





# RAIN Agency Awards

*by Miranda Lewis (she/they), DSHS*

The RAIN Agency Awards were created in 2016 by Governor Inslee through Directive 16-11. Think of them as the Oscars, but for state agencies that are committed to creating a safe, diverse, and inclusive workplace for current and future LGBTQ+ employees.

We were excited to recognize the following winners of the RAIN Agency Awards:

- Employment Security Department
- WA State Parks and Recreation Commission
- Office of the Corrections Ombuds



These awards aren't just pretty trophies; they're a big deal. They recognize state agencies (or specific programs within agencies) that are going the extra mile to make their workplaces welcoming for LGBTQ+ folks. By shining a spotlight on these efforts, the awards not only celebrate the hard work of these trailblazers but also set a stellar example for other organizations to follow. It's like a nudge to everyone else to up their inclusivity game.

Agencies don't get these awards just because someone felt like it. They earn them through nominations from state employees and a rigorous scoring criteria crafted by the RAIN Advisory Committee and dedicated BRG members. The selection process considers policies, trainings, HR support, and how well the agency has fostered an inclusive environment. And remember, the award highlights the agency's efforts, not perfection. There's always room to grow!

The RAIN Agency Awards are all about celebrating the people who are making Washington State an LGBTQ+ friendly place to work. It's a shoutout to their hard work and a nudge to keep pushing for even more inclusivity.

This year's awards ceremony featured some incredible guest speakers. Nikki Brueggeman (she/her) spoke on "What Oral Histories Reveal About Queer Spokane," sharing fascinating insights into local queer history. Erica Kay-Webster (she/her) shared broader queer history, about her experience of the Stonewall Riots, providing valuable context and stories that highlight the LGBTQIA+ journey. Keep reading to learn about Erica's incredible journey.



RAIN Agency Awards Speaker

## Erica K. Webster

We're introducing Erica Webster, a retired interior designer who has dedicated her life to fellowship. She's been recognized for her tireless efforts in serving here and abroad. Her contribution is so vast this is only a slice of that because I want to give her more time to talk. But, in 2013, she was the international media spokesperson for the LGBTQ+ Compassion Games. And her role took her to many places including Louisville, Kentucky where she created flags for the holy Dali Lama, she became a signer for compassion in 2013, and is preparing for a global tour, the release of her autobiography, *In Search of a More Perfect Love*.

As a survivor of Stonewall and executive committee member of the Veteran's Association, Erica has been a vocal advocate for social justice and human rights. As the Founder and governor of a Most Perfect Love Foundation, a Washington non-profit, Erica has led the efforts to support marginalized communities including the 2SLGBTQ+ population, despite being in her mid-70s but not looking a day over 30, she remains actively engaged in overseeing the foundation work to this day.

Erica's leadership and dedication have made a significant impact on the lives of countless individuals, and her unwavering commitment to creating a more just and compassionate world is an inspiration. I am so honored to warmly welcome, Erica K Webster.

*Note: This speech has been edited to cut audience interjections and for clarity.*





You know I'm getting closer to eighty. As I get closer to eighty, I realize so much. How fortunate we are today. I wrote a speech, I'm not going to use it because I will speak from my heart, it's done me well with the United Nations and President Obama, and all the great politicians that we had from the Stonewall on. What I realized more about the result of what happened that night, it is the night we found our voices. And the night we found our power. And the night that the birth of the LGBTQ+ modern day movement, to use that power, with our votes, with our voices, and standing in unity one with each other. That's why I am so honored and humbled to be here tonight because I'm looking at a room, I call my heroes. Who are keeping it alive, taking care of our future generation with your contributions that you make. I'm so deeply grateful. Aylis, thank you for that compliment, "I don't look a day over 30". When I met your beloved governor, and I introduced myself to him, he said "Erica, you don't look old enough to be at Stonewall," and I almost kissed him.

I'm serious, I almost did! I had it pull myself back, not a good idea. I didn't want security popping out. Throwing me in another paddy wagon. I'm sure there are going to be a lot of questions, and we're going to hang out and socialize with you afterwards. I will be happy to answer any individual question. But I am a transgender woman, who started out homeless at 15. I know what it's like to experience rejection. I know what it feels like to be homeless. I know what it feels like to be scared sh!#less. I know what it's feels like to go hungry. And no matter what experience I go through in life, I would not let my heart become so hard, that I would turn away from what was put in my heart, I was born with compassion. With the desire to remember the words, "Become the change you wish to see in the world." Much of our work today, I would like to see if my beloved my best friend, who is-- if he shows up, he is a published author. A screenwriter. And book editor, he's my grammar police. I need a tissue.

When I was preparing for this, -- I never wear makeup. But today I did. I can just imagine. I began to research and go back through our history from the founding of the United States and before that. My husband is from Massachusetts. With the Puritans actual from cape, the Puritans arrived on Cape Cod before they went to Plymouth, and I'm in minister attire.

Which tells you I believe in God. But I don't believe in the God that creates separation and division. Or the God that wants to increase hate. I believe in a divine source creator, who loves all creation equally. And to my dying breath I will honor those beliefs by continuing to support equality for all humanity regardless of the color of our skin, our gender our gender identity, our nationality where we are from it's a great honor to be working right now with an incredible couple in Pakistan, we just experienced tremendous war. That opened the peace cafe that reached out to me, to know that I am trans, LGBTQ+, and they wanted me to know the peace cafe is open. That blows your mind we get to work in countries all over the world today, with some remarkable people who are standing with us. Wanting the same things that we want. John F Kennedy's inaugural, at the end of the speech, asked not "What your country can do for you, what can I do for my country?" John F Kennedy.

I received many honors in my lifetime. I was shocked when I got a call from Los Angeles from John Bozwell who represented Compassion Games International to ask me to take on the role of the international media folks had. I was shocked. Why me? It was for a project that they were doing. Okay.

I don't worry about the little things. In fact, I don't worry about anything anymore. I just get up and do some more. I honor you guys. That's really why I showed up today. Because it takes the work of the many and you're using your voices and you're free to be your authentic selves. And sometimes that's pretty scary. I will tell you the truth about what I did- from Stonewall for quite a number of years. Something I'm not proud of. But it was a very different time back then. We had been so abused that we hid in the shadows, we would not dare be meeting like today or marching in parades or even speaking out. Because of police brutality was so severe, it was illegal. We were breaking the laws every time we showed up at Stonewall. Or showed up at a drag pageant because did you know that when Stonewall happened in 1969 the word transgender was not even used. It was in an obscure medical dictionary somewhere.

