gay man out of two gay men in the entire population. Most of the students were girls and they came from different parts of the country and the world because they wanted to learn how to do, learn about the fashion business of the fashion industry and mostly women's wear. So I was, like, the only guy I wanted to do menswear. And I befriended a friend that was bisexual named Laura who I keep in contact with occasionally, who lives in Atlanta now. And she was like I've always been fortunate that I speak about her because she was, like, the only person that accepted me before my diagnosis and after my diagnosis. And this was also in 1992 when one of my first partners or whatever Joey had passed away suddenly and it was traumatic. And this was the time before of beepers, before cellular beepers, that you had to go down to the cafeteria and use

the actual pay phone to call somebody back you know. And it was very traumatizing that I'm in class and to get a phone call from, you know Joey's older brother crying.

**[00:41:15.110] - Milton**

And this guy is like the whole masculine football image package and he's crying, telling me, you know, my baby brother is dead. And I come up here now, come up to the Bronx now. And I'm like, I can't. I'm in class, sweetie. I can't go. You know, and to come up there and then go to the wake, you know, and we had made, like, a pact between him and I and that if he went first, that he would dress in the coffin because he know, he knows that I'm a fanatic for Prince before he died, I went through the motion that his music and everything, he's June 7, I'm June 13, you figure it out. So he promised that on the coffin he was going to be dressed in purple, in a purple tuxedo holding a white flower. And I got to see that before in the wake and if I was going to go first that he wanted me in a white tuxedo with a red rose. And I remember this woman who was like his neighbor, who was like a street, a friend from the streets that lived on his block in the South Bronx and yelling at me in the funeral parlor and chastising me and calling me everything from an abomination to like a snake in the grass.

**[00:42:47.060] - Milton**

And I just slapped her. I just slapped her in the funeral home. And when you're around elderly Hispanic women and Black women with their veils over their “\*gasp\*... escandaloso!” like, scandalous! You know, and I slapped her because I couldn't take it anymore. And I possessed my father's characteristics where it's like, tick, tick, boom. Like you f with me that I'm your worst nightmare. I'm Satan incarnate if I can be that way. And I slapped her. And in Spanish, I was cursing her out in the funeral.

**[00:43:24.170] - Milton**

In the funeral parlor.

**[00:43:25.020] - Milton**

And I was 22 years old and, you know, and losing Joey like that, tragically falling in the bathroom and hitting himself on the bathtub, the doctor, the EMS, went to the hospital. And I didn't see this because I was in class. And that to have friend rushed to the hospital at Lincoln Hospital, and he was hemorrhaging so much that he lost blood and he was dead on arrival in the emergency room. And I'm sorry. The reason why I'm saying this is because I have been through so much in my 52 years of living soon that I don't take any of that for granted. And it's like a piece of my life that's always in the back of my head that I recall that I remember to this day I even have those photographs and pictures of us and stuff like that. And it's a part of my life that I don't utilize in my artwork, but I'll say it in therapy or things like that. So I've come so far in all those attributes and all those you're like in a juggling act, in a three ring circus, you're juggling all these balls like the health issue, your personal health issues, your spirituality, the artwork, the ball, and seeing how is that affecting all of that.

**[00:44:49.440] - Milton**

And you're careful not to drop any of the balls because if you drop one of them, it's going to impact you severely you know, so I'm learning how to kind of just position myself and become more accommodating and relevant in everything that I do. And that if it offends somebody, well, it offends you you know, but I know that if it works for me, I'm going to stick with it, you know. And if it can work for somebody else, then

I'm all for it. I'm in it for the long run, you know. And to have a kid from me, from Brazil who doesn't know me from Adam, who saw me on a second of a video on YouTube, because now it's worldwide, it's gone viral and stuff like that, tell me that. And living with HIV

**[00:45:42.000] - Curtsy**

You don't know where you reach or how you touch someone's lives.

**[00:45:43.000] - Milton**

Exactly, and that impact is something just something so impactful that it just goes beyond words. So it satisfies my need to feel paternal. It satisfies my need to not feel so down on myself that I couldn't get to do certain things that I wanted to do, like adopt a kid or something like that, that still can be within my reach if I desire to do it but...

**[00:46:08.690] - Curtsy**

You can adopt me.

**[00:46:12.030] - Milton**

Haha, well you're already adopted now. You're an honorary Ninja now.

**[00:46:15.980] - Curtsy**

Yeah.

**[00:46:16.930] - Curtsy**

Thank you.

