

Star Trick

Artist Dom Orejudos Is Etienne!

Written September-October 1977, this editorial promotion essay was published in *Drummer* 19, December 1977.

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- I. Author's Eyewitness Historical-Context Introduction written February 16, 2002

Dom Orejudos, Sam Steward, and Chicago DNA in *Drummer*

Written and produced October 1977 for my pal, Chicago artist Domingo Stephen Orejudos, and for my longtime friend and sexmate, Lou Thomas of Target Studio, who was announcing his publication of *Star Trick*, the new Target book of drawings by Dom-Etienne-Stephen Orejudos.

This editorial essay amounted to "advertising" in *Drummer* 19 (December 1977). Synergistically, I also planted it to promote the upcoming "Etienne and A. Jay - Joint Exhibition" at Robert Opel's Fey-Way Gallery, May 27 - June 9, 1978, San Francisco.

For that show, Opel commissioned two single drawings to be created for the Fey-Way invitation. It was a genius union. Chicago's Etienne drew one side of the pictures and San Francisco's A. Jay drew the other.

Within our growing salon of in-laws and outlaws, Lou Thomas also published my writing including my 1969 novel *I Am Curious (Leather)* in a limited private edition (1972).

This eyewitness-participant introduction to *Star Trick* is an example of the inclusive ways I worked to connect *Drummer* in San Francisco to leather culture in Chicago. Jeanne Barney had featured "The Etienne Portfolio" sold by Target Studio in the centerfold of *Drummer* 10 (November 1976).

As a favor within our *Drummer* fraternity, I wrote this little essay to accompany four pages of the cartoon narrative, *Star Trick*, by Dom

Orejudos with a photograph (page 74) of artist Orejudos lying in front of one of the large murals he painted for the Gold Coast Bar which he and Chuck Renslow, his partner from 1950-1991, had founded in 1958. By means of having their traveling “personal leather salon” spontaneously congregate at various Chicago bars, Renslow and Orejudos invented the first distinctly leather bar *during the first five years* after Marlon Brando brought leather biker culture out of the closet in *The Wild One* (1953).

Born in 1933, Dom Orejudos was seventeen in 1950 when the twenty-one-year-old Chuck Renslow spotted the muscular teenager on the sand crescent that is the Oak Street Beach, a block north of the Drake Hotel and the Miracle Mile. The man who would be their significant mentor, Samuel Steward, was forty-one, and living in Chicago since 1936.

All this Chicago leather action occurred during the 1950s-1960s beat-hippie-gay-leather revival on the Near North Side of Rush Street and Old Town. Doing research at the Newberry Library in the early 1960s, I often stared out the windows down into the trees and bushes and pathways of Bughouse Square to watch the hustlers signaling the johns cruising around the block in cars. It was while he was hustling there that the teenage David Sparrow—three years before he became my lover—was hired by Renslow and Orejudos as a back-bar bottle boy for the Gold Coast.

Dom was twenty when he gayed up his middle name to the French “Etienne” for the publication of his first art work in *Tomorrow’s Man* #8 (1953) published by Irv Johnson who ran the gym that Renslow and Orejudos would buy in 1958.

As a matter of fact, I grew up on Renslow-Orejudos’ homomasculine tastes. When I was a closeted teenager, *Tomorrow’s Man* was my favorite guilty-pleasure magazine. I was so imprinted and impressed that in 1965 I mentioned *Tomorrow’s Man* specifically in my first novel *What They Did to the Kid* (1965 and 2001), page 112. (Much of *Kid* takes place in Chicago; *Kid* is the prequel to my memoir-novel *Some Dance to Remember* which is the story of the main character in *Kid* moving from Chicago to San Francisco where he becomes editor of a magazine very like *Drummer*.) Beginning at age fourteen, my personal erotic maturation in homomascularity was zero degrees of separation from Renslow’s models and Orejudos’ art direction. I understood that *Tomorrow’s Man* was an occasion of mortal sins against purity—as I confessed to priests—because it tempted me to masturbation, but I could not stop looking. I did not know then that Dom (1933-1991) was only six years older than I and Renslow (born 1929) only ten years older. People ten years senior to or younger than a person are that person’s generation.