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Photo: liliyabatyrova / Adobe

I don't know if any of you here know who Dr. Harry Benjamin was, who created the standard of care for the Transgender community. He was my psychiatrist and my physician. Who made it possible for me to do I transition. And I transitioned exactly one year to the day of Stonewall. I was a kid, I was 17. And yeah, I lied about my age. I knew who I was from the moment I was born. And I knew where I belonged. And I made that choice. And I went to Stonewall that night to meet a group of friends to celebrate my first birthday as Erica. One year. It was also the day that Judy Garland had been buried. Her funeral was in New York. Many of us were there. We were grieving losing a great ally. That's why we showed up at Stonewall that night. Me and for my birthday party, but at the same time grieving for the loss of Judy Garland who had a very troubled life. When the police came -- we actually showed up in the evening of the 27th -- the raid happened very early in the Morning of the 28th. I was inside the bar. I remember we just when the lights came on, we heard, raid. Not again. Because this had been a pattern. What would happen to you then is, the next morning, your photograph, your name, was in the New York Times and the New York Daily News. Or in both. Publicly outing you as being Homosexual Trans, Lesbian. We all knew that our lives were about to be destroyed. We looked at each other, and said, "No. Enough of this, enough."

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I'm going to read something to you at this moment and then I'm gonna go back to it.

*“For immediate release, June 24th, 2016. PFLAG National Statement on Stonewall National Monument. To recognize passionate heroes who fought on the front lines is to recognize how far we have come and how far we still need to go as a country to ensure safety and equality for all Americans. PFLAG would like to thank President Obama for ensuring the recognition by our government of the history of the LBGTQ+ movement, as part of the history of America.”*

## **We didn't even expect to make any changes. We were just tired.**

“His designation of the Stonewall Inn and the surrounding area as the first national monument commemorating this movement honors hallowed ground, where brave activists like Morty Manford--” Anyone here familiar with that last name, Manford? Morty’s mother, Jeanne Manford, and his father – by the way, Morty was a dear friend -- had been violently beaten so bad by police for passing out invitations to show up for a rally that he almost died. This beloved mother Jeanne Manford, had me in her home, when I was homeless and hungry. They fed me, they clothed me, they housed me. The Manford's went on to be the founders of PFLAG – Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. I served on many boards for PFLAG throughout my life. Because I know what it's like. I remember. I did not want our youth and our children to suffer as we had suffered. So, we began to work together with families, that was one of the best jobs I ever had in my life, believe me I did not get paid it -- was all volunteer. Jody Huckaby -- this is his statement -- -who was the President of PFLAG in 2016.

“Like Morty Manford, PFLAG leader and trans activist Erica Kay-Webster, Marsha P. Johnson,” -- another dear friend -- “Sylvia Rivera” -- another dear friend, because we were all homeless together at the same time. Many nights we rode the bus. Because we could scrape together the change to get on the bus. And we just partied into the morning on the bus. I remember them well. The only thing I chose not to do was to get stuck in the drug world. Because I saw the damages it was doing to my friends and I found a friend dead in a hotel room from an overdose -- “and hundreds more said enough is enough, and stood up against violence and bias toward the LGBTQ community. In the shadow of Orlando,” -- we brought up Orlando because that just happened -- “the 49 LGBTQ and ally LatinX lives taken, the many injured, and the families and friends impacted, to recognize these passionate heroes who fought on the front lines is to recognize how far we have come—and how far we still need to go as a country to ensure safety and equality for all Americans.”

Not long about before this article came out, in the United States Supreme Court, we won marriage equality. It was ensconced into law. I remember celebrating, when I was called by the Rainbow Times to give an interview, I couldn't stop crying. It took me two hours to call them back before I could even speak. Because I was imprisoned in the State of Georgia, for four years, because I dared to get married and list my gender as female on the marriage application. And I was outed and they found out I was trans. My marriage was invalidated as a same-sex marriage. Do you know what I did during those four years? I went to the Law Library everyday and studied constitutional law. And since then, I worked with Harvard University, to establish safe shelters and space are for our homeless youth. And founding Promise Place School for unaccompanied homeless youth, where it's a living and learning environment. We're working on opening one here in the State of Washington.

Because I learned -- I dropped out of school in the tenth grade, and b-y the time I was in my 40's I was earning a quarter of a million dollars a year, with a tenth-grade education and hiring college graduates. I felt incomplete, so I resigned and went back to- school and got my GED, and went on to the American College for Applied Arts to study Architectural Interior Design, received a scholarship went on to Georgia Tech to become an architect. I've had a very privileged life because of this statement right here. And- I know it.



Photo: Nakarin / Adobe

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*Yeah, my life started out difficult and challenging. But I will never forget Stonewall. Because we were every color, every gender, from every country. We all had one thing in common, we were all part of the LBGQTQ+ community, we were a family. We looked out for each other. There was no discrimination inside the Stonewall. It was only outside.*

I got on a plane, from Georgia, and flew to New York City. I had already been homeless for two years. I had \$75 when I got to New York. I spent my first night in a hotel across from La Guardia Airport. Next morning I took a cab into the city, got out of the taxi and began to walk and explore. Part of me was scared to death and the other part of me felt freedom. I could breathe. For some reason I knew I was going to be safe, I was going to be okay.

On that night of Stonewall, do you think for one moment I was going to volunteer to give up the life that I worked so hard to build? Because the year before I was ice skating in Rockefeller Center with my dear friend Josie, who was my roommate, when a photographer came up to me as we were leaving the skating rink, and handed me a business card he said “Did you ever consider modeling?” Oh, my God. I'm transgender, how am I going to do this? Josie talked me into it, just call him.



Well, it turned out he was the husband of Wilhelmina, one of the most famous modeling agencies in the world. In a very short period of time, I went for a photo shoot he said, "Erica, my camera loves you." Of course I was very young. But I ended up with a contract, where I was making incredible money as a model. And became spokesperson for Cashmere Bouquet Bubble Bath and talcum. I modeled for five years, but I never said a word about being trans. I took the opportunity, and I said, if they find out, they are going to fire me. But I had been homeless and hungry, and I was tired. I couldn't believe that opportunity had fallen into my lap. No cops, you are not taking it. Something inside of me welled up. It did with all of us that were there.

Wilson Henderson and Andrei Dupri are the Founders of the Stonewall Rebellion Veteran's Association to which I am still a member to this day. New York City was a hot bed in the sixties. Greenwich Village the place to be. Women's rights movement. Bonfires burning the bras. The peace movement, anti-Vietnam. For peace. Civil rights movement. I was born and raised 'til I was 14, in the State of California. It was integrated. I couldn't conceive in my mind what the discrimination really looked like. But when I was 14, my family moved to Georgia. We traveled cross country by automobile. When we hit the southern states, I refused to eat in restaurants because of the signs that said whites only. I would not, and my grandfather who was driving us cross country, bought a loaf of bread and bologna and that's what I ate for the rest of the journey. Then we arrived in Georgia, what a culture shock for me. Still knew nothing about gay, lesbian, trans, because it was not topics that were ever discussed about. So, how am I doing on time? I feel like I have been up here for a long time.

