

# The art of being queer

Gallery owner Reggie Petry makes queer art exhibit a dream come true

BY MARC ACITO

Just about everyone involved seems to agree that Pride Northwest's first Queer Art and Culture Exhibition, to be held June 17 and 18 at Portland's Gov. Tom McCall Waterfront Park, is a great idea.

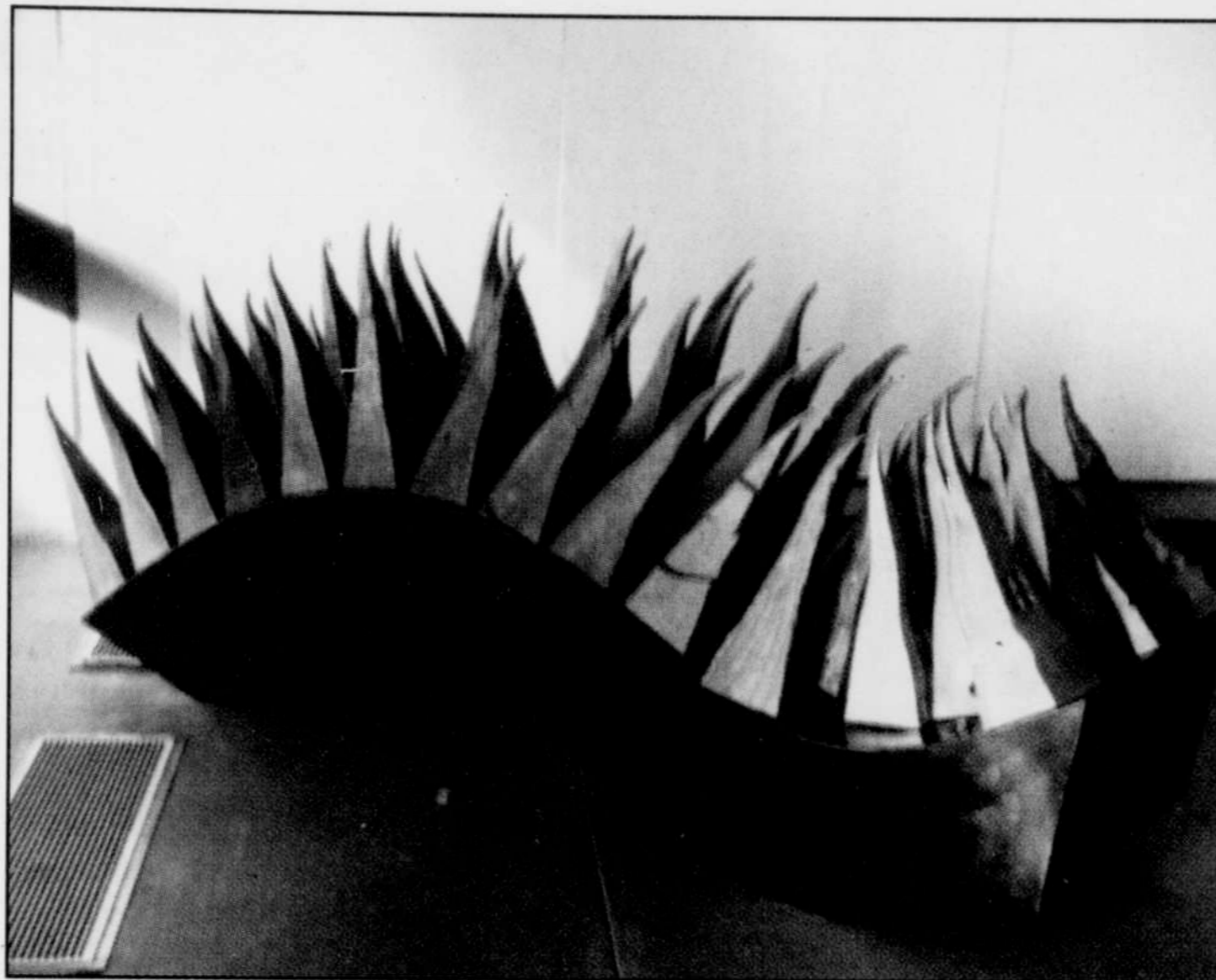
That consensus doesn't mean, however, that everyone can agree on what makes art queer in the first place. But if anyone is up to the daunting task of ensuring that the breadth of the sexual minorities community is represented, it is the show's coordinator, gallery owner and art dealer Reggie Petry.

"Culture doesn't mean just one thing," says Petry. And he should know; he was born in Germany to a German-French mother and an African American-Cuban-Cherokee father.

"When I fill out forms," he says, "I just check 'other.'"

The 43-year-old one-man melting pot is also the openly gay single father of three children, ages 15, 23 and 25, and will add grandfather to his list of identities when his 23-year-old daughter gives birth this summer. It's easy to understand why Petry can't help but have a multicultural view of society, queer or otherwise.

Petry makes it very clear that queer culture doesn't mean just sex: "If all the images in the show were highly sexualized," he says, "it conveys the message that we're not a culture, but only a behavior, and this show is an expression that there is a queer culture."



