Overview Of Aids Epidemic

The AIDS epidemic was associated with homosexuality due to the initial similar cases among gay males. In particular, it was observed and identified by the immunologist Dr. Michael Gottlieb in the Los Angeles area. Gottlieb began to serve as a faculty member of the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA with the Associate Clinical Professor of Medicine position in 1980 and provided a report about AIDS in 1981. In 1982, the New York Times brought up the term “GRID” Gay-Related Immune Deficiency) to identify the disease’s close relationship with the gay community. According to the HIV/AIDS timeline, in 1986, “The U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC) demonstrates that “AIDS cases are disproportionately affecting African Americans and Latinos.” Specifically, it is noted on the CDC website that “In the period June 1, 1981-September 8, 1986, physicians and health departments in the United States notified CDC of 24,576 patients meeting the AIDS case definition for national reporting. Of these, 6,192 (25%) were black and 3,488 (14%) were Hispanic, whereas these groups represent only 12% and 6%, respectively, of the U.S. population.” Therefore, it is important to provide insights into a minority population’s reaction to the AIDS crisis in this city.

By the time the AIDS crisis arose, there was a huge lack of government support with regards to sufficient funding for medical research for the disease compared to other nationwide plagues. The disease itself was even used as a threatening weapon against the victims because the government consistently considered “extreme measures, including tattooing HIV positive people” to potentially segregate the infected population.

Before the AIDS Crisis:

Edmundo “Mundo” Meza was indeed one of the most essential figures in representations of Chicanx and LGBTQ movements. By identifying the uniqueness of Meza’s and other contemporary artists’ artworks in terms of cultural heritage, people are likely to grasp a general overview Mexican American queer artists dealt with prejudices and strived for opportunities of social mobility through artistic representations. Specifically, the artistic reflections on the critical issue of AIDS serve as an effective means to explore both of their ethnicities and sexuality with regards to their marginalized status in the mainstream. He also stirred up a conversation in a huge artists’ network which explores inspiring and innovative art demonstrating ethnic or racial heritage and sexual orientation.

Gronk (Glugio Gronk Nicandro), one of the founders and first members of the politically active performance group Asco and a gay artist, closely worked with Mundo Meza and Robert Legorreta. In the Chicano community theater, they collaborated and produced some intensively aggressive cross-gendered performance art that criticizes patriarchy in society. This theater production is called “Caca-Roaches Have No Friends”, and it delivers explicitly radical information regarding queerness to the relatively conservative general public.

In this performance, Legorreta interpreted a drag character “Cyclona”, who was inspired by Legorreta and Gronk’s flamboyant personal experience of cross-dressing as queer teenagers in East Los Angeles. They challenged the audience and the entire contemporary social norms by presenting sexually provocative and expressive scenes such as stripping. One of the most

provoking scenes, as the book Gronk vividly describes, involves the action of Cyclona popping a large balloon and crushing the eggs between shirtless Mundo Meza's legs, which is an obvious and bold implication of destroying the male genitalia. By rejecting the "conventional (straight, white, middle class) masculinity" with an aggressive approach, they intrigued a wide range of disapproval. In this piece, they refused the common stereotypes that merge the action of cross-dressing and gay identity, "confusing the boundaries defining the singular 'Chicano' subject with a radically queer sensibility". The first and second show was located in Belvedere Park's outdoor theater and the gymnasium.

After this avant-garde attempt of a theater performance, Meza continued to produce extensive artworks about his homosexuality. He produced extensive paintings and sketches of human figures including a collection of Cyclona, and the socially reforming avant-gardism which advocates for the disconformity of gay male proceeds in most of his work.

One of Meza's most well-recognized work is The Flying Women (1975). This work features distinct vibrant colors such as the red and blue on the women's bodies. The white highlights in the foreground and dark shadows in the background produce stark contrast as well. Meza applied artistic exaggeration to the representation of human body and made the scene unrealistic. The overall use of color is bold and flamboyant.

After the Explosion of AIDS:

Meza also presents his own confrontation with the AIDS crisis. After being diagnosed with the disease, Meza employed some new aesthetics in his artworks: abstraction and traces of Cubism. His earlier works such as Untitled from the Silver Lake Terrace sketchbook also illustrated distorted and abstract human bodies, but his extremely vague art practice in monochromatic painting Untitled (Abstraction) in 1983 has a significant difference from it. Untitled (Abstraction) displays a large scale of gray obscurity and defines some white empty spaces, possibly symbolizing his confusion and a sense of uncertainty when fighting with the disease. This is very special since it is clear that Meza distinguished an alternative artistic approach when it comes to the topic of HIV/AIDS, apart from his past figurative paintings on sketchbooks or pigments on canvases in the late 1970s. The painting shows nothing aggressive or depressed. Instead, it potentially stresses the concept of "the very absence of a subject" which intrigues people's nerves.

Another work in 1983 shortly before Meza's death is Untitled (Male nude), in which Meza returned to his usual figurative representation but utilized grayscale coloring. The painting presents a view of a nude male body from behind. If compared to his work Untitled in the late 1970s which also features the back of a nude male, it is easy to spot the change in the artist's depiction of the same subject. The definition of strong muscles preserves in both artworks, but the bright colors in the earlier work disappears as the artist solely applied black, gray, and white in his later work. The background of the later work implements an insecure sense of ambiguity by laying out obscure blocks, which, to some extent, is similar to his painting Untitled (Abstraction). Meza's transition in his state of mind is obvious in his work.

