

Navigating *The Gay Gaze*

Historian Jack Fritscher's newest book, *Inventing the Gay Gaze: Rex, Peter Berlin, Arthur Tress, and Crawford Barton*, is the third volume in his award-winning series *Profiles in Gay Courage* showcasing twentieth-century artists speaking to the twenty-first century in this revealing book of lively annotated oral-history interviews as enjoyable as heart-to-heart conversations in an artist's private atelier.

The artist Rex drawing his pointillist pictures, and the three photographers, Berlin, Tress, and Barton, speak for themselves inventing their own authentic queer eye during the Stonewall 1970s dominated by the politically-correct gaze of censors, and by the influence of their common frenemy Robert Mapplethorpe whose spirit infuses this boundary-breaking book.

Eyewitness Fritscher has known these artists since the 1970s when as editor-in-chief of *Drummer* magazine, he first published their pioneering work. He canonizes his iconic friends by curating their specific avant-garde histories within the context of mainstream gay history that readers will find informative and entertaining.

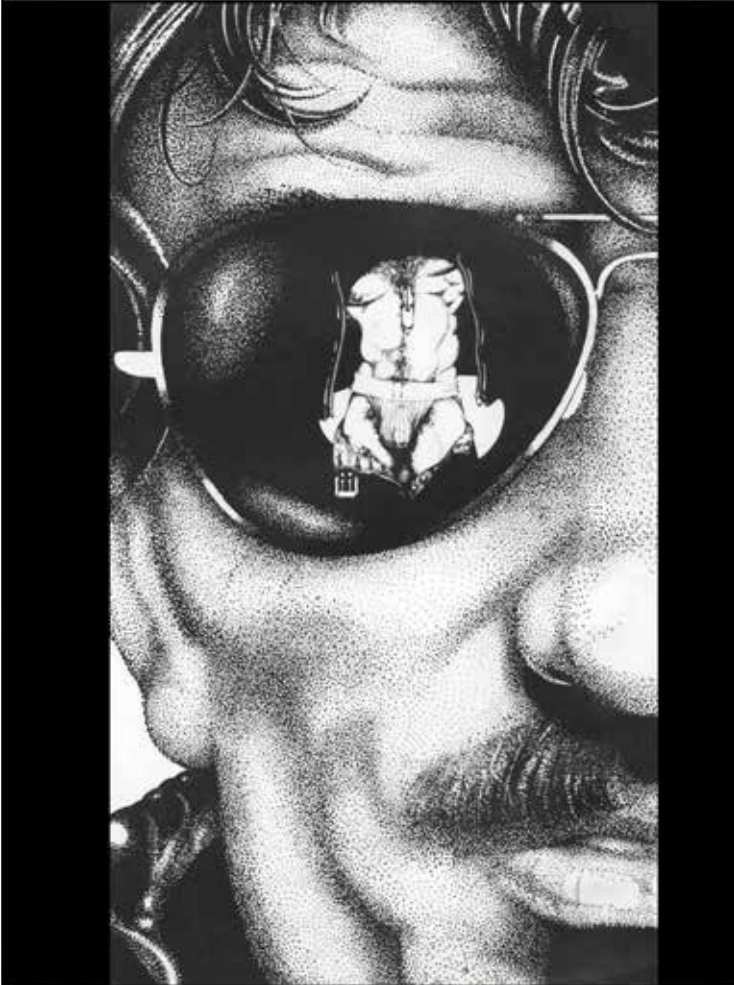
In four unfiltered conversations, he profiles the reclusive anarchist Rex who designated him to hear his deathbed confession. In his chat with photographer Peter Berlin, celebrating Berlin's 80th birthday, Berlin details how his camera-eye created his strutting alter-ego. In dialogue with ethnographic photographer Arthur Tress, Tress explains using the magical realism of mid-century modernism to develop his unique perspective. In his tête-à-tête visit with the dying Crawford Barton, the key photographer of 1970s Castro Street, Barton recalls escaping the homophobic American South to document diversities of men in San Francisco.