*Epistemological Interrupt* by Tad Williams

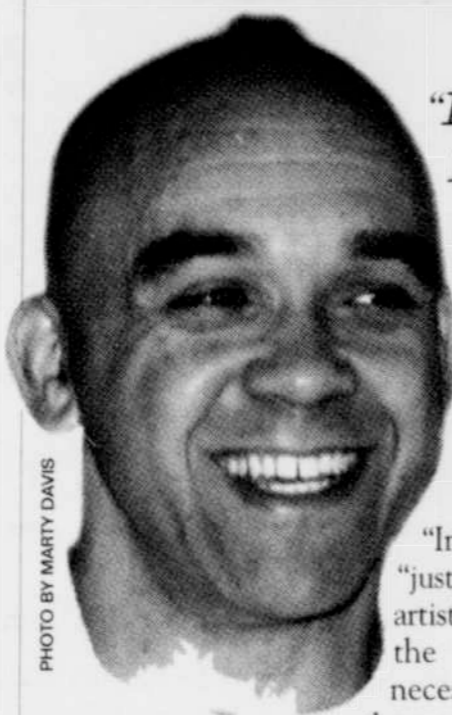


PHOTO BY MARY DAVIS

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—Reggie Petry

"In fact," he adds, "just because queer artists are producing the work doesn't necessarily mean the work in this show will be entirely queer in content." Petry and Pride Northwest officials hope that the open show, representing more than 25 local artists, will create a forum for spectators to ponder and discuss the elusive meanings of queer culture and art. The event takes on an

added significance when one considers that some of the artists have not publicly come out as queer before.

Petry has long explored the issues of minority cultures as owner of Our Dream, a gallery dedicated to African American artists, located on Alberta Street in Northeast Portland. His decision to focus on African American artists has garnered him criticism as well as praise.

"People ask me, 'How would you feel if there were a gallery only dedicated to white artists?'" he says. "But when you have a segment of the population that you feel has been underrepresented, that's what you do. I don't think white artists have been underrepresented."

Applying the same reasoning to the notion of queer art, one might argue that, from da Vinci on, the gay male artist has achieved his share of recognition. However, the totality of a gay male artist's experience, including his sexual identity, has only been openly expressed quite recently. The controversy surrounding the explicitly homoerotic work of Robert Mapplethorpe and Tim Miller, and the virtual invisibility of lesbian, bisexual and trans artists, suggests there is quite definitely a need for the sexual minorities community to stand behind its artists.

Petry hopes his experience coordinating the show will enable him to represent more queer artists in the future, particularly now that he has opened

Matrix Gallery, a contemporary fine art gallery also on Northeast Alberta Street. His two galleries are nestled between the lesbian-owned Chez What restaurant and the gay-owned Onda Gallery.

As the vice president of the Alberta Street Business Association, Petry urges the queer community—both artists and patrons—to visit the area and make themselves known. He points out that there are at least 10 queer-owned businesses in the neighborhood.

"It's easy to know when someone Asian or black comes in," he says, "but if someone is willing to identify themselves, I'd love to know who the queer people visiting are."

We'll make it easy—just tell him *Just Out* sent you.

■ Look for the QUEER ART AND CULTURE EXHIBITION at the Portland pride festival June 17 and 18 at Gov. Tom McCall Waterfront Park south of the Burnside Bridge. The festival opens at noon Saturday and 9 a.m. Sunday.

*Pecan & Almond Seaform Set w/Oxblood Lip Wraps* by Dale Chihuly



PHOTO BY TERESA RISHEL

Local jazz legend Tom Grant will perform with his band, and after the auction DJ Mr. Mu Mu will "throw down the funky groove," promises Jose Ayala, special events coordinator for CAP.

Patrons who pony up \$75 each will be treated to a reception starting at 5:30 p.m. to meet participating artists. General admission tickets are \$35 for the main event, which takes place from 7 to 11 p.m. at 1245 N.W. Johnson St. in Portland.

A number of corporate sponsors ensure that 100 percent of the money raised goes directly to CAP.

Enormous work goes into putting on an event of this scale, and kudos go out to Tracy Savage, the committee chairwoman, and her squadron of helpers. For more information or tickets, call (503) 223-5907.

■ Reported by ORIANA GREEN

## You bidder believe it



*Same Ride, Different Car* by Melinda Thorsnes

Art lovers have another great opportunity this month to appreciate and acquire works of art. On June 24, Cascade AIDS Project holds its 10th annual art auction at the Pacific Northwest College of Art. The event will feature more than 150 works of art, with both live and silent bidding.

This year's auction promises to be the biggest in the astounding history of the event, which has raised more than \$450,000 in support of CAP. Procurement chairwoman Shari Critchley has collected fine art from a wide array of noted Northwest artists, including phenomenal glass artist Dale Chihuly, and the acclaimed painters Gregory Grenon, Mary Josephson, Lucinda Parker, Rene Rickabaugh and Melinda Thorsnes.