I love you guys. Thank you for having an interpreter, two people here tonight. - I love that. Equality for all. Inside Stonewall that night was not a riot, I want to set the record straight on that. It was a rebellion. We just refused to cooperate. I laid down on the floor, and they weren't very nice about it. Finally, they got us under control. It got wild and crazy after we were carted off to jail. We were booked into jail. - I had to do a strip search. And they went, "Oh, my God. You are not a drag queen, you're female. So, I got segregated and got separated from the rest of the gang. The next morning we were appearing in court, and as we were waiting for court to start, bursting through the door of the courtroom, swinging doors, there was this woman, about yea tall, in pumps, gloves, business suit and hat. All in [unintelligible], like everything had been made together at the same time. Everything. And I heard, I don't remember who it was, that said it, but from Stonewall, "Oh, my God, that's Bella Abzug," in case you don't know who this woman is, she was the civil rights lawyer for the Women's Rights Movement [unintelligible]. Okay. She goes marching straight in front of the judge. I'm sitting with Josie because Josie was also arrested that night. Facing the judge this way and all the other participants from Stonewall were facing the judge from this direction. So we could talk to each other, we could hear each other. Then I was called to the bench, standing in the front judge, charged with civil disobedience, resisting arrest. Those kinds of charges. Standing next to me was Bella Abzug. We stepped forward and spoke very quietly to the judge. He asked me, how do you plead? She looked at me and said not guilty, that's what I said to the judge. It was over with that quick. She was there to represent me -- to this day I don't know how, why, in the world she got there, who told her about me.

But I had been active with the Women's Rights Movement as well. I attended every rally that was going on in Greenwich Village. I learned to use my voice very early on. I'm no great hero from Stonewall that night, I'm one of those that were there. I'm proud of all Stonewall Veterans -- those who were inside and outside. I am so grateful for all of those straight people that showed up to those riots as well -- the Black Panthers, women from the women's rights movement, in defense because everyone said enough is enough. I can't attest to anything that happened after the paddy wagon pulled away, but there is an artist that did a lot of work, about Stonewall and that night. Joe Quigley is his name. Cartoonish, but a wonderful friend. Has me on the top of that wagon. Because I fought awfully hard to not go in that paddy wagon. I resisted arrest, but I sure wasn't going to plead guilty to it.

With that, I have so many wonderful and great people that I have known in my life. That I have real heroes that inspire me every day to continue to work and one of the those is Martin Luther King Jr's speech, I have a dream speech. How many of you know who Dale Ruskin {Bayard Rustin} was? He was a gay black man, who helped Martin Luther King Jr held together the million-man march from Washington, where he gave, I have a dream speech, I think not only he had a dream, but I'm looking around this room, beautiful smiles and the faces. I think we all still have a dream. And I believe as long as we hold on to that dream and we keep showing up, using our voices, our talents, our gifts, that dream is becoming a reality. I could've, I mean, this is really thick. So, I certainly wouldn't have ever had time to go through all that.



But even California, woman dressed in men's clothes became very well-known, stagecoach driver, lived as a man. Presented as a man. I can go through history all the way back. But I'm gonna go back to World War II, and I am going to close with that. Many of you are not old enough but you know the history of what happened. In Germany. With the Nazis. I've got to pull this quote up. Compton, anybody remember Compton? Heard of it?- That was a real riot. And that happened before Stonewall did. So I don't know why it wasn't until 1969 because that was in '66. A Lutheran minister wrote this.

*“They first came for the socialist. And I was not a socialist. And I didn't speak out. Then they came for another group. I was not that either. So I did not speak out. Finally, they came for the Jews. And I wasn't Jewish. So, I didn't speak out. And then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak for me.”*

A lot of wisdom in those words. Remember how powerful your voice is and how powerful your actions are, by becoming the change you wish to see in the world you are actually changing the energy of how many things happen and come into being. So, I honor you and I say thank you for being here now. I believe we make [unintelligible]. And in that combat, it's predestined. So, we always always always always need to remember how powerful we really are with every word, every action, and every deed. And using that for the highest good and causes and concerns, and certainly not being held in bondage, would be in the highest good of anyone. So, continue to use your voices. And thank you and I give you my love. I want to hug every one of you before you leave here tonight.

# Art as Remembrance and Resistance

by Nicoli Dominn (they/them), DSHS

Trans Day of Remembrance has been observed every November 20th since [Gwendolyn Ann Smith founded it in 1999](#). It is a day to mourn and spread awareness of the deaths of murdered transgender people while remembering those people the way they lived, by their chosen names, true genders, and correct pronouns. While awareness of disproportionately high levels of violence against the trans community ([particularly trans-femmes who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color \(BIPOC\)](#)) increases with the amount of media coverage and public TDOR events, we cannot end at awareness. The fight for gender equity is far from over and continues with education, advocacy, and action.

Art is a powerful form of education and advocacy. Art can provide aesthetic pleasure and inspiration. It can communicate emotions, thoughts, stories, and concepts while uplifting or challenging audiences. This fall, as we acknowledge Transgender Day of Remembrance (TDOR), we are sharing artistic works by and for the transgender community that spread messages of radical self-love, show grief for the lost lives of transgender people, depict the beauty of gender diversity, and demand gender justice.

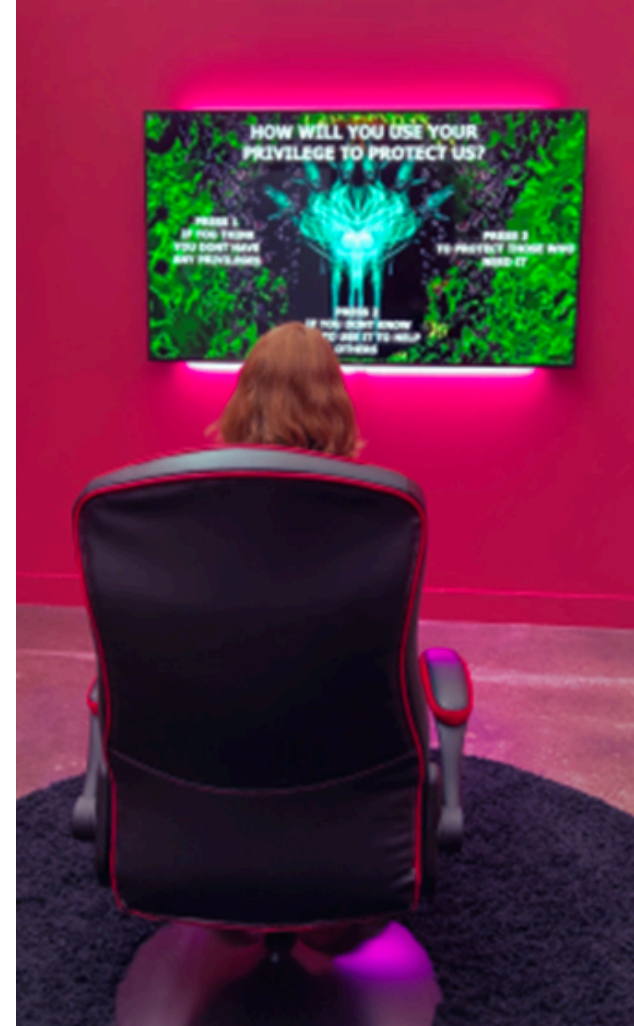


Photo: Tina Rivers Ryan for Albright-Knox Art Gallery

One of the screens from an interactive video art installation by Black transgender artist Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley ("[Difference Machines: Technology and Identity in Contemporary Art](#)") asks viewers a challenging question: "How will you use your privilege to protect us?" The viewer uses a controller to navigate the installation by choosing from the multiple answers to the question. On this screen, the choices are, "Press 1 if you think you don't have any privilege," "Press 2 if you don't know how to use it to help others," and "Press 3 to protect those who need it."

