

## GREAT QUOTE FROM REX

*“The “Legendary REX” you refer to is as much a legend for his “eccentricity” as for his art. People think I am stubborn just for the sake of being stubborn—just to have my way. But I am someone who has had to fight great battles against society, the law, church and state—even the art world itself— for decades in order to get my art out there to be seen. There is simply no “polite” way to battle against the great odds I have had to confront over the decades. Saying “please” does not work when taking on these powerful institutions. So I fear in the long run it has made me rather abrasive and abrupt when trying to get my art before a public that essentially won't allow it to be seen. Or rather, be seen on “my terms”. But my bark is worse than my bite.”*

31<sup>st</sup> May 2015

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

REX is an American artist, whose career began in New York in the mid-nineteen sixties. His meticulous black and white homoerotic drawings, rendered in a pointillist pen and ink technique, first appeared at a seminal moment in the sixties, when photographic pornography was still illegal but drawings and stories were protected by Supreme Court “free speech” rulings in the United States. His art was showcased in a number of pioneering gay American publications such as THE ADVOCATE and DRUMMER MAGAZINE. However, it was his hardcore drawings in a series of self-published portfolios circulating underground in America and Europe, that cemented his reputation as a leading cult artist of esoteric sexual imagery over the past five decades. His most internationally recognized work was a series of iconic posters and t-shirt designs for the legendary New York sex club THE MINESHAFT. A limited edition portfolio of his work – REXWERK – was published in Paris in 1986 and a hardcover retrospective of

his work REX – VERBOTEN was published by BRUNO GMÜNDER in Berlin 2012. As a chiaroscuro illustrator of perverse and psychologically disturbing images, he was branded “persona non grata” by the American art establishment which until today has refused to acknowledge his fecund imagery. In 2014 the CNCPT13 Gallery Amsterdam mounted a retrospective of 50 large prints and original drawings spanning the past four decades of his career. The artist resides in the Netherlands where he continues to work.

Works by the artist may be viewed online at [www.rexwerk.com](http://www.rexwerk.com)

## WIKIPEDIA:

**Rex** [Pseudonym – birth unknown –USA – American | drawings] is the pseudonym of a living American artist and illustrator closely associated with homosexual [fetish art](#) of 1970s and 1980s New York and San Francisco. He avoids photographs and does not discuss his personal life. His drawings influenced [gay culture](#) through graphics made for famous nightclubs including The [Mineshaft \(gay club\)](#) and his influence on artists such as [Robert Mapplethorpe](#). Much censored, he has remained a shadowy figure saying that his drawings "defined who I became" and that there are "no other 'truths' out there".

### Early life and work

Abandoned at birth his real name and exact birthday are unknown but references indicate a date in the 1940s. His childhood was spent as a Ward of The State on a farm in a small North-eastern town.<sup>[3]</sup> He ran away to New York as a teenager in the 1950s where he lived among Beatniks and on the streets of Greenwich Village. While still in his teens he became the protégée of a fashion designer who paid for two years study at the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan. He later worked there in fashion illustration and commercial art, a career that brought him to London and Paris in the late 1960s, while maintaining an apartment on Saint Mark's Place in Manhattan's East Village.

### Career before 1980

Disillusioned with commercial art, he dropped out for several years but re-emerged in the 1970s as one of the leading figures visualizing the fetish and S&M subculture in New York and later San Francisco. His distinctively styled black-and-white pen-and-ink drawings, quickly became synonymous with an emerging S&M graphic idiom that included artists [Tom of Finland](#), [Etienne \(artist\)](#) (Dom Orejudos, also known as ‘Stephen’, 1933–1991), Steve Masters (‘Mike’ Miksche, born David Leo Miksche, 1925–1964), and Luger ([Jim French \(photographer\)](#), born 1932). The raw sexual energy of REX’s early drawings resonated with a Leather Scene that was just emerging in [Greenwich Village](#), Chelsea and the [meatpacking district](#).

The illusiveness of all the artists was deliberate because explicit sexual erotic art, particularly homosexual in subject, was illegal, framed in vague language and enforced via contradictory

judgments before [Stonewall riots](#). He said "I signed myself REX because it was non-specific and untraceable in those days by the cops". Although explicit nudes aimed at gay men would become more permissible, conservative and [homophobic](#) social culture of the era still meant that involvement with [gay pornography](#) could have serious consequences.

