



Art, AIDs and Domesticity in Crisis in Brett Reichman’s ‘Better Living Through Design’

Lucy Tiven

In his new solo [show](#), “Better Living Through Design” painter [Brett Reichman](#) looks to the oft-fetishized midcentury modern aesthetic to render desire, homoeroticism and domestic space during the 1980s and 90’s AIDS crisis.

Reinterpreting and repurposing kitsch iconography, “Better Living Through Design” asks us to examine *what* and *how* we fetishize when we navigate domestic space and identity politics. Reichman’s cluttered canvases invite domesticity and eroticism to coexist, juxtaposing surrealistic contortions of the nude male body with emblems of late capitalist nostalgia and familiar midcentury idealizations of domestic space.

Placing erotic taboo and domestic iconography into conversation, the artist invites us into a cultural history of desire and its realizations, struggles and failings. More shocking than the overt sexuality of “Better Living Through Design” is its stark contrast between pleasures of the flesh and violence of the body, as captured in the finite world of Reichman’s congested apartment.

Reichman’s compositions frequently reference those of religious paintings, imbuing the erotic with a sense of sacred space, struggle and sacrifice, while locating his work in a tradition of historical painting. Dynamic male bodies are placed in close quarters, while crosshatched strokes and exaggerated poses contribute an urgent sense of discord to his subject matter.

“AIDS is the site at which the advance of sexual politics is being rolled back,” wrote Cultural Theorist Stuart Hall in his seminal [lecture](#) “Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies.” “It’s a site at which not only people will die, but desire and pleasure will also die if certain metaphors do not survive, or survive in the wrong way.” Reichman’s paintings ask us to reassess the line between familiarity and estrangement, infusing domestic spaces with vulnerable, private moments.

Brett Reichman has lived and worked in San Francisco since 1984. Painting in the late 1980s, much of his work addresses the AIDS epidemic and issues of gay identity politics. He has had numerous solo shows at galleries including Gallery Paule Anglim in San Francisco, the PPOW Gallery in New York, Feature Inc., NY, the Rena Bransten Gallery in San Francisco and the Orange County Museum of Art, and is featured in the exhibition “Art AIDS America” at the Tacoma Museum of Art.

His paintings can also be found in collections at the the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Berkeley Art Museum, the Portland Art Museum and the Orange County Museum. Receiving a BFA from Carnegie Mellon University and MFA from the University of California, Berkeley, he currently serves as an Associate Professor at the San Francisco Art Institute.

[Brett Reichman’s “Better Living Through Design”](#) is on view at CB1 Gallery until Dec. 19th.



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