A [mural by Black trans artist Uman](#), painted in 2019 in honor of 23 Black trans people killed in 2019, consists of 24 panels that each show a silhouette of an abstraction of a body or body part transmuting into an organic form that lives on after death. One can interpret the images to mean that remembering those who have died and fighting for justice keeps their memories alive.



Photo: callen-lorde.org/mural

Transgender artist [Micah Bazant](#)'s mixed media image, created on Transgender Day of Remembrance in 2013 in honor of Black trans activist CeCe McDonald, reminds viewers that Transgender Day of Remembrance is also a day of resistance. The poster shows CeCe McDonald holding her left hand up, palm outward. The text reads, "Honor our dead & fight like hell for the living. In June 2011, CeCe McDonald fought off a racist, transphobic attack. She was sentenced to 41 months in a men's prison for 2nd-degree manslaughter, despite clear evidence of self-defense. Free CeCe: support trans women of color."

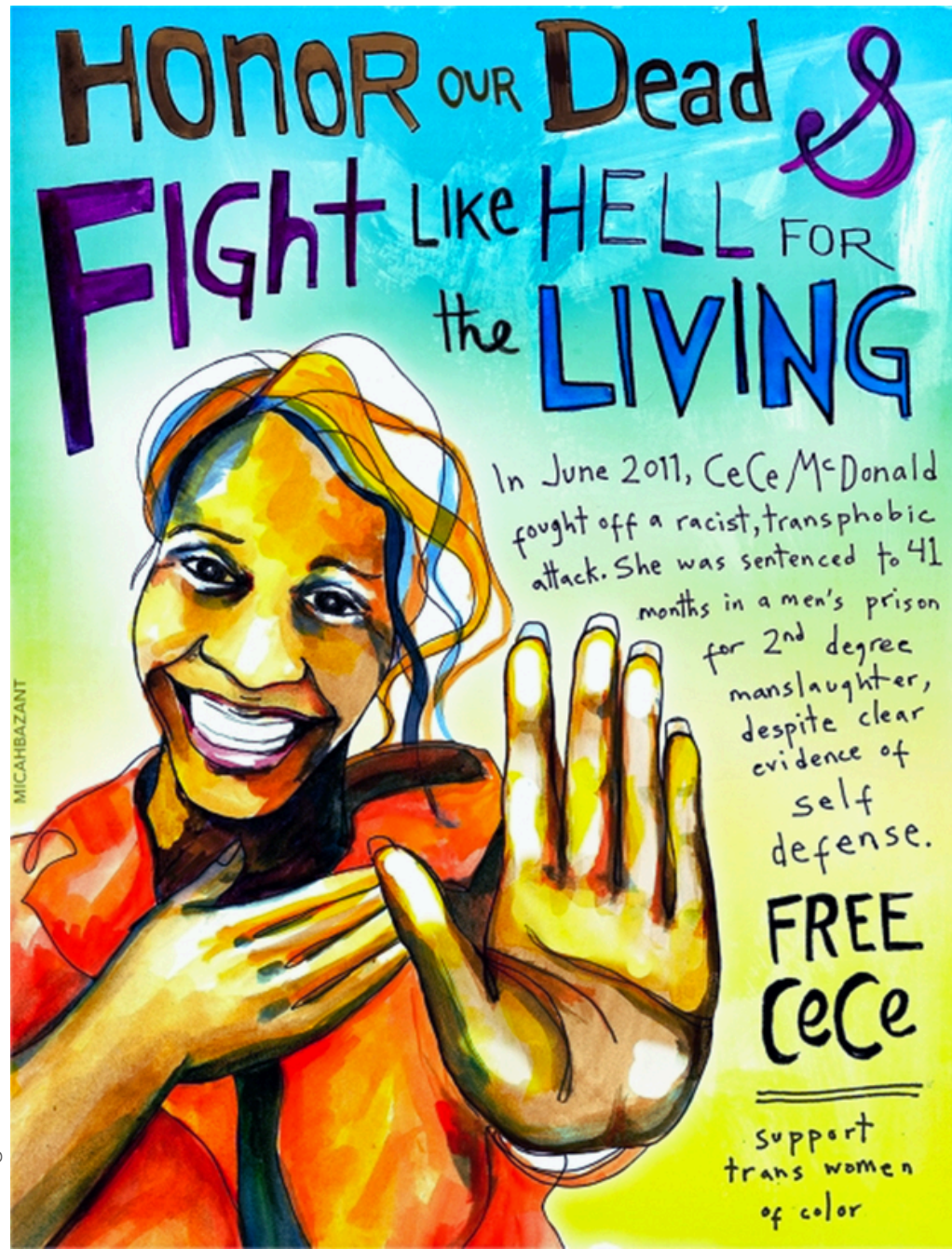


Image: micahbazant.com

In 2015, Black trans artist [Ethan X Parker](#) (previously known as B. Parker) also [partnered with Trans Day of Resilience](#) to create this poster. At the top, two people with medium and dark brown skin face each other. The figure on the right has long, curling black hair that spreads out behind and below them, fading into a dusky sunset skyline over black building silhouettes on a bed of red-orange roses, under which reads "#Black Trans Lives Matter." Underneath, a crowd of protestors is superimposed over the silhouette of a gate against a blue sky and a scatter of butterflies. The foremost figure in the crowd has medium brown skin and shouts into a megaphone, while the crowd behind them carries a banner reading "Give us our roses while we're still here." Similar to Bazant's poster, Parker's work urges viewers to show their support for the living and prevent further violence against the Black transgender community.