**[00:46:17.680] - Curtsy**

Oh, my God. Oh.

**[00:46:18.500] - Milton**

Yes. It's a beautiful ... my life is becoming so enriched with each moment that I live it. You know. And I wish Willie were alive to see me grow and foster himself, but in a way, he is.

**[00:46:35.000] - Curtsy**

He feels you if you feel him.

**[00:46:38.000] - Milton**

Call me crazy. But there are moments when I'm talking to that face on the twelve inch son, I'm like, are you proud of me, Willie? Do you approve of me doing this and doing that when I was in the hospital with the kidney disease, you know, the current father of New York, Javier Ninja, who's now an icon status, you

know, we have a lot in common, including knowing Willie, and I came clean about my substance use, and not too many people knew about that, but they could feel that part of the issues around my kidneys and dialysis could be a factor. That could be a factor that I have to explore. So I'm crying, like, on video chat to him in Connecticut and really bearing my soul to him. And he is like, I've been through it. I'm in recovery, and if I find out you're doing that again, I'm going to come down from Connecticut and kick your butt. I've never felt a sense of purpose and family, not to say my regular biological family is somewhat supportive.

**[00:47:55.320] - Milton**

They're somewhat supportive, but at the times, I can't really connect to that biological family like I can with my house family. So they are just feelings of self immeasurable gratification and joy that when I have those days and moments that it, doesn't look so... it looks bleak, I remind myself of those moments more than ever before. And it gives me such a solace to know that you're loved and you're enough. And I don't need my ex to feel infuriated that I'm choosing to express myself with my artwork. And he's offended by that screw you, you know, if he knew that last year, thanks to Visual AIDS that I got, I had been showcasing at the MoMA, oh! Oh, all of a sudden you were interested in me again. Right. I'm starting to see polar opposites of that in my life. And the artwork is a template and a base for me to find myself stability and security. And if I can spread that joy to others, then I'm doing my job.

**[00:49:17.320] - Curtsy**

Yeah. I remember my experience first with HIV. I mean I call it HIV, it was AIDS. But I was in the hospital. I was very debilitated. I wasn't able to, because of the medical complications of what it was, I had some brain tumor, so I couldn't think. And everything was all happening at once. It had culminated. I had been hiding away from it, and I was so debilitated. I couldn't tell one thing from another. And in the hospital, it's like everybody starts I mean, I had family and friends and a lot of support, but the hospital also had a lot of personnel that came in and out of the room, and everyone was wearing white coats, and I was like, I don't know what's going on. And in that maze of strangeness, there was one doctor that came and put his hand on me and touched me in a very warm way. And so I couldn't figure out I thought I could understand what they were saying, but I couldn't make a decision. Not that it's like my brain wasn't working right. So what I did recognize was like, oh, there's somebody with compassion, which I associate with love.

**[00:50:44.760] - Curtsy**

And I thought, you know, in this whole crisis intervention scene, there's somebody that is coming and speaking with their heart. And so I reached out to him and I said, please help me, I don't know what to do. And he said, just follow me. And he was really a competent I mean, he was like preeminent HIV doctors, this was at St. Vincent's, and he knew the medication system. So this is, by this time, the cocktail had just been like a year old and I didn't even know about it. And so I was able to start on that medication, which was brutal for like a year and a half, two years of very, very heavy meds and then just working with the cocktail after that. And I thought after I came through that, like after three, four years coming through that, I thought, wow, I started out I had AIDS, and I don't want that to be my whole life so, or at least I want to have a life, not just be stymied by that. So I realized, oh well, now I'm going to focus on trying, I'm going to be HIV positive. I'll just work through it. But it was about how to get my head into that vision and to believe in that myself.

**[00:52:08.870] - Curtsy**

That was doable and that was a lot. But at the same time I was going to school, you start doing that juggling act and I'm dropping the balls all the time and then you pick them back up and you throw it back up in the air. But one of that out of that experience was that sense of love and compassion. And I got a sense of spirituality from that. Because you're like, yeah, my God, you're on the brink of going to the beyond, you know dying. So I thought, hey, maybe there's something out there beyond myself. I try to recognize others and be as compassionate and kind and sharing to them. That my experience through the arts, because it was through this sort of hetero window I realized, oh, gee, I have a lot of straight friends. But it was a community, but a disparate community. And I think that's a nature of community unless you're locally, if you live in the same building or if you live in the same town, if you are just close in a family. But I think in gay life you don't have that. It's coming together of individuals. I mean, they use this term of tribes now, which I love the sound of that, but I don't know if it's easily recognizable.