Latin Leather Pioneers

The quintessential presence of the Latin artist Domingo Orejudos as one of the central action figures creating leather culture, and as a universally beloved person as well, indicates the ethnic diversity at the formative core of our inclusive leather culture. In San Francisco, Mario Simon, the longtime partner of founding *Drummer* publisher John Embry, was an immigrant from Spain who became associate publisher of *Drummer*. In October 1979 when *Drummer* art director Al Shapiro (a very close friend of Etienne) and Embry and I picked the first Mr. *Drummer*, we chose the Brazilian immigrant Val Martin (Vallot Martinelli) who appeared dozens of times on the cover and in the pages of *Drummer* as well as in films by Fred Halsted. In face, physique, and sweet temperament, if Dom Orejudos had been separated at birth, his twin would have been my longtime intimate, Tony Tavarossi, who was legendary in San Francisco leather the way Dom was in Chicago leather.

For more on race and ethnicity in *Drummer* and leather culture, see *The Drummer Salon* in this *Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness* series, and my erotic biography *Mapplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera* (1994).

Having come out in Chicago in the early 1960s, I became personally familiar with the Renslow-Orejudos leather family. Everyone drooled over their Triumph Gym, was imprinted by their photography at Kris Studio (1950-1979), and cruised through their bar businesses like the Gold Coast and the Man's Country Baths. I played in the heady and "outlaw" leather culture spun out of the Black Castle where they lived. When I moved to San Francisco, I took many Chicago leather values and ideas, and years later folded them into my version of *Drummer*. I also "married into the Renslow clan" when on July 6, 1969, I met the Gold Coast bartender David Sparrow who quit to become my domestic lover for ten years (1969-1979). With our Chicago values, we moved permanently to San Francisco and photographed many covers and centerfolds as a duo shooting for *Drummer* during the issues I edited from March 1977 to December 31, 1979 (*Drummer* 18 - *Drummer* 33).

This thin slip of an article on *Star Trick* occasions this introduction of its surrounding history that emphasizes that gay life exists at six — maybe three, maybe zero — degrees of separation.

It also demonstrates the roots of *Drummer*, and how everything that rose within leather culture converged to make *Drummer* possible. *Drummer* did not spring full-blown from the head of John Embry, Jeanne Barney, or me. Without Chicago's on-going leather heritage, *Drummer* would not have been invented in LA and perfected in San Francisco.

Blaine Cunningham, my travel partner in Europe in the wild spring of 1969, introduced me to Dom Orejudos during a concert at the Lincoln Park band shell, July 4, 1969. The bunch of us were picnicking in a leather group together, and Dom and I laid in the grass sharing a joint, surrounded by John Philip Souza and fireworks and shirtless men in leather vests, beginning an acquaintance that lasted until his death; we were both judges for Mr. *Drummer*, and before his final illness we were in correspondence about my directing and shooting an *Etienne Video Gallery* in the style of the other video galleries I had created for Dom's peers: Rex, the Hun, A. Jay, Domino, and Skipper.

In a zero-degrees letter from Boulder, Colorado, October 12, 1988, Dom "Etienne" Orejudos expressed his interest in my translating his drawings from page to screen:

Hi Jack:...Yes, let's follow through on discussing the possibility of an Etienne video gallery by you at Palm Drive. I've had some ideas in that area (video) for some time now, and I'm sure we could come up with something interesting. I enjoyed visiting with you during the Mr. *Drummer* Contest weekend [We were both judges]...I'll look forward to seeing you again....

Sincerely, Dom

Used with permission of Chuck Renslow and the Leather Archives & Museum.

