



**SCHOMBURG CENTER**  
FOR RESEARCH IN BLACK CULTURE  
The New York Public Library

# Legend in My Living Room

Artist: Jasper Briggs

Co-curated by Souleo and Steven G. Fullwood

For more information: [info@souleouniverse.com](mailto:info@souleouniverse.com)

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# EXHIBITION DESCRIPTION

*Legend in My Living Room* is an oral, visual, written and performative history project utilizing cultural production tools to redress traditional narratives regarding the LGBTQ experience. At its core the project aims to challenge the erasure of people of African descent from mainstream representations of LGBTQ history by highlighting the stories and experiences of black individuals.

The project launched in 2015 with the induction of oral histories from older adult participants (deemed “legends”) of SAGE Center Harlem into the In the Life Archive (ITLA) at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library. These oral histories document the experiences of black LGBTQ people (ages 52-84) from the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century through landmark chapters of our nation's history including the civil rights movement, black power movement, gay rights movement, AIDS crisis and today's revitalized LGBTQ rights movement.

Through its current iteration in the visual medium, *Legend in My Living Room* highlights six of these oral history participants in specially commissioned portraits. Each subject was photographed in their living room, often the site of a lifetime's worth of personal memories, keepsakes and intimate revelations. In this setting each legend invites the viewer into their private world to glean from their wisdom, revel in the light of their glory and reflect upon their struggles, triumphs and perseverance as contributors to and embodiments of LGBTQ history.

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# EXHIBITION DESCRIPTION

The exhibition debuted on May 24, 2016 at the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art (currently the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art). It was presented by the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, and Services and Advocacy for GLBT Elders (SAGE).



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## FEATURED ARTWORK

"I teach in my church and bring people to realize God is in all aspects of your life, including sexuality. Lean on that power because you and God are working together. It's not just pray, pray, pray. It's action. You got to get up and do something."

-Nora-Ann



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## FEATURED ARTWORK

"I don't feel old but I've lived and seen a lot of things change since my first Gay Pride March I participated in during the 1980s. Nobody got in formation or put up banners until the march started. We were afraid people would throw rocks. Now we are not afraid anymore. We have banners all over. We don't give a hoot."

-Shelly



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## FEATURED ARTWORK

“When I was young we didn't think about getting old. Most of us never made it that far. I am shocked I made it. I proudly see myself as somebody who lived the life.”

-Tina

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# FEATURED ARTWORK

"I've been in the army, worked in hospitals and been a spokesperson for LGBTQ rights. In that time I've been called everything you can imagine. Remember, it's not what people call you, but what you answer to."

-George







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# FEATURED ARTWORK

"Being trans saved my life."

-Alex





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# FEATURED ARTWORK

"As a black gay man I've learned you have to fight the fear. The fear of life. The fear of existing in the world. My creative energy and art has made me fearless."

-Beau



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# Legend in My Living Room Oral History Project Participants

**To access the oral history recordings visit:**

**<https://archives.nypl.org/scm/185434>**

First Row (left to right): Steven G. Fullwood, Nora-Ann Thompson, Joyce Banks, Pauline Kennedy Rice, Tina Moét, and Souleo.

Second Row (left to right): Shelly Montrose, Beau McCall, Alexis Page, and George Stewart.

Third Row (left to right): James Harris, Tanya Asapansa-Johnson Walker, and Alex Gilliam.

Not pictured: James Davis.

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# BIOS

## **Nora-Ann Thompson, 66**

Nora-Ann Thompson has served 30+ years in the health and social service field with a primary focus on mental health advocacy. Ever since identifying as a lesbian at the age of 45 she has remained a staunch supporter of and advocate for LGBTQ rights. Presently she serves as a revered of Unity Fellowship of Christ Church - New York City, a member of LGBT Faith Leaders of African Descent, and is also part of the Mayor's Interfaith Community Board. Thompson regularly serves on panels discussing the intersectionality of spirituality and sexuality within the LGBTQ community.