Image: tdoor.co

In 2020, the [National Minority Aids Council sponsored a music video, "But...I Survived"](#), featuring BIPOC transgender performers Peppermint, Mila Jam, and Deja "The Lady Deja Davenport" Smith. The video is set to a song by Sia and Yung Beef ("Alive"). Sia's strong and soaring vocals tell a story about the struggle of finding oneself and surviving hardship. The three performers begin the video in their respective rooms alone, and the video follows each of them as they dress to go outside, walking to meet in a grassy field, surrounded by dancers. There are stills interspersed throughout the video of a news segment covering the murder of a transgender woman and the three performers holding up signs that read "Resist." Using videography, dance, and visual images, the music video imbues Sia and Yung Beef's song with deeper meaning, alluding to how the transgender community defies violence and oppression by refusing to disappear and persisting in their fight for justice.

Transgender artist Remi Fatamorgana created this painting titled "Loved by the Divine" in 2022 to commemorate Transgender Day of Remembrance. [In Fatamorgana's words](#), "Pictured is Ardhanarishvara, a Hindu deity who symbolizes masculine-feminine unity, standing beside a trans person. I want us to remember that transgender and gender-nonconforming people and heritage have always been here, and we are all divine and loved (by the divine)."



Courtesy photo via pridesource.com



Image: newmaratit.com

[Trans Day of Resilience's 2020 zine, "Trans People Exist in the Future,"](#) features creative work by and for the transgender community. The zine begins with a poem by Benji Hart, ["Layleen's Bill."](#) "Layleen's Bill" takes phrases from news articles about legislation focused on the transgender population, striking out the formal and clinical wording and replacing it with strong imagery that is simultaneously empowering, hopeful, and flippant.

[Trans poet Joshua Jennifer Espinoza shared their poem, "Pardon My Gender," on 11/19/2017.](#) Laden with eloquent sarcasm, the poem is a monologue by a transgender person to a cisgender audience that challenges their rigid notions of gender and gender roles: "[...]and I certainly don't want you to be forced to think about what it means to name a body and mark its flesh with its future before it has had the chance to know and love itself[...]"

These images, songs, and poems are a small fraction of the wealth of artistic works by, for, and about 2SLGBTQIA+ community members. To explore and learn about more work by and for 2SLGBTQIA+ people, visit the links below.

- [ACLU Maryland: "In Harmony: Our Soundtrack of Queer Resistance"](#)
- [Artsper.com: "Transgender Artists Taking The Art World By Storm"](#)
- [Billboard Magazine: "15 Transgender & Non-Binary Artists You Should Know"](#)
- [Brooklyn Arts Council: "Six Queer and Trans Artists We Love"](#)
- [Burnett Foundation Aotearoa: "Trans Artists You Need to Follow!"](#)
- [Columbus Museum: "Art After Stonewall, 1969-1989"](#)
- [Country Queer: "Trans Country Artists You Need to Know"](#)
- [DailyArt Magazine: "Modern Transgender Art"](#)
- [DRAVVT: "10 Contemporary trans artists making waves in the art world"](#)
- [Essence: "10 Nonbinary / Gender NonConforming Entertainers"](#)
- [Five Oaks Museum: "Gender Euphoria: Contemporary Art Beyond the Binary"](#)
- [The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center, New York: Online Gallery at Google Arts & Culture](#)



Photo: Sabrina / Adobe

# Holiday Harmonic Convergences 2024

(and a little bit of 2025)

by Marianne K. Ozmun-Wells (she/they), DOL

This year, folks here in the USA have some interesting Autumn and Winter holiday convergences that rarely happen.

Although Halloween and Los Dias de Los Muertos, (sometimes people celebrate it for more than one day), typically overlap, it is rare for Diwali to land at the same intersection.

Halloween, or All Hallows Eve, lands on October 31 each year of the Gregorian calendar (the one most folks in the US use). The origins of Halloween go back more than 2,000 years to the Celtic festival of Samhain. It was one of the many Celtic celebrations of cycles. Samhain marks the end of summer and harvest and the beginning of colder, darker, more dormant months.

As with many ancient Celtic observances, the Catholic Church was skilled at merging them with Christian holidays, making the adjustment from Pagan to Christian festivals a tad easier.

Samhain was replaced by All Hallows Eve which is the night before All Saint's Day. November 1st is All Saint's Day, a Christian feast day most recognized in Catholicism and some other orthodox faiths. It is a day to honor the saints and their attributions.

Los Dias de los Muertos, or the Days of the Dead, are traditionally celebrated on November 1 and 2 in Mexico, some Central and South American countries and parts of the USA with large Latino/a/x communities. (Depending on the country, some observances begin around October 27, the day to celebrate pets who have died, and some go until November 6). They are days in which many folks of Latin American heritage and/or culture, celebrate death as a part of life and remember loved ones they have lost.

These days sometimes commence at Midnight on October 31 and often feature skulls, skeletons, and festive foods, which is why folks tend to confuse Halloween and Days of the Dead. November 1 is traditionally, Dia de los Angelitos (Day of the Little Angels) and is for families to remember and honor children who have died. November 2, Dia de los Muertos is to commemorate adults who have died.



Photo: gn8 / Adobe

The holiday that less frequently synchronizes with the end of October, beginning of November is Diwali. Although the aforementioned holidays fall on October 31, November 1-2, respectively, Diwali shifts based on the Hindu Lunar calendar. Diwali is the most widely celebrated festival among Hindus, and some people of Sikh and Jain faiths also celebrate these festivals of light in India and throughout the world. The faiths have different reasons for the celebration, honoring different gods or holy people, the triumph of good over evil, or freedom from oppression, but light by way of lamps, candles, and lanterns feature prominently among them all. In 2024, Diwali celebrations begin October 29 and continue until November 3.

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Photo: phive2015 / Adobe



Photo: Ryzhkov / Adobe



Photo: photovs / Getty Images



Photo: Nadia / Adobe

Although Christmas is traditionally celebrated on December 25 and Kwanzaa begins on December 26, this year will see another rarely observed overlap. This year, the first day of Hanukkah, and Christmas both occur on December 25. This exact convergence has not happened since 2005. It also means that the last night of Hanukkah and the last night of Kwanzaa both occur on January 1, 2025 which is also...yep, New Year's Day.

Although, again, Christmas, Kwanzaa and New Year's Day all fall on the same day every year, Hanukkah follows the Hebrew calendar, another lunar calendar, so like other global observances it shifts annually. Oh, by the way, our 2024 has nothin' on the Hebrew calendar, according to which we are currently in the year 5785.

Hanukkah is the Jewish festival commemorating the miracle of the lights when a band of Jews called the Maccabees won a battle against their oppressors. They reclaimed their temple inside of which a holy light was supposed to always burn. After their victory, the Jews only had enough oil for a single day, but God kept the lamp lit for eight days. During Hanukkah, Jews who celebrate the holiday, light candles in a Menorah, eat foods fried in oil, recount the story of the Maccabees and sometimes exchange small gifts for every night for eight nights.

Unlike Hanukkah which traces its origins back thousands of years, Kwanzaa is a relatively new holiday, but its lessons and symbolism are also deeply meaningful.