His last thirty-six months of illness kept Dom from going forward with our project. Without his own video gallery, and before the public had access to the Internet, he died September 24, 1991, with our video feature unfinished. During the sad time of his oncoming death, Renslow, his partner of forty years, was inspired to create — with *Drummer* publisher Anthony DeBlase — the Leather Archives and Museum of Chicago which was founded in 1991 to preserve the artwork of Etienne and then by extension other artists and artifacts of leather heritage. Seven years earlier in Los Angeles, the nonprofit Tom of Finland Foundation had been created in 1984 with its own mission to preserve the homomale artwork of Tom of Finland and other gay artists.

Excerpt source: ©[Jack Fritscher](#), [Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer](#), San Francisco: [Palm Drive Publishing](#), 2008

In the way that Renslow-Orejudos ran a salon of artists and bohemian leathermen out of the Gold Coast in the 1950s, and in homage to their style (in which Dom would later introduce Durk Dehner to Tom of Finland in 1979), I figured it made sense for me in 1977 to follow their model and create a salon around *Drummer* because a magazine requires many talented people—and an erotic magazine requires a salon of even more specifically talented people, all having tons of sex (often with each other). It was, in fact, former Renslow-Orejudos family member Sam Steward who first used the word *salon* to describe the team of friends and pals I pulled together around *Drummer* in the 1970s.

I made sure there was less than one degree of separation between Chicago leather and San Francisco leather in *Drummer*. Dom appreciated my fidelity to my Chicago leather roots. He was an enterprising businessman who saw publication of his drawings in *Drummer* as free international advertising for the Renslow-Orejudos Chicago enterprises that had worldwide consumer appeal. Wally Wallace, the founder of the Mineshaft in New York, wrote in the *Mineshaft Newsletter* that he felt the same way about my coverage hymning the Mineshaft to leather tourists from around the globe in *Drummer* 18 (December 1977).

When I took over the reins of *Drummer*, I did not know that my allegiance to Chicago leather, which was so formative to my personal coming out, would be questioned by publisher John Embry. He wanted to compete with Renslow and Orejudos who had invented their International Mr. Leather contest from their experience running sanctioned AAU physique contests in venues like the Lawson YMCA.

Chicago: The Lawson YMCA

I feel compelled to make this eyewitness *tableau vivant* aside: The Lawson YMCA was a block from where I lived at 60 East Chicago Street at the foot of Rush Street and not far from the cruise-y Oak Street Beach. I had rooms above a socialist bookstore that was bombed one afternoon in 1964 while I was writing *What They Did to the Kid*. (Luckily, it was a small bomb.) In the 1960s, when I was in my twenties, the Lawson YMCA was a sperm-o-rama orgy party from the roof sundeck down through the rooms and toilets, down through the stairwells where I had to step over writhing bodies, down to the showers and the pool. This was the Chicago scene in which Renslow and Orejudos flourished—years before Stonewall.

Meanwhile, back at *Drummer*, I watched Embry grow green with envy (in my opinion) over the new idea of IML. He immediately ordered me to begin a Mr. *Drummer* contest. (I refused.) That arm-wrestle is detailed in *Gay San Francisco: The Drummer Salon*.

It was in my *Drummer* 31 (September 1979) that I wrote the first national and international coverage of the first IML in order to salute and support Renslow, Orejudos, Chicago, and IML.

My review was reprinted by leather scholar Joseph W. Bean in his history of IML, *International Mr. Leather: 25 Years of Champions* (2004) published by the Chicago Leather Archives and Museum.

In fraternity in *Drummer*, I promoted Dom-Etienne, who was already a legend as a bodybuilder and dancer and artist from the 1950s, because I wanted the DNA I was injecting into *Drummer* to show off its gay leather roots out of the heartland in Chicago.

Some people—who don't know we suspect they're playing "Where's Waldo?"—say they got stoned at Woodstock in 1969, and thousands claim they were in the Stonewall Bar which must have been as crowded as the Black Hole of Calcutta. In the 1960s, I was carried out of Mayor Daley's office during a civil rights demonstration while working with The Woodlawn Organization (TWO) in August 1962. I was laid by my first leathermen in Chicago in 1964, and I was beaten up by the Chicago police during the Democratic Convention in August 1968. Wonderfully turned on by the eroticism of it all, I always ran off to the nearby Gold Coast bar for comfort and safety and sex.

