



Homo Riot

An L.A. street artist leaves his mark on Chicago

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During a weekend visit to Chicago, most people will content themselves with an architectural boat tour, a stroll through Millennium Park and a slice of deep-dish pizza. When L.A.-based street artist Homo Riot came to town in September, he spent his 48 hours spray painting the walls of Wicker Park and Logan Square with images of bearded men kissing and hanging posters near El lines that read, don't fuck with the gays. He returns Saturday 3 for the opening night exhibition of his work, "HOMO RIOT #losangelesqueer" at Bert Green Fine Art in the Loop.

A fashion stylist and fashion director for a Los Angeles retail company by day, Homo Riot (who prefers to remain anonymous) began creating art as a child in northwest Florida. "I was kind of born an artist," he says. "I was a little kid cutting things out of magazines and sticking them on walls and trying to always create."

As far back as 20 years ago he began practicing street art in the form of found objects left in the public space, but an activist flame wasn't lit until election night in 2008 when Proposition 8, the California voter initiative that stripped same-sex couples of the right to marry, passed with 52 percent of the vote. "I was just sure that it wasn't going to pass," he says. "When it did, I was so angry and instead of being rational about it I was just enraged."

In the aftermath of Prop 8, Homo Riot found himself working through his anger at home one night when he fused together a silhouette of two men having sex with a cartoon car bomb. The resulting picture clicked. "It felt right, this marriage of retribution or terrorist act along with pushing this naughty gay imagery, which is what I felt people that were voting for Prop 8 were reacting to, this base idea of what it means to be gay," he says. Homo Riot took to the streets of Los Angeles the next day and has been pushing queer imagery ever since.

His designs are masculine in energy and often include naked, bearish men posing provocatively against colorful backgrounds that recall a Pop Art influence he readily acknowledges. In one instance, a man in briefs puts his fists up to the viewer in fighting mode and his signature piece of art depicts a cartoon image of two bearded men locking lips. "I want gays to look strong and powerful and intimidating," he says. "That's why I go for this bear aesthetic. There's something about the bear identity that is big and masculine but also really approachable in many ways."

The public has taken notice. Homo Riot says social media has become the most visible indicator of success. He can search for it on Twitter using his hashtag or via uploads to Instagram. But the most

visceral reactions come from the way his art is hung in public and left to the viewer. "Sometimes pieces that I put up are shredded in this intentional way," he says. "They will literally peel the lips off the kissing guys just so that they're not kissing anymore. That's as powerful to me as somebody saying to me, 'I love your work.' "

If you're wondering where to find his work in Chicago, try hitting a bathroom, alleyway or any other place where gay men cruise for sex. "I feel like that's a place where it's meant to be," he says. "It's communicating with other gays."

This brings Homo Riot to where he is today. Even with a legal battle still being waged in court, he says his anger toward Proposition 8 and the right-wingers who fueled it has since cooled. "What I'm doing is not so much about being aggressive and trying to piss off Mormons and evangelicals," he says. "It's really about communicating with other gays and lesbians and saying, 'Hey, we are part of the street.' "

"HOMO RIOT #losangelesqueer" opens at Bert Green Fine Art Saturday 3.