#### **[00:53:42.150] - Curtsy**

You have to sort of feel your way through it. So when I'm creating work, I try to think of that sense of the spirituality, something beyond myself. And maybe it's not a clear vision. I don't know what it is and I don't know if people pick up on it. You have to ask them. I couldn't tell you, but I like things that are intriguing. I get a lot of people going like, what the hell is that? What is that? I don't have an answer for them to say what it is.

#### **[00:54:21.210] - Milton**

I kinda, in my experiences, the cartoons are pretty colorful, they're clear, they're concise and to the best of my ability, as creative as I can possibly create them to be in my vision. So my process starts with just the idea comes like a title. And then I'll jot the title down in my phone or something to keep it and keep a list of my ideas, current ideas available. And then when I have enough stock, you know Bristol paper and stuff, I start writing them down in these ideas individually on each sheets of paper. And then I'm finding that my creative process is becoming a lot more almost to the point of an assembly line, because in the past, I was unsure about whether I was going to live or die because of so many medications. And even so, how the medications were affecting my mental prowess at the time and also my creative process. But now, when I look at the title, now I know exactly where the image or the vision comes from or the idea comes from. And I try to create it in color form. And it amazes me that when I finish a piece, it is almost exactly what I envisioned it to be.

#### **[00:55:54.680] - Milton**

And some people get the reference points in some pieces of work, some people don't. But I'm more than happy to explain you know if they don't get it, then I give them a simple explanation, then they get it. You know, and like I said, you know, being in the ballroom scene as the progenitors of popular culture and creating the taglines and the slang and having Tamar Braxton say you know, you tried it, you tried it. That's lingo that we learned from each other in the subculture and you know we don't get recognized for it. Even when *Paris Is Burning* was being filmed, Jenny Livingston did it as a film for her NYU class to pass her course. But, you know none of the participants in the movie got paid for that. And it's the same kind of situation where *How Do I Look?* So when I decided to go into kind of a self made business for myself with the artwork, you know I was not going to not forget the people that had died and create these cartoon images of a swan song of things of like that I wanted to say to them when they pass away and give it to a member of their house as a form of respect without charging them for it and things of that nature.

**[00:57:22.530] - Milton**

And slowly but surely, I've started to reconnect and connect with other graphic artists, photographers in the ballroom community, fashion designers, people that sometimes are coming out of that community with jobs, sensible jobs and a career out of it and fostering these networks that are available for each other, for each other. And like a for us, by us for us such a situation. And that's the reason why you see *Pose* and *Legendary* and all these shows coming about, because of that kind of concept, and that we're finally being recognized as a subculture within the culture of the gay community, that we have a large, rich history, and I'm so proud to be part of that. You know. Even people in my community got kind of chastised by, you live in Chelsea. Doesn't that make you a Chelsea boy? A Chelsea snob, blah, blah, blah. And I'm like, no, that's an address, not an attitude. So I snap right back with a little light read or something, and then they're like, oh, well, yeah, he's from our generation. He's from the Red Era. He, you know, he doesn't play, you know? And last night last night when I saw the girls perform and girls and guys trans men trans women, I can never tell anymore.

**[00:58:48.460] - Milton**

But I respect them as spiritual entities and people that are living a life here, a human life here. And everybody is valued in my world inside the cartoons and outside the cartoons. So don't be too surprised sooner or later in the future that there's a forthcoming cartoon of all four of us coming real soon. I don't need to have an image of you to create a picture of you. So I'm just putting that out there so you're aware. So yeah I already got the idea down on my phone, so once it's there, it's etched in paper. So I'm giving you that as something to look forward to.

**[00:59:33.650] - Curtsy**

I think we're like wheels, and we're just spinning in space, and it's like the spokes all going out in all different directions, and it's creating bridges, but it's up to who wants to cross those bridges or make those connections. You know, you do your best. You venture out here, a little bit there, and wherever you know you can get a foothold, you get a foothold. Or if you want a different view, you can go over there. But as far as what comes, it's what the universe applies. You know.

**[01:00:08.650] - Milton**

And I didn't say that just to be just to plug myself. Oh, that's my phone. My apologies. Would you know? It is my nephew. Can I take this? Yeah. If I feel like I'm speaking too much, let me know too. Okay.

**[01:00:30.300] - Curtsy**

I think you're perfect.

**[01:00:31.870] - Milton**

Okay.