As a freelance artist, initially working for pornographic series of Rough Trade pulp books (1972) illustrated with 12 images for each story, he produced poster commissions for a number of leather shops and gay bars around the US. His most famous work from this period were created for the notorious and legendary New York sex-club The [Mineshaft](#). The three posters and T-shirts he created for the club were sold in the tens of thousands during the 13 years of the club's existence and feature in the film [Cruising \(film\)](#) (night interiors were filmed elsewhere, but recreated the club's interiors and include Rex posters). His illustrations reflected the sexual activities and extreme end of newly empowered pre-AIDS gay community and celebrated the [Gay bathhouses](#) culture blatantly and without apology. Other commissions included the 1976 poster for the pioneering sex-boutique the Pleasure Chest (a [sex shop](#)) which led to his work appearing on early covers for the fledgling S&M orientated [Drummer Magazine](#) in 1977 and to advertisements for the leading amyl nitrite, 'poppers', brand BOLT in 1980. Commuting between New York and San Francisco, REX also produced posters, catalogues and calendars for The Trading Post, considered the first gay department store (1978 to 1981).

### Later career

On July 1, 1981 REX opened his own gallery, Rexwerk, in his [South of Market](#) (SOMA) studio on Hallam Street in San Francisco. Only ten days later it was destroyed in a fire started at The Barracks bath house that was undergoing renovation across the street. The fire could not have come at a worse time for July 1981 was also the same month the first case of AIDS was diagnosed in the city of San Francisco. His commercial work and original art nonetheless continued to appear as regular features in sexual magazines such as Manifest, Just Men, Torso, Inches, Uncut and In Touch. Other erotic artists such as Allen J ('A.Jay') Shapiro (died 1987), [Harry Bush](#) (1925-1994) and British artist [Bill Ward \(British erotic artist\)](#) (1927-1996)<sup>[4]</sup> were colleagues. Later commissions included posters for The Lure in New York and The Eagle in Washington DC and the original [The Saint \(club\)](#) parties.

When the AIDS pandemic emerged, the increasingly negative attitude towards the sexually liberated scene in both San Francisco and New York led to panic measures from civic authorities and calls from within the gay community to suppress and discourage sexual permissiveness and promiscuity, so prominently a feature of REX's work. Rather than submit to what he regarded as the resulting suffocating censorship, and increasingly depressed by the deaths from AIDS of nearly all his contemporaries, REX stopped publishing his work for several years. In 1992 he returned to New York and opened a 'by appointment only' private gallery called The Secret Museum at 218 Madison Avenue until the events of 9/11 closed down Manhattan's economy. In early 2002 he returned full-time to San Francisco where he had maintained a room over the Zeitgeist Bar on Valencia Street during his bi-coastal years between Manhattan and San Francisco (1976-2010). Disheartened by the conservative trend and lack of opportunities open to him in what he saw as an increasingly '[Politically Correct](#)' America, he moved to Europe in 2010 to live and work in Amsterdam.

## Stand alone works

REX published three 8- by 11-inch, 36-page bound portfolios of his black-and-white ink drawings entitled Mannspielen [5] (Man Games'). The increasingly conservative political climate meant news stands refused to sell them and from the start of the 1980s, his main source of income came from this mail-order business called 'Drawings by Rex' which issued privately printed, unbound portfolios of hard-core images. Beginning with 'Icons' (1977) a series of portfolios were advertised. Rarely shown or seen in their entirety; these carefully considered and structured sets are diminished in isolation or redacted details. Most artist of the era issued photographic prints not art prints. The only comparable previous works of this type were the commercially made lithographic prints of [George Quaintance](#) who also independently marketed his in the early 1950s.

His series of 8- by 10-inch, 12-print unbound portfolios were entitled (chronologically) Rexwerk, Uncut, Undercover, Armageddon, Scorpio, Rexland, Legends and Rex Sex-Freak Circus. The unbound format proved popular with buyers who had been frustrated for the need to dismantle the earlier bound book format collections to frame their favourite images. Rex's drawings, made over months, defy the throw away nature of most pure pornography and are more akin to a [Graphic novel](#), [Gay comics](#) and the Japanese tradition of [Shunga](#) prints. The 'standalone' portfolio images are highly polished and sophisticated, akin to the work of [Franz von Bayros](#) (1866-1924), known for his scandalous 'Tales from the Dressing Table' portfolio. The mood of REX's flop house interiors find parallels in the privately illustrated edition of [Jean Genet's](#) verses for 'Parade' illustrated with twenty explicitly homoerotic lithographs of drawings by [Roland Caillaux](#) (1905-1977).