Chicago-San Francisco connections were everywhere in my extra-curricular *Drummer* life in the 1960s and 1970s. Cliff Raven aka Cliff Ingram, another member of the extended Renslow family, was the artist who tattooed David Sparrow and me in 1969. Raven had taken his name from advice given him by Chicago personality Samuel Steward who had pulled off the double-identity act of being both a university professor at DePaul and a tattoo artist in the Loop—until the university stopped his moonlighting. Sam in his tattoo parlor lusted, as did homomasculinist photographer Renslow and artist Orejudos in their Triumph Gym on Van Buren Street, for the hot young sailors coming into the Loop on leave from the Great Lakes Naval Training Station where the glittering North Shore of Chicago sucked them down from industrial Waukegan.

With his credentials from Gertrude Stein, Sam Steward was the avatar of intellect and esthetics within the Renslow and Orejudos salon. Sam was a kind of Super-Ego to their Ego and Id. He taught Renslow how to tattoo and tutored the tastes of the twenty-year-old Orejudos whom he casually schooled in the homoerotic ballet photography of George Platt-Lynes who was a friend of Stein and Toklas. To them Sam sent a black-

and-white snapshot of himself appearing as an “extra” with the New York City Ballet. (This impressed Orejudos.) Sam was a teacher and a reporter; he was a constant analyst collecting information and statistics about the emerging Chicago gay sex scene, leather culture, and tattooing folkways that he personally reported to Dr. Alfred Kinsey at the nearby Kinsey Institute. In the Titanic 70s, he pumped me to keep him up with every detail of the latest sex fads in San Francisco.

If history wants an illustration of what was the main *idée fixe* stored and replayed on a loop inside Sam Steward’s head, I would point to Paul Cadmus’ *The Fleet’s In*. That infamous painting, as a national American art scandal, pre-dated Mapplethorpe in 1934 when Sam, an impressionable young man of twenty-five, was soaking up the world and had already corresponded for two years with Stein. Sam, tipping on the edge in France with Gertrude’s “Lost Generation,” had only just met his Stein and Alice B. Toklas in 1937 at Bilignin, a year after he was fired from his college teaching job at State College in Washington for writing the novel *Angels on the Bough* (1936) which echoes E. M. Forster’s *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905). Sam admired Forster who was thirty years older than Sam and was the author of *A Passage to India* (1924) and of *Maurice* published posthumously in 1971 to the delight of “Samuel Morris Steward” fresh out of his tattoo parlor in Oakland and sitting pretty in his arts-and-crafts cottage at 2016-x Ninth Street in Berkeley.

Sam Steward was an esthete who wrote, sketched, and painted referencing cool classical museum culture warmed with hot-blooded sensuality from the streets. Upper crust and lusting after “les miserables,” Sam was magnificently carnal in his hands-on tattooing of the young flesh of muscular rebels without a cause (including the original *Rebel without a Cause*, James Dean whose forearm Sam tattooed with a black panther before that image became racially political). Sam who was the artful dodger “Phil Andros” and “Phil Sparrow” liked his homomascuine tough guys “down and dirty” in real occupations like sailors and cops. Dom who was “Etienne” and “Stephen” liked his homomascuine “chaps in chaps” idealized as irresistible leather tops and cherry-ripe leather bottoms with no more real occupations than Betty Page. Sam *pere* brought every innuendo he had to his tutorial of Dom *filis*. The art historian Justin Spring, author of *Paul Cadmus: The Male Nude* (2002), is writing the forthcoming biography of Sam Steward. He informed me on April 19, 2007, that Sam and Dom occasionally worked together on drawings, and that Dom turned his hand to illustrating Sam’s story “The Motorcyclist.”