Kwanzaa began in the 1960's as a way of connecting Americans of African descent to their ancestry. Kwanzaa is another celebration that uses a special candle holder, this one called a Kinara which holds seven candles, each connecting to one of the seven principles of African heritage.

A prevalent characteristic of all these holidays is light. Isn't it interesting how in a world as diverse and often divergent as ours, there are some universal elements from continent to continent, and light seems to be one of those archetypal elements.

From Celtic candlelit gourds to ward off evil and their descendants, the Irish Jack O' Lantern, to the candles lit in Catholic churches lifting prayers to the Saints.

From the oil lit Diya lamps of Diwali and the candles adorning ofrendas (altars) to the dead. From the Menorah candles lit during Hannukah and Kinara candles lit during Kwanzaa to flickering lights on Christmas trees and fireworks welcoming the new year, light connects them all.

Perhaps the message of them all is to remember in the coming dormancy of winter that light always returns, always guides our path, allows us to connect to one another no matter how great the darkness.

Here's hoping that in the rare convergence of these holidays, we find there is more that connects us than divides us and even in the darkest days, we can always be a source of light for one another.



# Growing into my Gay: Identity Acceptance in Conservative Culture

by Juan Garza (he/him), OFM

Growing up wasn't the easiest thing. Sure, being raised in a conservative little one-horse town was a big part of it; but being gay and Latino in a conservative little one-horse town was something else, entirely. Looking back now, the best analogy I can think to describe the experience almost felt something like having to paddle harder in the deep end of a pool because only "sissies" needed floaties (and I was never the greatest swimmer to begin with).

But I survived...tried to thrive; still not even convinced I did that (jury's still out). While I knew from a young age that I was "different" from most other boys (and just people in general), it wasn't until I was around 10 that I finally realized I was attracted to boys. I didn't realize there was a word for it until I hit middle school. Those guys weren't my first bullies, but they were the first to use "gay" as an insult...In a weird way I suppose I'm grateful to them. All the teasing and hatred I'd experienced from my peers (all genders) leading up to that point had been a complete mystery. At least in Middle School I finally knew what they were so uncomfortable with and what it was about me they hated so much.

With family, it was slightly different. The bullying wasn't outright, but the judgment was all the same-made evident through sideways stares, small chuckles and unavoidable gossip. Growing up in a half Catholic, half Neo-Pentecost family meant that "God" was everywhere...and by "Everywhere," I mean all the eyes, ears and senses that would capture every intricate detail about a person's mannerisms, behavior, attitude, dialogue-you name it. The data collected from watchful Tias (aunts) and silently disapproving Tios (uncles) would later translate to gossip. I think people in my family knew about me at a young age...but it was a truth so horrifying, so unbelievable, that to give it any more volume beyond the level of a whisper would apparently somehow make it an absolute and inescapable reality. A "gay" in the family was "not right," and "not in God's plan," of that much, every pious believer in my family was certain. So while the passive aggressive teasing and jokes persisted, nothing was ever actually said out loud (unless someone thought their joke was "really" funny, of course).



I know what you're thinking: "Juan, how could you possibly know this? Were you really paying attention to all that when you were that young?" Totes fair question, and the answer is-absolutely not! I was far too busy dancing to Selena's "Como la Flor" and singing "Ven Conmigo" at the top of my lungs to care what anyone else was doing, thinking, or saying. Selena was a goddess and while I didn't know it at the time, my North Star into my Latine Queerdom. Looking back now, I never felt more alive, more free and more myself. It wasn't until my uncles started busting out camcorders, tossing their beers back and laughing until their faces turned red that I suddenly had the thought: maybe what I was doing, what I was thinking, how I was feeling...was completely wrong.



From there, it's all been an uphill battle. Never mind the humiliation I was experiencing with everyone pointing fingers and whispering about my demeanor; I suddenly remember becoming so worried about my parents. My father, the eldest son of nine children- and I, his namesake; and my mother-who so badly wanted a run-of-the-mill athletic heartbreaker of a son (she actually wanted 5 but got stuck with just me)...what was "being me" doing to them? Their American hopes and dreams? Their promise for the legacy they'd always wanted? Needless to say, from then-on, I was very conservative with the singing and dancing, reserving most of it for solo driving trips and shower time karaoke.

Dive, dive, dive now into 20 years of masking, code switching, and just enough self-loathing to mentally beat myself into a less-sassier walk, (my attempt at) a deeper voice, and a number of "beards" leveraged to maintain the "straight cis machismo male" façade. This image of what it meant to be a real Mexican man was everything I wanted for such a long time. I wanted it so badly that it was utter devastation when I'd fail to live up to this role (and it happened a lot), slipping back into an effeminate expression or reaction during conversation or when my laugh was too high-pitched...or even when I refused to engage in belittling and tearing down another guy for his deficits in the machismo archetype.

Continued...

The harsh criticism and pressure to perform left me with the burdens of anxiety and depression. Even when these conditions were apparent to others, it only fueled their passion for picking at your weakness and charging you with “suck it up, llorón,” or the classic, “Be a man!” Constant reminders of my failure to meet the cultural expectations of my assigned gender. I turned to food for comfort. Abusing my body and my ability to self-regulate by “eating the feelings” I wasn’t allowing myself to express openly, which led to a laundry list of health problems and a promise from my doctor that I wouldn’t live to see 30 if I continued on that particular path. Somewhere in that era was a long-stretched period of “praying the gay away,” where I found myself in the thrall of manipulative groupthink. In this space I was coached to believe that my “struggle” was somehow a “choice”, and the test was essentially “choosing to be straight,” despite my natural predisposition. I remember leaning into this belief with a little more interest-watching other men openly cry and fall apart in their worship and praise for God somehow gave me the impression that at least in this version of manhood, I’d be allowed to show a little emotion without the risk of being chastised for it. Enter the spiritual abuse phase and one more pathway to “manhood” that just wouldn’t work for me.

While the road has been long and full of obstacles, I have learned a lot about myself through the process. The best part I’ve realized is that I’m no longer on the same “road,” and that has made the “journey” all the more enlightening. Having finally reached a space where I’ve found manhood in my queer identity has blessed me with gifts that I had long forgotten... abandoned and left behind at the early age of 10: confidence, reassurance, integrity, pride, humility, and grace. Reclaiming these treasures has not been an easy feat, and there are still some occasions where I lose them during particularly difficult seasons in life. All that to say, I am ironically so grateful for the cultural paradigm of the “machismo” male, as it has given me insight into a truly toxic nature perpetuated by Latin interpretations and reinforcements of heteronormativity. The fact of the matter is, the negative impacts of this subculture are harmful even to straight brown cis-males, making an even stronger case and instilling the hope that newer generations will continue to dismantle these oppressive structures and focus more on how we can creatively meet people where their at; giving them the space, opportunity, and affirmation in realizing that no matter what their identity-they belong.