## Reception and exhibitions

[Robert Mapplethorpe](#) knew REX and was attracted to his hard-core imagery relating to the [Mineshaft](#). The photographer developed a photographic portfolio that reflected the same themes and, like Rex, had strong links with the West Coast fetish scene (they both had work published by [Drummer](#) editor [Jack Fritscher](#)). The photographer was more focused on Los Angeles whilst Rex preferred San Francisco. His work secured an invitation in April 1978 from [Robert Opel](#) to have a one-man exhibit at his newly opened Fey Wey Gallery on Harrison Street in San Francisco. REX's hyper-masculine men of this period were best described by [Jack Fritscher](#), who was also one of Mapplethorpe's lovers, who he met Rex in person for the first time at the opening:-

**"Rex is artist of urban toilets, blue-collar hotels, filthy construction workers, greasy gas jockeys, muscled bikers, tattooed fighters, beautiful young homeless bums ... ex-cons, armpit-sweaty beautiful studs needing head - all these unshaved "lone wolves" in jockstraps, leather, boots, and torn tanktops ... who pay-per-night in sleaze-bag hotels where sailors, Marines, cops, and drifters lie back on stained mattresses, the smoke of their cigarettes drifting out the crack of their rooms, down to the toilet where the cracked urinal drips beer piss, and the graffiti-covered stall is drilled with gloryholes ..."**[6]

Like Mapplethorpe any exhibition of such scenes, which also include occasionally imagery suggesting bestiality, [urolognia](#) and sexual involvement with ephebophilic boys, are rare and dogged by controversy. In 1985 Rex was selected as one of the city's "100 Most Influential Artists" and shown as part of the Mayor's Art Gala.[7] He was represented by a work entitled 'Dogtreats' which drew immediate press condemnation in the San Francisco Chronicle. Richard D Mohr (Department of Philosophy at University of Illinois) struggled to find a publisher for 'Gay Ideas:

Outing and Other Controversies' (1994) specifically because it included work by Rex.<sup>[8]</sup> Richard Goldstein, writing in Village Voice, condemned the sexual activities of the fetish community and what he called its 'Naziphile' sympathies, pointing to Rex's work as evidence.<sup>[9]</sup> There have been few publicly accessible exhibitions of the artist's work as a result although he has found a more accepting climate in Amsterdam.

### Cultural impact and legacy

A hardcover book of fifty drawings (Rexwerk) was published in Paris in 1986 by Les Pirates Associes, a private press run by photographers Ralf Marsault and Heino Muller,<sup>[10]</sup> and Bruno Gmunder issued a book retrospective 'Verboten' in 2012 (the more controversial images were not included in this edition reflecting more nervousness around the subjects). A retrospective 'Persona Non Grata' was held at the nascent [Leslie Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art](#)'s early Prince's Street Address in 1994 (Rex's work is held by the Museum), but the complex and compelling imagery of the late 1980s and early 1990s in particular is still largely ignored and invisible in the mainstream art world (Sex Freak Circus was shown for one night only on March 7th, 2013 under the auspices of the Lohman Foundation and The Saint nightclub). In a book about his friend the Photographer [David Hurles](#) <sup>[11]</sup> Rex discussed what he regarded as the hypocritical attitude towards his brand of gay erotica, over "cookie cutter nudes" and "antiseptic, nonthreatening males posed in luxurious settings ... an idealised homoerotism with which viewers could feel at ease." Exhibiting with CNCPT13 in Amsterdam and Uncle Crickey's Closet in San Francisco.<sup>[12]</sup> The artist lives and works between Amsterdam and the USA and maintains a pay to view website.

### Notes

- Kalin 1990, p. 111; Hooven 1993, pp. 84–85.
- Löfström, p. 190.
- Correspondence with British artist Guy Burch, a friend of Mapplethorpe subject [Ossie Clark](#), regarding Bill Ward
- see Comics Unmasked Art and Anarchy in the UK, Paul Gravett & John Harris Dunning, British Library, 2014, ISDN 978 0 7123 5735 7 and <http://www.guyburch.co.uk/?p=2662>
- Vol 1 - 1975 & Vol 2 - 1976
- *"Virtual Drummer Article: Rex Video Gallery: Corrupt Beyond Innocence"*. [jackfritscher.com](#).
- Verbotten, Bruno Gmunder Verlag, 2012, [ISBN 3867874220](#)
- Richard D Mohr, 'Gay Ideas: Outing and Other Controversies' (1994) discussed in 'America the Philosophical' by Carlin Romano. Romano relates how Mohr's scholarly book was rejected by a series of publishers, both commercial (including the publishers of Madonna's 'Sex' book) and university presses, who objected to images of REX's being included.
- Village Voice, April 7, 1998
- Les Pirates Associes, Paris in 1986; [ISBN 978-2906463004](#)
- *Speeding, the Old Reliable Photos of David Hurles*, text and design by Rex, Green Candy Press, 2005, [ISBN 978-1931160391](#)  
*"Drawings by REX"*. [unclecrickey.com](#).

### External links

- [Rex website](#)