

CULTURED

7 Queer Artists Shed Light on the LGBTQIA+ Creatives Who Came Before Them



Jim Isermann at home in Palm Springs. Image courtesy of the artist.

Though a contemporary queer canon has been established and continually revisited over the past few decades, countless names have slipped through the cracks of art history—reduced to footnotes in a larger movement, relegated to archives, or confined by the moniker of "queer artist." To mark the culmination of a month that often emphasizes commerce over community, CULTURED invited seven of today's genre-bending artists to pay homage to an unsung queer elder who has shaped their work and inspired their lives.

JIM ISERMANN

The Wisconsin-born, California-based artist mines the domestic design universe's campiness to create playful and meticulous geometrical compositions.

Who is a queer artist who came before you who you think more people should know about?

Scott Burton, an openly gay artist who entered the art world through playwriting and the New York experimental theater scene of the 1970s. He is most well known for his site-specific commissions, including at Battery Park and the Equitable Center. His life was cut short by complications of AIDS.

How did you encounter Burton's work? Why were you drawn to it?

In 1979, when I was a grad student at CalArts, the powers that be scheduled me for a studio visit with Scott Burton. At the last minute, Burton canceled his trip. I didn't even know his name, but the missed visit piqued my curiosity. Without Google, my research took shape through library books, galleries, and museum collections. In 1989, I happened upon Burton's legendary Brancusi MoMA exhibition curated from their permanent collection in which he prioritized the unique pedestals. For possibly the first time ever, a rough-hewn stack of forms was exhibited as a sculpture in its own right—without the mirror-polished, impenetrable object atop it.

How has his work shaped yours?

Scott Burton gave this boy from the Midwest permission to embrace my obsession with architecture and interior design, to make unashamedly queer work. Like Burton, use became integral to my sculptural work—ever since my “Flower” exhibition in 1986 when seating and lighting sculptures functioned as gallery fixtures. For the last 20 years, I have taught Scott Burton's canny quotation of the vernacular and historical, his ability to simultaneously communicate to both the queer cognoscenti and the general populace. This is exactly where I want my work to live.



Scott Burton, Equitable Center, *Urban Plaza South*, 1985-86.

Image courtesy of NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project.