## **Shelly Montrose, 59**

For over five years, Shelly Montrose covered the NYC arts/culture scene for the lesbian publication, Women News in the 1980s. Through her work, Montrose contributed to increasing visibility and representations of women in the LGBTQ community. Presently she serves as a volunteer for LGBTQ community organizations including SAGE Center Harlem.

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# BIOS

## **Tina Moét, 60+**

In the 1980s, Tina Moét worked at Sally's Hideaway as a hostess and entertainer. While there she became a popular fixture on the scene and mentor to individuals in the trans community. Presently, Moét continues to perform at local LGBTQ centers and various other venues. Moét is proud that she has survived the civil rights movement, AIDS crisis, domestic violence and numerous incidents of transphobia to still be alive and thriving today.

## **George Stewart, 84**

George Stewart has led a life full of change and surprises. He served in the Army, both in the U.S. and overseas, was a hospital aide during the AIDS crisis in the 1980s and became an out-LGBTQ spokesperson when he was an honored speaker at The SAGE Center's ribbon-cutting ceremony in 2012. Stewart was also a finalist for the White House LGBT Champions of Change contest. In addition he has served as a spokesperson on LGBTQ issues for media outlets including Huffington Post and NY1.

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# BIOS

## **Alex Gilliam, 56**

Alex Gilliam is a trans and labor rights activist. In the 1980s he advocated for organized labor and increased representation of LGBTQ people within the U.S. Post Office. In 2014 he participated in Trans Lobby Day in Washington, D.C. and led a forum on trans issues at The Riverside Church. Gilliam is an active member of Black Transmen Inc. (BTMI), an organization for African-American transmen solely focused on acknowledgment, social advocacy and empowerment. In recognition of his years of service, Gilliam has most recently been nominated for a 2016 Black Trans Advocacy Award.

## **Beau McCall, 59**

Beau McCall is a visual artist whose primary medium is clothing buttons. McCall began his career in wearable art as a member of the Black Fashion Museum in Harlem for over 10 years. During this time, McCall's visually captivating work was featured in the fashion bible, Women's Wear Daily and on PBS. Since then McCall has begun to focus solely on creating visual art. His work is held in the permanent collection of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture and the Cyndi Lauper True Colors Residence in Harlem. For the latter he was commissioned to create a work of art highlighting the issue of LGBTQ youth homelessness. McCall was also recently selected as one of NBC's TheGrio.com "40 Amazing Black Artists to Watch."

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# BIOS

**Jasper Briggs** is a documentary photographer capturing images that reflect the human condition. In 2015 he was selected to be a Magnum Foundation Fellow. For his project, Briggs photographed LGBTQ older adults from SAGE. Briggs is an alumnus of the International Center of Photography's Documentary Practice and Visual Journalism Program. He lives and works in NY.

**Souleo** curates entertaining and informative events, exhibitions, and cultural programs. Souleo has collaborated with noteworthy institutions and brands including the New York Public Library, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Columbia University, Newark Museum of Art Stax Museum of American Soul Music, Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art, and AARP. Souleo's work has been widely covered in outlets including the Associated Press, NY Times, The New Yorker, NBC and more.

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# BIOS

**Steven G. Fullwood** is currently the Project Director for the Institute of African American Affairs and Center for Black Visual Culture, starting in June 2019. Steven G. Fullwood is an archivist, editor, and documentarian. He is the former assistant curator of the Manuscripts, Archives & Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library. He has long been associated with the preservation of archival materials and collections focusing on African and African Diasporic cultures. In 1999, he founded the In the Life Archive to aid in the preservation of materials produced by and about LGBTQ people of African descent. In 2018, Fullwood co-founded The Nomadic Archivists Project, an initiative to establish, preserve, and enhance collections that explore the African Diasporic experience. His publications include *Black Gay Genius: Answering Joseph Beam's Call* (co-edited with Charles Stephens, 2014), *To Be Left with the Body* (co-edited with Cheryl Clarke, 2008) and *Carry the Word: A Bibliography of Black LGBTQ Books* (co-edited with Lisa C. Moore, 2007). Fullwood is currently at work on his first feature documentary, *Black Toledo*.