**[01:00:33.210] - Curtsy**

You're sexy, handsome, gorgeous, beautiful. Thank you. Thank you.



**[01:00:41.150] - Milton**

Because I want you to be comfortable too.

**[01:00:43.630] - Curtsy**

I'm very comfortable.

**[01:00:44.870] - Milton**

Okay.

**[01:00:45.600] - Curtsy**

And very instructive. I learned a lot. Yeah.

**[01:00:53.490] - Milton**

I can't think of anything else.

**[01:00:59.650] - Curtsy**

Okay. You mentioned about your lover, one of your lovers. I thought, if I may just share with me, I was very fortunate. I had a long time partner for, like, 35 years, and it was also a difference in age. He was older than me, which was kind of a godsend because he had a lot of patience, and he put up with my brattiness, but he was like, a teacher and a mentor and a mother and a father and just a lot of things. And he was involved in drag himself. He worked on the persona of Flawless Mother Sabrina. His name is Jack. Jack Doroshov. But it was a real relationship, so it had ups and downs and you know wasn't all smooth sailing. But I knew when he brought out the wig box and brought out the makeup, the honey, the party was about to start. And so it was a lot of joyous times and a lot of discovery and learning new things. For me, it was all new territory, so it was a lot. But I met him, he was later in life and I was you know in my late 20s, so his experience in the drag world and doing drag pageantry, he had many years of doing drag competitions and it was before me.

**[01:02:29.390] - Curtsy**

And he didn't press that persona. He had let it go for a while. So we met under different guises and so like that, and I just thought he was the most fun imaginable and really smart and stylish, and he was very free and very loving. So it's very supportive relationship.

**[01:02:52.290] - Milton**

It's very empowering to hear that side of, may I call him Flawless Sabrina because that's how I know him.

**[01:03:01.210] - Curtsy**

Mother. Sabrina. Flawless. Jack.

**[01:03:05.770] - Milton**

I have friends and former friends that were in the drag circuit, in the pageant circuit and stuff like that. So that's closely associated with ballroom too, as well, in many minute ways, in many intricate ways. And it's very humbling to hear you speak about Flawless Sabrina in that light because it brings a whole new dimension to me after seeing her and *The Queen* about the full humanity of Flawless Sabrina as your partner. And it's very joyous to hear that. I want to say that to you. And you're a rare breed of gay man that now in this day and age, with this hypersexuality of masculinity being dominating the whole kind of whole spectrum of the masculine gay culture, that drag queens are still frowned upon and shamed on. It's an art form.

**[01:04:05.310] - Curtsy**

I say proudly, I'm a drag queen. And I've heard people saying, well, we don't like that term anymore. I'm like, well, yeah, you know.

**[01:04:14.280] - Milton**

You can change the term, but that doesn't mean that you can't change the attitude of that persona feeling there.

**[01:04:18.980] - Curtsy**

I'm not trying to appropriate a female persona. I'm just dressing up, getting gussied up, dressing silly and trying to make people happy and make myself happy. There's other so many issues around identity and gender, things that are beyond me. I don't have a handle on that. I don't inhabit another persona. I'm the same goofy, silly, awkward person that I am out of drag, that I am in drag. I don't have a different persona that I inhabit, and I'm not trying to make an illusion for somebody and I'm not trying to demean or disrespect women in any way. It's not my thing.

**[01:05:05.310] - Milton**

It's amazing how you speak about the whole spectrum of the drag culture as it is in the spectrum of ballroom culture, in the spectrum of the gay and lesbian culture, and how all of those are intertwined or manifested in one shape or form within, intertwined within each other that I appreciate and that I've always let my life that when I got up in drag, it was for performance shows and for fundraisers, for organizations I was a part of and stuff like that. And I stayed in contact with my gay mother, Princess Diana, who transitioned to become transgender and was a drag queen. So, you know, I have a high regard and high respect for drag as an art form. Still, even in the midst of this whole hypersexual masculine kind of environment that the gay community is perpetuating right now, I still respect those that have come before me in that sense. And my attitude is, if I can't experience what it's like to put on to be a drag queen for a night or something, if I don't get into pumps and that tuck stuff is painful, the tucking, that's painful. But, you know, there's a price for looking good.

**[01:06:28.430] - Curtsy**

I cut myself a lot of slack. I wear flats. I'm old you know and things change. You have to adapt. Like you said, you go on the runway with the cane? Yeah, it's okay. It's part of the look. For me.