Cadmus’ pop-style satire *The Fleet’s In* influenced the queer zeitgeist — and ballet dancer Orejudos — when legendary gay choreographer Jerome Robbins and bisexual composer Leonard Bernstein based their

ballet *Fancy Free* (1944) on the Cadmus painting. Gay men of that era, including Steward and Renslow and Orejudos, watched the queer evolution of “sequels” as that famous painting became that famous ballet which became the Broadway musical *Fancy Free* (1944) which became the musical-comedy dance film *On the Town* (1949) starring Frank Sinatra, Gene Kelly, and Ann Miller.

With show business in his blood, Dom Orejudos was a classic ballet choreographer and principal dancer with the Illinois Ballet Company. At the same time he was art director for Kris Studio. Lightly guided by Sam, he chose Kris’ dramatic, classic, often stage-y themes, designed the Platt-Lynes’ Balanchine-meets-Hollywood glamour lighting, and posed the heteromasculine models that the more technical photographer Chuck Renslow artfully lensed.

In the indie-movie narrative of their relationship, whose screenplay I’d like to write in the fashion of Christopher Hampton’s *Total Eclipse*, Dom intermittently grew his own identity and absented himself from Renslow and Kris Studio to dance in touring companies of *Song of Norway*, *The King and I*, and *West Side Story*. Leather artist Chuck Arnett was also a chorus boy. He arrived in San Francisco with the touring company of *Bye Bye Birdie* (1960) and never left. He settled into the waterfront gay scene of San Francisco at the foot of Folsom Street, created the Tool Box bar in 1961, three years after the founding of the Gold Coast which he had enjoyed while *Birdie* played Chicago. As the “Leather Lautrec of Folsom Street,” Arnett, unlike Orejudos, was listed under “Contributors” on the masthead of *Drummer*. As a muralist, Arnett inspired Orejudos.

In *Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer*, see my leather-history feature “Artist Chuck Arnett,” *Drummer* 134 (October 1989); Arnett was one of the original charter members of the *Drummer* salon.

Because of cross-pollination inside Renslow’s Chicago leather salon, I think it reveals something about Orejudos to examine a bit about his senior mentor Sam Steward.

The aristocratic Sam Steward was a different class than Renslow and Orejudos, but they both had more testosterone. Sam, the sage and teacher, had this lyric whimsy that tattooists, at least tattoo artists under his tutelage, should be named after birds. Cliff Raven followed his advice, but Sam’s protégé Ed Hardy and others did not convert.

(Sam was immensely amused that *Sparrow* was truly David Sparrow’s family name. He found it very “Edna St. Vincent Millay, very ‘Passer Mortuus Est.’” *Spero* in Latin means “I hope.” Sam wrote a monthly column, 1942-1949, for the *Illinois Dental Journal* using the pen name “Philip Sparrow.”)

I think Sam's romantic idea of the role of the tattoo artist inflicting beauty and pain at the same time was reinforced by Tennessee Williams' very popular bird imagery of the 1950s. Savage birds of beauty fly through Tennessee Williams' stories and dramas such as *Sweet Bird of Youth* and *Suddenly Last Summer*. Williams' first play has a title that sounds in fact like a description of a tattoo: *I Rise in Flame Cried the Phoenix*. After Williams penned *The Rose Tattoo* (1951), Sam, who began tattooing in 1952, had a rose tattooed on his own chest. As Gertrude might have claimed, the link of ink may have signified nothing more than "a rose is a rose is a rose." The S&M theme of beauty inflicting pain was the subtext of Kris Studio's photographs and of Etienne's artwork of heroized sadists.

Sam was especially fond of Williams' short story about a stunning young sailor, "One Arm," which he told me that he wished he himself had written. Sam appreciated my writing of the first doctoral dissertation on Tennessee Williams in 1967. He also appreciated that my doctorate was from Chicago's Loyola University where he himself had taught for ten years (1936-1946) before transferring to DePaul University, also in Chicago. In 1964, before we knew each other, we had both met Tennessee Williams, separately, when Williams was in Chicago for the premiere of *Eccentricities of a Nightingale* at the Goodman Theater. On Sam's book shelf, he had an autographed copy of the New Directions anthology called *One Arm* with its final story "The Yellow Bird."