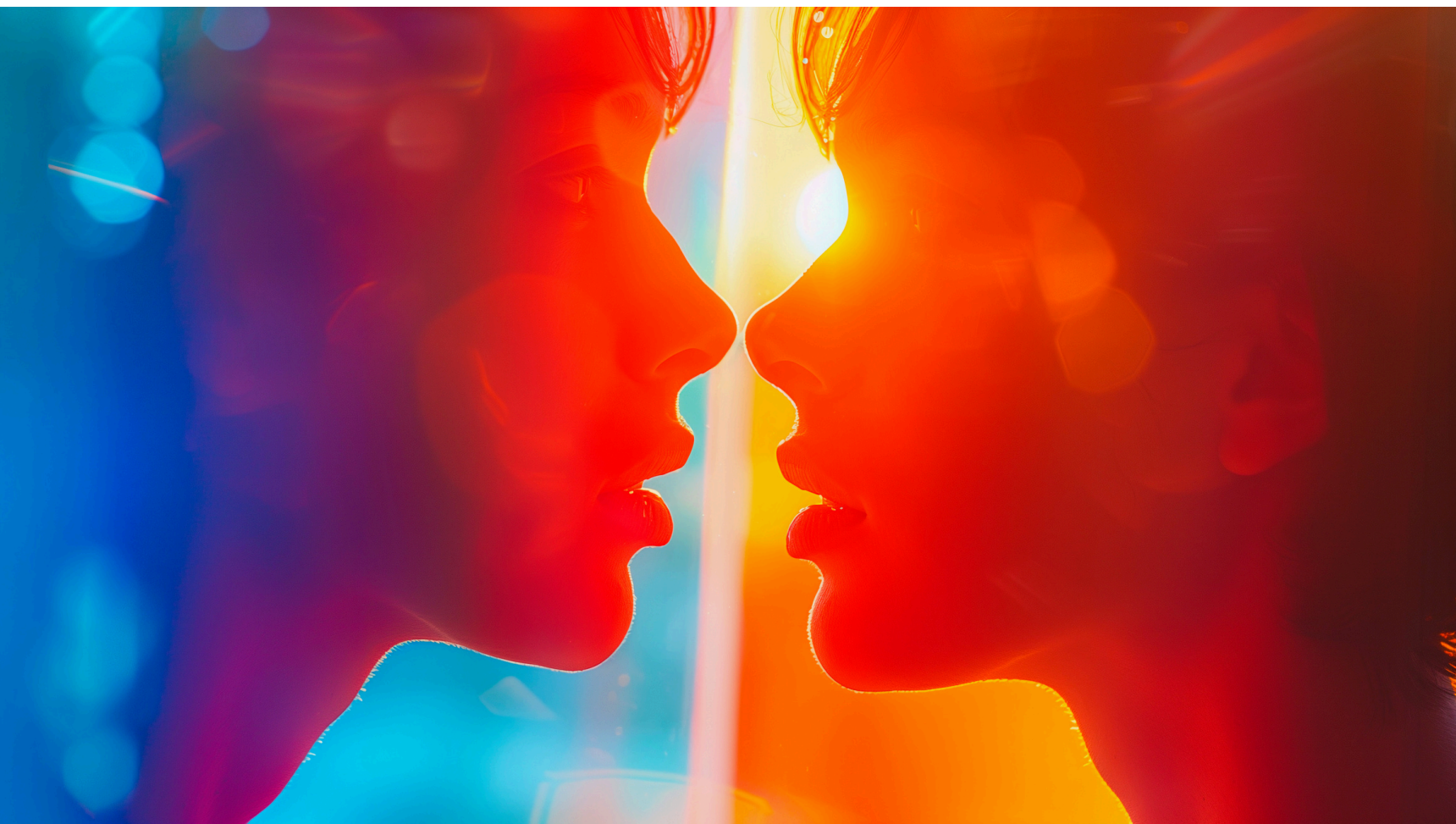


Photo: Ignacio Carrera / Adobe

# Behind the Mirror

by Taja Blackhorn (chi/her), LNI

You watch the artist with their pallet of shades  
Creating a doorway of swirling greys  
Your body begins to quake with anticipation and fear  
For you glimpse the truth beyond the mirror

You watch afraid to look away  
You need to know what the painting has to say  
Finished the artist smiles knowingly at you  
As helplessly mesmerized you step through

Welcome now to behind the mirror  
Home of your doubts, your hopes, your fears  
Welcome now to the mind's other side  
I am the shadow come to be your guide

I see your questions, for gone is your mask  
I have your answers, have you the courage to ask  
Here there is no this or that, no judgement or fight  
For we are all creatures of darkness and light

There is only the truths of your heart, soul, and head  
And the spirits of your friends both living and dead  
Here you can soar to the ultimate heights  
Exploring all possible pleasures, facing all frights

Welcome now to behind the mirror  
Home of your doubts, your hopes your fears  
Welcome now to the mind's other side  
I am the shadow come to be your guide

You think I am the devil come to lead you astray  
By praying you think to make me go away  
I am your shadow, we're one and the same  
I am the truth behind your soul's name

Does hope and joy flash in your eye  
Is it that the truth has come home to lie  
This is your mirror, your creation, your place  
Full of potential, this colorful swirling space

Welcome home behind the mirror  
Home of your doubts, your hopes your fears  
Welcome now to the mind's other side  
I am your shadow come to be your guide



# SUMMH Times

Photo: Mirador / Adobe

The Substance Use Mental Health (SUMH) Times is a semi-regular feature of the RAIN Newsletter because we could all use a little help SUMH Times.

by Marianne K. Ozmun-Wells (she/they), DOL

# Art as a tool for Mental Wellness and Addiction Recovery

*A professional and personal journey*

As a kid who relied on art to get through a tumultuous upbringing, I wanted to be an Art Therapist. With no Arizona universities offering that degree, I attained an undergraduate degree and teaching certification in Multicultural Fine Arts and took graduate courses in addiction studies.

After graduation, my schooling and lived experience led me to varied jobs. I taught art to children of migrant farm workers in dusty desert cotton fields, managed a media art-based mentoring program for formerly gang- and drug- involved youth on an American Indian reservation, and developed an alternative school for kids with “Severe Emotional Disturbance, (SED)”, still, sadly, the official terminology.

Later, as a clinical case manager for unhoused folks, the main images associated with “the homeless,” were the littered encampments that made the news 25 years ago and still do today.

Some of the residents asked about doing a mural project and in preparation, asked if I would teach them some art fundamentals. Three months of weekend art classes later, the core group agreed on “Unity Amid Diversity, Our Histories and Hope.” A former resident and phenomenal artist took the individual disjointed stories and worked them into a cohesive image. The 1997 result was 175 square foot mural 25 feet above the asphalt. The mural tells stories of a sailboat from Cuba; a cabin on a tobacco plantation; Irish immigration to Arizona; studies in Egypt, fighting under the USA flag, and the experience of feeling like always running but never getting anywhere. The mural was also a thank you to the founders of the organization where the artists lived and a message of hope for a future world unified regardless of race, creed, color, body, mind, ability, or orientation. For participants, it was a chance to leave a different legacy of being unhoused.