**[01:06:45.570] - Milton**

Oh but for me, it's not more of a look, it's more of a statement, a mental statement to let people know, like, don't define me by my disability define me by how I perform. You know that they're like "How could you move like that? You can't barely walk. How could you?" It amazes me to see the reaction of people's faces when they're watching me on an elevated runway. And it amazes me sometimes. Sometimes I'm, you know, dumbfounded by it. And even with last night when I went to the drag show where the kids performed, I'm still moved by the songs that they choose, and they choose to lip sync or perform and I really respect that whole process because I've done it once or twice, at least in my lifetime. So I have a real affirmation and a real positive outlook on all the spectrums of what it is to be GLBT. And if I haven't lived it, how can I say that I haven't experienced it once if I don't appreciate it? How can I still appreciate it if I didn't live it at least one time in my life.

**[01:07:57.770] - Curtsy**

Keep doing that and I mean doing it for yourself as much as for anyone else. May I give you a hug?

**[01:08:03.830] - Milton**

Yes. And please, the next time you pray, the next time you speak to Flawless Sabrina and your prayers, please tell them that there's a fan, there's a younger fan that appreciates that, appreciates your sacrifices that she made you know. And when I saw that movie *The Queen*, it wasn't just because of Crystal LaBeija. It was also because of seeing in that era how drag pageants had affected the gay community as a whole before Crystal LaBeija came out of that whole situation and colored it.

**[01:08:41.100] - Curtsy**

She came out on top and that she owned the film. She ends up being the star of the film by the end of it. And I thought, that's a great inspiration for conquering the hills and climbing up the mountain.

**[01:08:57.610] - Milton**

After seeing the movie *The Queen*, I was inspired not only by Crystal LaBeija, but also by your partner. And knowing now, wow, it was such a revelation knowing that you were his partner. I want to tell you that in lieu of her, I want to say that her influence as being Mother Sabrina, you know, gave me an affirmation and an appreciation for drag and its cultures and its flawlessness and it's, you know, sacrifices that I really appreciate you know..

**[01:09:33.840] - Curtsy**

Well, I can easily tell you her secret. Maybe not at the time of the creation of the persona Flawless Sabrina, but as the period of time when I was in a relationship and through that and by the end of his life, it was just unrequited love. He gave love fiercely. He just totally gave love, gave love. And he said, I love getting jam, so I give jam. And yeah. And without expecting anything in return. It was amazing to watch because you see people respond to it in such a positive way.

**[01:10:11.970] - Milton**

Can I ask you a question? Has your artwork been kind of fortified and inspired when those moments when you were with her, in relationship with her?

**[01:10:21.750] - Curtsy**

Well, I did know I first started paying homage. I did the painting here that's a portrait of, even though it's sideways. But, so I did that. And then I also made, you know, I just wanted to acknowledge I didn't want to wait until she had passed to make something that memorialized her so I said, well, I'm going to make it now. So I made like, a marble bust, but I didn't know how to carve marbles. So I just made a video with marbles in my mouth and just said, I want you to know how much I love you. You mean everything to me, with the marbles in my mouth. It's so hard to say. Sometimes you think it is hard to say, but it's not.

**[01:11:05.510] - Milton**

It's even harder to say with marbles in your mouth.

**[01:11:12.610] - Curtsy**

So just being silly. So I did that. And I also have I did some photography earlier, but I wasn't like a, you know, I didn't feel like I was living with a legend, my boyfriend. And that's what we called each other boyfriends. Later in life, it was a little bit partners. We like being that, even though we were old, we like being kind of cute and thought of as boyfriends. So yes. But she was the one that saw in me, oh, you're very visual. And it was funny. He said, Why don't you try art? And he just showed me some art books and tried painting. And that's how I began with that and then later went to school because during HIV experience, the AIDS experience, it was like, what am I going to do with my life, but he was always very encouraging. And it was sometime during school my mother sent me these, I guess she saved it from when I was a child, I think I was like eight or nine, and it was like, I want to be an artist or I'm going to be an artist. It was like drawings she'd saved, like, the drawings and the paintings you did as a child.

**[01:12:33.570] - Curtsy**

It's like, oh my gosh, I guess, well, I don't know if you believe in fate or

**[01:12:39.000] - Milton**

Of course, in many ways I do.

**[01:12:43.060] - Curtsy**

But if we find that encouragement that, that or that support or that, you know, someone saying, yeah, you're doing great, or, It's okay, it's good, fabulous! Go for it, work.