In the helix of art and imagery, Sam made Dom aware that his first short-fiction anthology was *Pan and the Firebird* (1930). Dom himself famously choreographed both *The Firebird* and *Metamorphosis of the Owls*. As the resident literary guru in the Renslow-Orejudos clan, before he fell out with Renslow and Orejudos (they later reconciled) and took off for greener pastures in California (tattooing Sonny Barger and the Hells Angels), Sam Steward also suggested the name for the Renslow drag-show bar "Sparrows." The Renslow-Orejudos Chicago Eagle, like Eagle bars everywhere, is part of this almost universal gay-bird bar imagery whose roots lie somewhere in the mythic rising of the phoenix firebird.

A veteran of the Renslow-Orejudos family and the Stein-Toklas charmed circle, Sam Steward required "salons." When he moved to Berkeley, six years before *Drummer* began, he moved into the 1970s San Francisco leather salon of Jim Kane and Ike Barnes and David Sparrow and me which he remained part of until his death in 1993—even after I exited that group because Kane wanted my Sparrow, and I wasn't a bottom. Individually, Sam and I had much in common in personality and synchronicity. In 1966, again, three years before we met, we had both attended the wild Chicago premiere of Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising* at the Illinois Institute of Technology in the company of Chuck

Renslow, Dom Orejudos, Cliff Raven, Bob Maddox, and a gang from the Gold Coast. In 1969, Sam was introduced to me by my longtime leather partner, the S&M Catholic priest Jim Kane, with whom I toured the American West by Harley-Davidson in June 1969. Kane and I cycled from Denver to Santa Fe and Taos where one night of a thousand stars, tripping, I floated barefoot, in jeans, shirtless in a swimming pool wearing Ken Kesey's brown leather jacket and dreaming of Neal Cassady after whom I lusted.

In 1961, so much had drawn me to San Francisco. That summer of 1969 so much kept drawing me back to Chicago. It gives me a palpable chill to write this, but that "Summer of 69," that summer of Dom Orejudos and David Sparrow, that summer before Stonewall even happened, this erotic leather-salón "incest" signified a brotherhood of homomascularity. That summer of 1969 focused a very high-energy on sexual liberation in the gay male world. Everything went wild. In Chicago, and other large cities, very "out" elaborate and scheduled orgies happened on the erotic numerology date 6/9/69.

As told, Sam Steward, who had been mild-mannered enough to be an intimate of Gertrude Stein, Alice B. Toklas, James Purdy, Chuck Renslow, and Dom Orejudos, was a university professor teaching English in Chicago when he took up tattooing in 1952 in a parlor under the El tracks around the Loop in order to get his hands on the tough straight guys that for him, and for many gay men, are the *sine qua non* of desire. He told me he learned how to tattoo by practicing on potatoes. Sam Steward was Chicago's Jean Genet. DePaul University, hearing of his "inappropriate activities" at first refused to give him tenure and a raise. In fact, his biographer Justin Spring wrote to me on July 3, 2007, that DePaul decided not to renew his contract and told him to resign. Like his friend James Purdy (and I) who quit teaching university because he was underpaid and wanted to write full time, Sam traded the ivory tower of academic sheepskin for the tattoo parlor of death-before-dishonor cheap skin.

Having had a "quarrel" with Renslow, Sam exited Chicago for California in 1967 at the age of fifty-eight. Playing the "old gent" card as if he were seventy-eight, he was the male version on the West Coast of Quentin Crisp playing the female spinster on the East Coast. Drawn to the university ambience of Berkeley, he wisely bought a property with two houses, one of which, he rented to generate income.

