

QUARTZ

This digital archive preserves the work of extraordinary, forgotten artists who died of AIDS



In remembrance. (POBA)

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An archive of some of the most daring art of the '80s and '90s is now open to the public, in a digital display honoring World Aids Day (Dec. 1). Called Art Lives, the online gallery features iconic artists whose creativity was lost to the world in the AIDS epidemic of the 1990s.

One featured artist is Jim Terrell, an architect who revolutionized the interior design of department stores in the 1980s. There's also singer-songwriter Sylvester (aka Sylvester James), who produced 1970's chart-topping disco hits like "You Make Me Feel Mighty Real" and "Dance (Disco Heat)," and sketches by fashion designer Patrick Kelly—the first person of color to be admitted to the prestigious French ready-to-wear council.



Art Lives is a special curation by “virtual cultural arts center” POBA, which since [July 2014](#) (pdf) has focused on preserving the work of deceased visual and musical contemporary artists. “Now more than 30 years after, as time passes and memories fade, that work is being lost and a lot of them are stored in attics,” explains POBA co-founder Jennifer Cohen to Quartz, of the Art Lives exhibition.

Cohen says she was inspired by her own personal experience working in the entertainment industry in New York in the '80s and '90s, an era of revolutionary creativity that sadly coincided with the beginning of the AIDS epidemic. “I experienced depth and the sweep of this exciting creative time,” she says. “What we saw was this tremendous movement towards freedom of expression, high style and great fun, and then this counter-blast where this wonderful generation of artists were being lost.”

Work by Patrick Kelly,
1988 (POBA/Courtesy of
Philadelphia Museum of Art)



The seven artists showcased in the inaugural Art Lives exhibition were nominated by three leading arts-based organizations advocating for AIDS education and services. In the coming months, the permanent online exhibit will feature more artists suggested by POBA's partner organizations. POBA is also seeking the public's help to expand the gallery by nominating lesser-known artists and designers, especially those who passed away before digital archiving was widely practiced.