**[01:12:51.370] - Milton**

I never really had that kind of ... I had it, but I wasn't looking for it. And I found myself analyzing who was giving that to me. All that time when I felt that could have been that was time wasted, and I could have just really focused on, you know, the creative process and stuff like that. I was also dealing with coming out issues and HIV issues, like you said. That's the reason why I asked that question. Because most of the people that I was involved romantically never really saw this side of me, you know using my artwork as a catalyst and a platform of self expression and self identity and also kind of taking myself out of a world that seemed so bleak and destructive and that also was pointing towards a point of self destruction

**[01:13:50.400] - Curtsy**

It's part of the lifestyle, you can get caught up in that. You know you mentioned about coming out. I don't have a lot of coming out experience or in my self. I just got the hell out of the little town I was in, and I moved to the bigger town, and then I moved to the city, and then I moved to New York City. But I got caught up in you know you forget why you came or what you're doing here. And I got caught up in the lifestyle and doing things I shouldn't have been doing. And it was a police officer that was undercover and kind of scoping out where I was picking up. I just bumped into him sort of the way things work out. And instead of trying to fake my way through it, I just said to him, what's going on? And he very simply was like an old grandfatherly thing. He said so nicely to me, he said, "Why don't you just find something better to do with yourself?" I thought, Boy, it doesn't get simpler than that. If I don't get that, I'm really thick. And that didn't happen overnight because you have to go through it. But I said, yeah, right.

**[01:15:03.950] - Curtsy**

What did I come to New York for? And I was like, oh, to pursue the arts. And then it eventually ended up going that way. And then later I met Jack. That was before I met Jack. And then again, support on that level too. And a lot of it was tough love. Not a lot of it, but some of it was tough love. You know so.

**[01:15:24.950] - Milton**

I'm sure you can share a lot of stories between you and Jack, or Mother Sabrina that have, you know, impacted you to present yourself in different light to the rest of the world with your art and your sense of purpose in your life.

**[01:15:43.220] - Curtsy**

When I'm inspired and I meet someone like you, yes, but I have a memory like Swiss cheese. I forget, and sometimes I use that, you know, I try to forget. I rely on, you know the doctors because I'm like, I don't want that job. I want them to do that, they're on my team, so let them, because otherwise I start worrying too much, getting held back by...

**[01:16:07.110] - Milton**

I'm the opposite, I worry too much and I get a little anxious. And sometimes I find myself doing the extra work, like researching a medication before I pop it in my mouth, because I want to know what I'm putting into my body now as opposed to what you're telling me to put into my mouth and not recognizing the side effects until I'm suffering in my privacy of my home, you know? And I'm really learning to personalize a lot of those feelings of feeling like you know they don't see the you know, the dialysis nurses don't see me when I'm having moments like this and I'm feeling frustrated about the issue with the urology, but I'll deal with it. I'm going to deal with it. But they respect the fact that they acknowledge that I see that is an issue is a hindrance to my quality of life and that I'm going to do whatever it's necessary to find out what's the cause of it, what's the root of the issue and combat the issue. Address the issue somewhat aggressively with medication or with even a change of lifestyle. And I've recognized in my life that change is good and that change is inevitable.

**[01:17:23.990] - Milton**

Change is good and that ...

**[01:17:25.740] - Curtsy**

Throw on a new dress.

**[01:17:27.140] - Milton**

Throw on a new dress and find out what your color is.

**[01:17:30.480] - Curtsy**

I think it's important you know, you're the only person inside your head. You're the only person inside your body. It can be a learning thing or a listening thing to have the confidence to say, yes, I'm going to listen to my own body. You have external guides and supports, but you have to bring to the table Milton and Milton's the most important, biggest factor in there. It's gorgeous. It's beautiful.

**[01:18:01.770] - Milton**

And all those years in the past when I first got diagnosed, until now, it's been a lot of feeling like I'm being selfish to myself and not caring about what people, even the doctors, would say. Yes, I do care about what the doctors say. But the last time I was hospitalized was to remove this catheter that I have on me for the dialysis. And even though I got the other surgery for the fistibula in my arm, which is going to happen soon, so they can open the vein up and that kind of stuff. I'm currently receiving it through the catheter. And there was just moments that I felt like, you know, when the catheter wasn't working, you know I felt like Freddy Krueger was stabbing me in the heart and I saw excretions of blood spilling out. And I panicked because that's my blood coming out of that. And I just want to thank you because your inspiration of your story that you're telling me or whatever is also giving me an acknowledgment of the sacrifices you've done in the past that I appreciate as a newer generation member. And that's going to catapult me in helping a member of the newer generation ahead of me since salvaging ...