In every one of my professional roles, art, regardless of medium or methods, was inherently healing.



Primavera Foundation. Tucson, Arizona Tucson Murals Project

<https://tucsonmurals.blogspot.com/2012/08/primavera-foundation.html>

“  
Art gives color, sound, and space to joy. It helps bring traumas out of hiding and into the light to be seen, acknowledged, and healed. Sometimes, the process of making art, serves as its own catharsis, even acting as a replacement for self-harm. Cutting a sculpture or striking a mound of clay can provide relief from the impulse to direct aggression toward oneself or others.

A friend I met through Foster Care Alumni of America, Misty Stenslie, understood the power of art to heal. Misty co-founded a project inviting foster care alumni to tell their stories through postcard sized art pieces. It had been a while since my own art touched on my foster care experience. The project educated professionals, informed the public, and connected those with shared experience. The submissions became a book called **Postcards from the Soul** and a [video](#). For many creators, it was the first time in their adult lives that they shared their foster care experience. Art somehow made our experiences easier to disclose.



When I was first hired by the state of Washington in 2001, and my wife and I moved from Tucson, Arizona to Olympia in November. I had never heard of Seasonal Affect Disorder (SAD), but I quickly became profoundly familiar with it. We did not know anyone in Olympia when we moved here, and the isolation and darkness felt suffocating.

Someone mentioned a community art studio and my ears perked up. The City of Olympia hosts the “Procession of the Species,” annually around Earth Day. It is a non-motorized parade of mostly upcycled art celebrating the diverse species of our planet, and there is a community studio where artists at all levels of ability can go, create art, and be IN community. It is not hyperbole to say that were it not for that studio at that time, I don’t know if I would have stayed in Washington much less stayed mentally healthy.

And as the proverbial apple falling close to the tree suggests, my daughter, Allie, inherited my genetic physical condition, Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome (EDS), as well as anxiety and ADHD. (I am sharing with her permission). Last winter as she struggled on her college campus in Eastern Washington, my wife and I decided that she sounded “down” enough that I would fly over and spend some time with her.

Because of her EDS, one of Allie’s many symptoms is the inability to thermoregulate. Her university accommodation includes a private dorm room. The isolation she faced during the winter months was brutal. In addition, the combination of academic pressure and her ADHD caused her anxiety to spike.

Despite her usual upbeat demeanor upon my arrival, I knew she was struggling, and we used art in many forms to connect and process feelings. The Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art is an amazing Artspace on the WSU Pullman campus. Allie enthusiastically took me to an exhibit by Queer Native artist, Jeffery Gibson called “They Teach Love.” The entire exhibit was stunning and a piece which resonated most powerfully was an installation of painted drums that reminded us of a close Native family friend whose own substance use recovery has been bolstered by his art.

Continued...

A couple years after the postcard project, Misty contracted Lime Disease and later developed early onset Alzheimer’s Disease. Again, art became her touchstone. She introduced me to Zentangles, a type of drawing that includes repeated lines, patterns, symbols and shapes. The practice contributes to calmness, focus, and mental health. She used art to calm her mind and help her to remain present until her untimely passing at 43 years old. Her art became her lifeline, and a large part of her legacy.



Later in the weekend, my daughter and I sat across a motel room table from one another creating our own art. Simple wooden canvases of X's and O's and small tubs of paint became the tools through which we could capture the time spent together and things that bring us joy.

She painted our family's desert origins and the things she loves, tea, and books, and Olympia, in the style of Blue Willow porcelain. I painted snapshots of the murals at Hotel McCoy, our home away from home when visiting our daughter. We each kept one that we had painted and one that the other had painted. During the process of painting, we talked about everything. We shared all the good, and joy, and all the things that are hard and anxiety-producing and occupy headspace and steal joy.

When I left to come back West of the Cascades she was doing a lot better, and subsequently, as most moms can relate, so was I.



This year, before our daughter returned to school, we sat down as a family and wrote a list of **“things to bring the light when \$#!+ gets dark”**. Several of the items on the list of strategies to interrupt anxiety or depression involve creativity.

Creativity does not demand that creators be experts. There have been studies showing that coloring or doodling can help to calm anxieties and wire neural pathways for new learning. The Book, **“the Doodle Revolution,”** by Sunni Brown let me know that my incessant doodling in grade school through grad school was not disengagement, rather it was a means of stilling myself and allowing new information to take hold in my memory. It was not until a later in life diagnosis of ADHD that I began to understand my need to keep a pencil moving when the environment demanded stillness.

There are countless articles and decades of research that extol the healing powers of art-in the making, the sharing, and the seeing of it.

It takes courage to put graphite to paper or paintbrush to canvas. In the LGBTQIA2S+ community, we are used to being courageous; we have often had to be brave just to exist. If some kind of creativity is not already part of our wellness repertoire whether painting, writing, dance, drag, or dinner parties, we might do well to add it to our toolboxes. And if we can find a way to create AND be in community, that's even better.

Here are some articles, and resources about how art can help with healing and ways to make art in community settings.

**Articles about art as part of recovery:**

- [‘The Role of Art and Creativity in Healing from Mental Health and Substance Abuse Challenges’](#) (Radias Health)
- [‘Role of Art Therapy in Addiction and Mental Health’](#) (White Light Behavioral Health)
- [‘How Art Can Help in Addiction Recovery’](#) (Gateway Foundation)

**Books and sites to Consider:**

- [The Doodle Revolution](#)
- [Zentangle Method](#)

**Community Art Class/Studio maps:**

- [Ellensburg](#)
- [Kitsap Peninsula](#)
- [Olympia](#)
- [Pullman/Moscow](#)
- [Seattle Area](#)
- [Snohomish County](#)
- [Spokane Area](#)
- [Tacoma Area](#)
- [Tri-Cities](#)
- [Vancouver/Portland](#)
- [Yakima](#)



# Tatoos and the LGBTQIA

by Kaitlyn Rowe (she/they), DSHS



One of the oldest symbols associated with the LGBT community, the triangle originated as one of the symbols used in Nazi Concentration Camps as a way to label prisoners as homosexual. Many still incorporate this into designs as remembrance of the struggles faced by Queer in those times, although never a triangle alone.



Lambda was selected as a symbol by the Gay Activist Alliance of New York in the 1950s, representing the charged energy of the gay rights movement since lamda symbolizes light shining into darkness of ignorance in Roman interpretation.



In the 1940s, many lesbians got a nautical star tattooed on their inner wrist to advertise their sexuality covertly, being able to cover with a watch when needing to be hidden.



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Photo: Miss[SIRI] / Adobe

