

BRING IT!

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by
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PHOTO: JACQUES WALKS



I'd like to get past the current conversation about gay nightlife,

in which we tribal elders lament the gay generation gap and fret over how mixed the Castro has become. And I'd like to invite the baby gays to help me change the subject.

I certainly never thought I'd call myself "traditional," but lately I'm all about gay history. I recently attended a panel hosted by the **San Francisco Leathermen's Discussion Group** that discussed the question: "Is *Leather Dead? Does it Need to Die?*" A few days later, I thoroughly enjoyed the premier of a documentary film about flagging and fanning (the "flow arts") called "*A Flow Affair*" directed by **Wolfgang Busch**. And my new favorite dance class is "Vogue and Tone" taught by **Jocquese Whitfield** at **Dance Mission** on Tuesday nights.

Studying the "classic gay arts" got me thinking that you don't have to be scarred by the struggle to carry a flag for gay rights and gay identity. And you don't have to be a survivor of the AIDS epidemic – or even remember it – to respect the contributions it has made to our community. The lessons to be learned are universal. Living your truth and having the freedom to find your own groove.

So I'm expanding my scholarship in homosociology, from appreciator to curator. Instead of crying about what used to be, I'm working on cultivating artistic expression that is completely and uniquely gay. We really can't know who we are as a community unless we know where we've been and what we've been through, and it's the way our community reflects and remembers that makes me love my gays so much.

Awareness doesn't have to come in the form of debate or dogma. It can come in the form of disco and duckwalks. Even the baby gays who have never been touched by discrimination or death can get into the defiant aesthetic of **Tom of Finland** or the affirmational spirit of flagging as dancefloor meditation. You don't have to know that **Keith Haring** was taken from us too soon to love the exuberance he brought to activism, just as you don't need to understand the hardship of Harlem to be blown away by the sickening suicide drops of vogue balls.

My love of circuit parties and "parties with purpose" – events that give back to the community – was born during the tragic years of the AIDS epidemic, which redefined gayness forever. The injustice and urgency aren't as pronounced anymore, and I understand why it's painful to look back, but the distinctly gay art forms that helped people rally and heal and win political victory are no less inspiring.

Flagging in the Park, featured in "*A Flow Affair*," is a perfect tribute to beauty born from despair, celebrating the resilience and joy of our community's musical, visual and dance legacy in the **National AIDS Memorial Grove**. Keeping our tribal traditions alive and thriving brings us back to the best of us. It gives us new ways to bridge the gap and keep on bringing it, together.