Meza also painted the work Self-portrait (1983) in realistic style with some huge and distorted brushstrokes. This coexistence of animated and vivid human figure and abstract paint strokes illustrate a certan extent of inconsistency and dichotomy, which may be another examle of the

unstableness in the artist's mind.

At the time of Meza's death, the ongoing social controversy was intense. "Because of the withholding of media attention, lack of federal funding for research toward a cure, limited educational resources directed at preventing the spread of HIV, and inadequate health care services, many artists through their work sought to spur the public to action." In this case, the disease is not given sufficient attention and in the government, and it is almost the artists' obligation to take the task of raising awareness among the public.

Witness of the AIDS Crisis & Documentation of the Epidemic:

In 1983, Judy Miranda, a Latina photographer, took a series of portrait for a friend who was diagnosed with HIV positive as a memorial gift for his partner. This fine art photography series of six pieces consists of the person's different erotic body parts, and these pieces were presented in the gallery with the form of a cross. This association of crucifixion with the AIDS infected, suffering body embodies the worthiness of memorizing and, to some extent, celebrates the subtle sensations and sensibility in homosexuality.

Joey Terrill was another pioneering artist in the Chicano LGBTQ community. He actively engaged in gay liberation and the Chicano civil rights movement as well as other artists. One of his most famous work is Homeboy Beautiful, in which he constructed a series of artworks involving photos and texts with straightforward and explicit representation of male homosexuality among the Chicano community. Some of the photos featured were scenes of sexual activity. In an interview, Joey Terrill said that he was highly aware of "the invisibility of Latinos in the dominant white popular culture that was also reflected in the mostly white burgeoning 'gay community and political activism'". Terrill's awareness of this marginalization of ethnicity in the LGBTQ movement cannot be ignored in terms of some of his aggressive and revolutionary artistic expressions.

He also designed the famous T-shirt with "Maricón" (Spanish word for "fagot", a disrespectful description of homosexual man) or "Malflora" (Spanish word for "lesbian", and it can also be literally translated into "bad flower" which is "a stigmatizing euphemism for Latinas without the 'proper' attributes of feminine fragility and delicacy") on the front chest and the word "rolemodel" on the back. These hand-drawn shirts were distributed to be worn by Chicanx queer population in 1976's pride parade in West Holywood Park.

Terrill started to work on themes about the AIDS epidemic and made artworks to pay tribute to his friends who suffered from the disease in the mid-1980s. He turned himself into a community educator and actively engaged in sharing important information of safe-sex in same-sex relationships. Along with other artists at his contemporary, Terrill took part in the creation of a comic project called Chicos Modernos.

He also painted the Remembrance in 1989, the year when he was tested HIV-positive. Remembrance is a piece that portrays "the same-sex couple's vulnerability", which "makes a startling contrast to Mexican American masculinity traditionally depicted in Chicanx painting". The popular manifesto of Chicanx movement tend to be violent and traditionally masculine against the American culture. This vulnerability depicted in the painting probably comes from the artist's self-reflection, and he also embraces the sorrow and grievances of survivors to their

losses under the huge influence of the HIV plague. Actually, a certain level of uncommon vulnerability is always showcased in Terrill's work before. But the satire and inclusion of extensive texts were not seen. Therefore it is reasonable to assume that this work serves as an implicit transition in Terrill's art life. With the presence of HIV epidemic, it can be observed that artists employ new styles which are distinctive from their previous artworks.

From the late 1990s to the 2010s, he made a series called "Still-Life" to address his concerns about the normalization of HIV/AIDS. With regards to this series, he states on his personal website that "My desire was to make art that reflected my observation as a long-term survivor, of the place where HIV has landed in the U.S marketplace and popular culture two decades after it's discovery. I chose to use the formal language of Pop Art, taking my cue from Warhol, Hockney, Ruscha but especially Wesselmann who's still- lifes from the late 50's –early 60's made from collaged 'found' advertising and materials were ironic illustrations of American consumerism and sexuality." By intentionally incorporating this sarcastic art style in his expression, Terrill eloquently demonstrates that the traumas of early resistance toward the disease are significantly underestimated in current days.

Equipped, fabricated by the HIV infected artist Ray Navarro with his close friend Zoe Leonard, is a series of three black and white photographs featuring mobility devices in the hospital such as a wheelchair. Navarro designed a plaque for each object under the picture frames to facilitate an office-like intense and depressed atmosphere. On these tages, he employs sexually explicit and provocative phrases to offer an amusing alternative term for disease-related implements that evoke a sense of grievance. One particular design of the work is it pink picture frames, which suggest "the default generic skin tone of prosphetic devices". It is notable that he did not choose to put the harm, death, and sorrows directly on display to demonstrate the epidemic. Instead, he uses tags as a subject matter to redefine the objects in hospitals. After becoming deaf and blind because the AIDS-related symptoms, Navarro still managed to create artworks that display a playful and humorous attitude toward the disease.