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**PALM
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**THE REX VIDEO GALLERY:
CORRUPT BEYOND
INNOCENCE**

The Rex Video Gallery: Corrupt Beyond Innocence directed/photographed by Jack Fritscher, produced/edited by Mark Henry, Palm Drive Video, bespoke soundtrack, 65 minutes, 1990

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INVENTING THE GAY GAZE

**REX
PETER BERLIN
ARTHUR TRESS
and
CRAWFORD BARTON**

Jack Fritscher, PhD

**PROFILES IN GAY COURAGE
Volume 3**

**Archival Edition
Jack Fritscher-Mark Hemry Archives**



Palm Drive Publishing™

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Inventing the Gay Gaze: Rex, Peter Berlin, Arthur Tress, and Crawford Barton.
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For author history and for historical research <https://JackFritscher.com>

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Special dedication and thanks
to my stoic editor and husband Mark Hemry
without whose remarkable diligence
for nearly fifty years
this material would have been
impossible to collect, analyze, and present



Openly gay German painter Rudolph Karl Alexander Schneider aka Sascha Schneider (1870-1927), "Hypnosis," 1904

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Michael Vernaglia (1956-1991), “The Saint,” a “gay-gaze laser poster,” 1980, was the invitation to the opening party, September 20, 1980, of The Saint nightclub, “The East Village Vatican of Disco,” 105 Second Avenue, New York, 1980-1988.

Robert Mapplethorpe was the official photographer of The Saint’s first Black Party for which he shot two horned-god photos for the invitation: “Rites Part I and Rites Part II: A Two-Night Black Party,” March 20 and 21, 1981. The next day, he carried his gay gaze from his studio to shoot “selected guests” at The Saint’s Sunday Tea Dance, March 22, 1981.

Rex drew the Invitation for “Rites IV, The Black Party,” March 19, 1983, and for “Rites XXIV,” 2013.

Introduction

Curating the Gay Gaze

by **Andy Campbell, PhD**

What to say about Jack Fritscher's role in leather culture that hasn't already been said? What about his own gay gaze? In him we still (thankfully) have one of our greatest living leather writers and New Journalists. At 86, he is an embodiment of what decades of observant living and mindful scholarship may offer to new generations. As his fellow writers and artists and photographers who invented the 1970s genre of homomale words and images will tell you, such foundational work is done for love not money. The prolific author's psychic income of earned respect comes from the numerous art and alt-communities he fostered during his 65 years of documenting and reporting leather lives in his books, feature articles, and fiction in the leather bible of *Drummer* magazine which was a first draft of leather history.

Luckily and happily, Fritscher, the tenured university professor who taught creative writing and film in the turbulent 1960s, is a writer who is an artist finely attuned to art, and to all the trappings of that wayward, difficult calling to create visions against all the odds of straight and gay censorship. In this book, as editor-in-chief of *Drummer* (1977-1980), and on screen, as co-founder and director of Palm Drive Video, he reveals how evolving visual artists invented the gay gaze. Recalling his unique community eyewitness position as editor, he says it was the centrality of *Drummer* itself that gifted him personal access to recruit and befriend artists seeking publication.

The multi-award-winning author is a Lambda Literary Finalist whose 1994 memoir of his bicoastal lover, *Mapplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera*, is one of his thirty books chronicling the

first post-Stonewall generation of artists and photographers including in this book: Rex, Peter Berlin, Arthur Tress, and Crawford Barton. As an intimate of Mapplethorpe, he is uniquely qualified to stir Robert's eye, attitude, and ubiquity into this book of competitive peers. Fritscher, clearly relishing the task of putting language to page, is a pleasure to read. Rollicking, fun, sexy, provocative, and heartfelt, he entertains and informs by opening his deep archives and journals as portals to the past.