In 1974, the first post-Stonewall decade, before the liberated gay world had heard of its forbear Sam Steward, I received a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Grant at UC Berkeley, and a Western Michigan University Research Grant to finish several hours of interview

of Sam Steward and his fabulous life that I had begun audio-taping in 1972. He modestly said he was interesting because of his friends like Gertrude and Alice and Kenneth Anger and Etienne, but I thought he was interesting in himself. Sam and Etienne were similarly modest and self-effacing, but they brooked no shit. Frankly, I loved Sam as a friend. In many ways, we were doppelgangers who did not fawn over each other. We were living the same life thirty years apart—him thirty years ahead, with me following in new improved, more liberal times. He thought so too. We both had in common: higher education in Columbus, Ohio; sex and university teaching in Chicago; gay and non-gay writing, S&M, cops, Catholicism, bad boys, *Drummer*, and on and on.

Sam and I appreciated critic Michael Bronski who linked our erotic writing together in his seminal article “S/M: The New Romance” in *Gay Community News* (Boston), Volume 2, Number 30, February 16, 1985. It was too narcissistic for us to have sex. “Take off just your shirt,” he’d tease, because neither of us was the other’s type. I gave him police patches for his fetish collection to feed his addiction to cops. After I went undercover as a gonzo reporter for *Drummer* in 1989 to role-play with real cops at the famous Academy Training Center, Sam invited me to lunch, and at the steam-table cafeteria he preferred near his home, he milked me for details beyond what I published in *Drummer* 145 (December 1990). His only real-world request to me had been that I not use the information on my tapes until after he was dead, because he said, “I have to live off these stories in my writing and lectures.”

On April 23, 1990, Sam, who was a superb memoirist, wrote me a letter about my novel *Some Dance to Remember*:

My god, what a book!...a real page-turner...beautifully handled crises of the golden age, all gone and lost....I wouldn't be surprised if you have written what will come to be looked on as that period's Great American Gay Novel....you really got me with the ten pages of Ryan's memories [the operative word behind all my writing of gay history] beginning on page 35. What lovely stuff! Thanks...especially for page 19...

©Estate of Sam Steward administered by Michael Williams. Used with permission.

...on which I mentioned him because I owed him for pioneering the path.

In early 1970, reading Sam Steward's fiction, published in Europe but unknown in the United States, I decided, with this precise verb, to *resurrect* him. (He had no American identity and I thought he should be a gay “brand name” like Etienne, like John Rechy, like Kenneth Anger.

In 1990, smirking, he thanked me for priming the post-1978 stream of “gay groupies,” and literary fans like John Preston, who sought to pay him court after his publication in *Drummer*.) I edited him by lightly updating several of his stories which I told him to send to Jeanne Barney who was the editor of *Drummer* in LA in 1975. Because of Sam, his friend James Purdy also sent a story to *Drummer*, but, as Purdy himself told me in 2007, his agent blinked and withdrew the story.

Sam’s fiction appeared several times in *Drummer*:

- “Babysitter,” illustrated by Chuck Arnett, *Drummer* 5 (March 1976), and
- “Many Happy Returns,” illustrated by Arnett, cover created by Sam’s Chicago protégé Cliff Raven, *Drummer* 8 (September 1976).
- When I was editor in chief, I published Sam’s “In a Pig’s Ass,” illustrated with photos by Falcon Studio, *Drummer* 21 (March 1978). Attached to Sam’s typed manuscript for “A Pig’s Ass” was a letter to me dated January 9, 1978. Sam wrote: “Dear Jack...The enclosed Xerox is by Dom Orejudos.” He thought Dom’s drawing perfect for his story, but that issue needed photos.
- Again, as editor in chief, I published his Catholic short story “Priest: This Is My Body - Hustling in Chicago” in the “Virtual *Drummer*” of *Man2Man Quarterly* #2, December 1980.

In “Priest,” the disciplined hedonist Sam Steward wrote the wonderful principle he lived by: “Man should be called to account for all the permitted pleasures he failed during life to enjoy.”