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## *Harlem Archive Collects Past Stories of Those Who Wrestled With Their Sexuality*

By WINNIE HU JULY 20, 2015



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JASPER BRIGGS

United States Photography

A portrait of the same woman from the first image, now wearing a pink shirt and sitting in a wooden chair. She is looking towards the camera.

# PRESS HIGHLIGHTS



## Manhattan Photo Exhibit Shows Pride Has No Age Limit

By Roger Clark

Updated Tuesday, June 21, 2016 at 12:50 PM EDT



ART | Emily Manning | 15 June 2016

## queer art to see in nyc right now

This week, many are reflecting on what it means to be queer in America. Here are five New York exhibitions to guide your exploration.

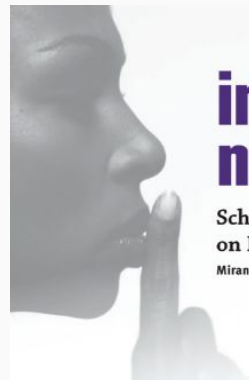
i-D fashion music culture watch news think pieces

### Jasper Briggs at Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art

Alongside its archival examination of pioneering queer Americans, Leslie-Lohman lends a new view on their lives now. *Legend in My Living Room*, the museum's concurrent show, features Magnum Foundation Fellow Jasper Briggs' commissioned portraits of LGBTQ adults involved with SAGE, or Services and Advocacy for GLBT Elders. Briggs photographed his subjects, who are between the ages of 55 and 84, in their home environments. "They have contributed to the advancement of LGBTQ rights in ways both measurable and immeasurable from serving in the military to being activists on the front lines to using their creative talents to inspire others," says SAGE Center Harlem program coordinator and the exhibition's cocurator Peter Wright. [More information here.](#)



# PRESS HIGHLIGHTS



## interrupting the narrative of silence

### Schomburg's Oral History Project on Black LGBTQ Individuals

Miranda Mims, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

Collecting oral histories can be a delicate process. Concerns about personal information made available to the public are weighed against filling voids in the historical narrative. Many black individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ) closely guard their private lives. But their stories have historical significance and research value, and our approach as archivists should take into account these conflicting needs.

#### Collecting Historical Narratives

The oral history project *Legend in My Living Room* helps to fill the silence in the historical narrative of black LGBTQ individuals. The project is the result of a collaboration between the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, a branch of the New York Public Library (NYPL), and SAGE Harlem, an organization dedicated to improving the lives of older LGBT adults.

Souleo Wright, project coordinator for SAGE Harlem, and Steven G. Fullwood, assistant curator of the NYPL Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Division and founder of the In 'Til Life Archives (ITLA), collected the personal narratives of thirteen LGBTQ individuals of African descent currently in their sixties, seventies, and eighties. The narratives are now a part of ITLA, which has a mission to document and preserve cultural materials produced by and about LGBTQ people of African descent and was founded

to address the lack of documentation of nonheterosexual black life in libraries and archival repositories.

The idea for *Legend in My Living Room* came about when SAGE members visited the Schomburg. While viewing programs, photographs, books, and ephemera, a SAGE member recognized himself in ITLA. Fullwood and Wright then spoke with SAGE members about historical gaps in ITLA and how to address these gaps.

The success of *Legends* is largely due to Schomburg's partnership with SAGE.

During the 1970s and 1980s, many members of the LGBTQ community were lost to AIDS and cancer, and with those losses went their personal stories. The bulk of Schomburg's ITLA material is composed of secondary resources (such as books and magazines), but there is substantial

research value in having firsthand accounts from individuals who came of age during a particular period or event. Working with an organization like SAGE, which already has strong ties with the LGBTQ community, was pivotal in connecting with those individuals who could tell their stories.

#### Building Trust

Wright and Fullwood thought the response would be enthusiastic when they first conceived the idea, but they met some resistance.

"So many of the participants suffered a lot of pain in the past around their sexual orientation that having to tell that story or revisit those memories could be traumatic," said Wright, who was new to SAGE when the project was in the beginning stages.

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*Legend in My Living Room* organizers Steven G. Fullwood (far left) and Souleo Wright (far right) with participants from SAGE Harlem. Courtesy Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.



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