He lets the unfiltered artists speak for themselves in their own authentic voices in these interviews of oral history. In this book, the third volume in his series *Profiles in Gay Courage: Leatherfolk, Arts, and Ideas*, these vivid profiles offer readers a basic introduction to the artistic practices of fine artists and photographers who helped create and develop the postwar queer eye in gay media. For this task, Fritscher culls his archive of writing, interviews, missives, and his own journal memories. His point of view canonizes his iconic friends by presenting their specific origin stories within the context of general gay history.

In these profiles of four artists who started up before Stonewall, flourished in the 1970s, and carried on as influencers despite AIDS to the end of the century, Fritscher is in top form. In his annotated interviews, he writes a paean to the reclusive pointillist artist Rex who asked him to write his uncensored eulogy.

In his interview with photographer Peter Berlin on Berlin's 80th birthday, Berlin, speaking under his birth name, Armin Heune, tells how he created his famous alter-ego by refining his gaze both in camera and in post-shoot enhancements.

In his intense chat with ethnographic photographer Arthur Tress, Tress explains using the magical realism of mid-century modernism to develop and frame his unique perspective.

In his conversation with Crawford Barton who was the key photographer of 1970s Castro Street, the dying Barton recalls how he escaped from the homophobic American South to the sanctuary of San Francisco where he developed his multiracial street gaze around the platonic ideal of all kinds of new male beauty.

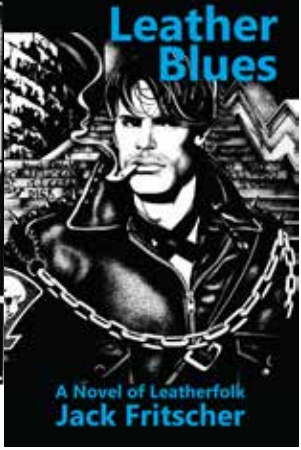
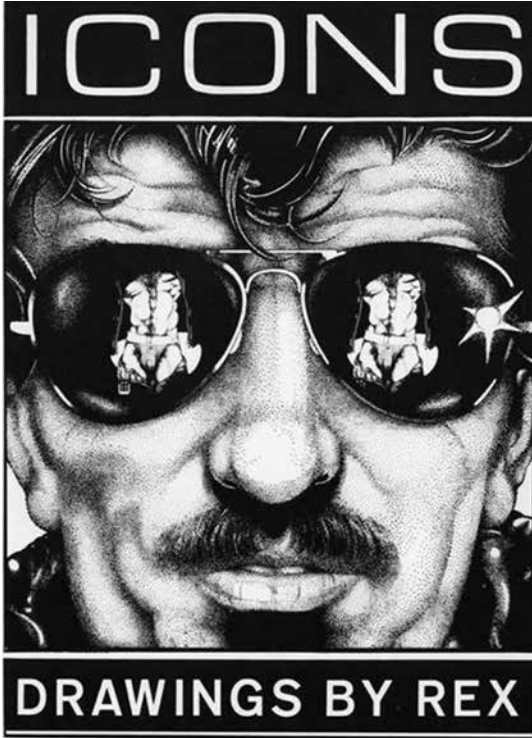
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The coverage of these four essential visionaries will interest readers of gay popular culture, photo historians, and scholars tracking the shifting visual codings of gay life. Taken together these essay-interviews consider the many ways that art moves the mind, body, and the relational feelings we have towards one another.

A new generation of readers may enjoy this book by an eyewitness survivor of the twentieth century.

—Andy Campbell, PhD, author of *Queer X Design: 50 Years of Signs, Symbols, Banners, Logos, and Graphic Art of LGBTQ Pride and Activism*, is Chair and Associate Professor of Critical Studies at USC's Roski School of Art and Design



Icons, 1977. Rex, studio portrait c. 1965. *Leather Blues: A Novel of Leatherfolk*, 1984. In summer 1984, the camera-shy Rex permitted frequent collaborator Fritscher to shoot four archival photos during his visit to the Fritscher-Hemry home.