**[01:19:33.380] - Curtsy**

That is so kind and so generous but..

**[01:19:35.230] - Milton**

Not really.

**[01:19:37.190] - Curtsy**

I think I'm a little more mature than you. I'm older than you by age, but not by wisdom and experience. You've got miles on me for sure.

**[01:19:45.850] - Milton**

I also want to say thank you for, you know helping me realize that, you know I've known this all that time, but until I've met you and knowing that, you know Mother Sabrina was also an intricate part of drag culture in this city and in this lifestyle, that I refuse to .. you said it yourself, I don't choose to live in anybody's box. I live to create my own box, you know. And I rather stand out amongst the fuzzy pink box among all these other glittery boxes. And hearing the story makes me appreciate drag more and more. And like I've seen, I've learned to live my life as a gay male, as a chameleon, and experiment with all those little vast communities of dressing in leather, getting in drag, doing those things at least once in my

life so I can have an appreciation of that for past and present. Thank you for sharing that story with me, because I appreciate it even more. And RuPaul will know I've seen every episode since season one. I've learned through my gay mother how to walk in high heels, and I don't walk in it as much, but when Shabli Osiris Ninja, that's my name in drag, Shabli Osiris Ninja comes out.

**[01:21:15.110] - Curtsy**

Well, that's history and respect and style right there. But you know you're very kind to say thank you to me, but ...

**[01:21:27.600] - Milton**

It's coming from a place of humility and honesty and it's coming from a place that I appreciate all of the sacrifices that at the time, you didn't see that they were sacrifices, but as a Generation X member or something like that, I appreciate it and I value it. And the rest of the community may not be in agreement with me, but I stick to my own beat of my drum. And I still appreciate the art of drag for all its campiness in the spectrum of campiness and gorgeousness and pageantry and all of that. And it's hard work. It's really hard work. And I appreciate the work that all of you have done to make you look good and look better and feel better.

**[01:22:18.760] - Curtsy**

I have just grown and learned so much just this short time being with you and talking with you and listening to you and feeling you and I worship you.

**[01:22:30.590] - Milton**

No, I don't need to be worshipped because I worship a higher power that's stronger than me, that gets me through it. But you know...

**[01:22:40.890] - Curtsy**

I just want you to know that it's a two way street. It's a two way street.

**[01:22:45.750] - Milton**

I'm humble when I say that. That's why forgive my humility.

**[01:22:48.990] - Curtsy**

Well it's diva free zone, which I think is the most gorgeous space. I love that.

**[01:22:53.180] - Milton**

I like that. Diva free zone. I like that.

**[01:22:55.740] - Curtsy**

It's real.

**[01:22:57.190] - Milton**

Yeah. And it's coming from a place of genuine, genuine affection and admiration. I don't have to assimilate to be myself you know. I don't have to, why go against the grain when you ...

**[01:23:14.650] - Curtsy**

Oh, use all the colors in the book. Yes. Use all the colors in the world, in the rainbow.

**[01:23:21.170] - Milton**

And I want my life in my artwork. I want my artwork to reflect the colors, the diversity, the beauty and the majesty, the masculinity and femininity of any man, of any woman, of anything like that, and appreciate their value more than anything. If you notice in my artwork, there's always, like, origami doves that I put on the top. And with my spirituality that represents the Holy Spirit, which means that any person that I create a cartoon for as a client or whatever, whether they are aware of their spirituality or not, they're children of the Holy Spirit. Or they are endowed by ... They're endowed by the blessings that I believe, I choose to call my higher power Jesus Christ and you know to be around people like my strong-willed Latina women like my grandmother of 83, who took care of me when I had AIDS in a time where when I was with my ex partner secretly and, you know to come to her bedside after recovering from a stroke and her blessing my relationship before she died. That's huge for me.

**[01:24:37.530] - Curtsy**

Maybe that's where you get some of your fierceness from.

**[01:24:40.550] - Milton**

Yeah. And the women in my life are pretty strong in that sense of family. And you know later on, I'll get to call my mother, and my mother lives in Florida. My parents are retired, and they're still together after 50 years. So I draw my inspiration of monogamy from them and from long term relationships like yours with Flawless Sabrina and my cousin with his partner Miguel, who died of AIDS, and they were together for 38 years. I don't aspire to get to that point in my life, but it would be nice if that came along as a blessing in my life. But if it doesn't, I'm content with the path that I'm choosing for myself or the path that my higher entity is taking me through. And I'm content with self more than anything. And it's not coming from, like, oh, you're being so all about yourself and snotty. No, it's coming from a place of, like, I've learned to learn to love myself a little more and more and manifesting that in how I show my love and affection to others. And I'm starting to see people recognize that and appreciating those little things in me.

**[01:26:02.500] - Milton**

Because sometimes my artwork could even help some kid avert committing suicide. And when that happened, that was just mind blowing to have a friend of mine tell me that if I didn't read your post on Facebook this weekend, I had thoughts of committing suicide. And he's HIV positive and lives with his mother, who's ailing. And you know he gets in drag at times, too, and he doesn't have the outlet to really express himself as the person that he's under in drag, as a personality, in himself. So he'll look to me and read my post or look at my artwork and give him that inspirational drive to him to keep going on. And when there are moments like that, Curtis, that you impact a person like that you know some of my stuff is



kind of lackluster in comparison to moments like that when you're pleasantly surprised that that can make your day because you've actually helped somebody avoid committing suicide that day.

**[01:27:14.880] - Curtsy**

The universe answering you back you know. You put it out there, you're sharing it with others, and it's just the universe.

**[01:27:26.790] - Milton**

And more and more I'm coming out with my stuff about my drug abuse and stuff like that. Honestly, I'm attracting more of the raw, honest people in my life that are unapologetic, that want to share their life wholly with me, you know what I mean? And I couldn't be at a very happier state.

**[01:27:46.980] - Curtsy**

Lovely. And you know in Buddhism, they call it being centered, I think, if I have that right. But yeah, and grounded it's just, Honesty is the most powerful pipe.

**[01:27:59.070] - Milton**

And I don't look for it. You know, I try to impose that myself.

**[01:28:03.550] - Curtsy**

It's being it. That's the sense. You *are* it.

**[01:28:08.650] - Milton**

But if I'm little off one day or off another day, I don't punish myself for the choices that I've made, you know what I mean? That's really hard for me as a man of color living in this city in which I'm living in Chelsea, which everybody said, "you're a Chelsea snob, you're a Chelsea boy." No, I don't live by the standards you want me to live or want me to think that I should live like that. And to me, it's just an attitude, it's an address. That's all it is to me. And I'm not paying the market price like friends across the street that are paying market price, like 2000 a month for a little shabby window and things like that. But I'm grateful that I didn't abuse the system to get me to where I'm at. And I don't want to move out of there because I have the comforts that I have. I have my clinic two blocks away. I have the upcoming ...

**[01:29:09.060] - Curtsy**

It's your neighborhood. You deserve that.

**[01:29:12.350] - Milton**

These coming weeks in my birthday and stuff, I'm learning to each moment like that. I'm learning to own a little bit more of myself that was robbed from me so many years ago, sometimes without my own consent, and now I'm like, learning to reclaim it.

**[01:29:31.030] - Curtsy**

Yeah, own it. Stand your ground.

**[01:29:32.870] - Milton**

Reclaim my pride in making people happy with my colorful artwork, reclaim my pride in a sense of who I am as a latino gay man, and reclaiming my pride that I'm passing off the baton to somebody younger than me that may not be latino. That's okay. But I'm passing the baton of those tools and the techniques and the necessities that they need to survive you know for years to come. And I'm very grateful that I have met you as a platform, that I appreciate the past, and I can draw inspiration and drive from that from your life with Flawless Sabrina in the past so that way, I can become a better me now and the other people in my life for my future benefit from that. So there's like a...

**[01:30:24.550] - Curtsy**

I don't know how you could be better. You're like ...

**[01:30:28.730] - Milton**

Oh, there are moments that I cut myself too much slack, and there's moments that I don't deem myself worthy or you know worthy of it. But sometimes I need people in my life to remind me of how, you know, valuable and fabulous you are and love yourself. Yeah.

**[01:30:48.000] - Curtsy**

Yeah, and love yourself.

**[01:30:50.800] - Constantine**

Y'all are angels and icons, both.

**[01:30:55.630] - Curtsy**

Good pair. Thank you to Constantine and Kaz. Thank you. I was like, I don't know what is he doing?

**[01:31:06.610] - Milton**

Thank you.

**[01:31:07.000] - Curtsy**

All right love.

**[01:31:09.000] - Milton**

Thank you.