For my introduction to the 25th Anniversary Edition of Larry Townsend’s *The Leatherman’s Handbook* (1997), I wrote an homage:

Chicago leather society, inspired by the Kris standard of masculinity, led the charge of the Leather Liberation Brigade. Renslow’s zeitgeist, with photo images and drawings and paintings by Dom Orejudos, was as pivotal to the creation of the American leather archetype as was the fine-art “cartooning” of Tom of Finland who was introduced to the United States by Bob Mizer via his LA-based *Physique Pictorial* magazine in 1957.

Mizer began Athletic Model Guild (AMG) in LA in 1945 and *Physique Pictorial* in LA in 1950. Renslow and Orejudos, having debuted

Kris Studio in Chicago in 1950, published the small-format magazines *Triumph* (one issue in 1960) and *Mars* (1963). *Tomorrow's Man* had rolled out in 1952. Together and separately, Mizer, and Renslow — supported by Orejudos, fought the 1960s laws against posting frontal nudity through the United States mail. They won, and thereby opened the gates for the creation of gay liberation, gay publishing, gay magazines, subscriptions, and gay mail order. Etienne was part of that social action, and he was published widely. Those men were humanists who were essentialists who knew that nudity is one specific element required by homosexual art.

The Leather Mural Movement:
Gay Bars as Gay Art Galleries

Dom Orejudos aka Etienne aka Stephen helped invent the “Leather Mural Movement” (1962-1979) that re-conceived “gay bars as the first gay art galleries.” That titanic concept inspired the founding of the first gay gallery businesses such as Fey-Way in San Francisco, Eons in LA, and Stompers in Greenwich Village.

If there is a gay Mount Rushmore of four great pioneer pop artists, the faces would be Chuck Arnett, Etienne, A. Jay, and Tom of Finland. If there could be a fifth face, I would nominate Skipper aka Glenn Davis. When I was editor in chief, all of them were associates in the salon around *Drummer*.

- In 1962, Chuck Arnett painted the cement wall inside his San Francisco bar, the Tool Box, with the legendary Lascaux mural that shocked the world in the pages of *Life* magazine, June 26, 1964, five years, almost to the day, before Stone-wall, June 27, 1969.
- In 1972, Etienne painted his mural-posters for the Gold Coast. (Uncredited murals adorned the Mineshaft.)
- In 1974, Tom of Finland painted the murals for the wall of Tom’s Saloon in Hamburg.
- In June 1977, A. Jay aka Al Shapiro, the founding San Francisco art director of *Drummer*, painted the murals for the new Leatherneck bar in San Francisco.
- In 1979, Skipper whose work first appeared in *Drummer* 15 painted the Sanctuary bath panels later installed at Dick Saunders’ Probe disco in LA, and those installations can be

seen in the background of the scenes in the Richard Gere film *American Gigolo* (1980) shot on location at Probe.

Dick Saunders, *Frontier Bulletin Gazette*,
and Probe Disco

Dick Saunders was the founding publisher and pioneering editor of the *Frontier Bulletin Gazette* which he started up in Los Angeles in January 1965 as a homomasculine newsletter for his cowboy-western themed Frontier Club. Very pre-Stonewall, and pre-dating *The Advocate* by two years and *Drummer* by ten years, *Frontier Bulletin Gazette* made the well-built model, Dick Saunders, a household word in LA fifteen years before he began writing and publishing the *Probe* newsletter from December 1980 through the arson fire in September 1983. In the zero degrees of separation, Saunders sold Probe disco to the man who founded *Frontiers* magazine after asking Saunders for permission to approximate his *Frontier* title. For years, Saunders and I shared—without then knowing we were sharing—a significant lover who was a great beauty in his day, and about whom we still compare (sniggering) notes while time marches on across the two-timer's face.

Search elsewhere in this *Gay San Francisco Eyewitness* series for “gay bars as art galleries” and for “Tom of Finland” in *Gay San Francisco: The Drummer Salon*. See also the related articles I wrote on Etienne's peer group of artists: “Tom Hinde,” *Drummer* 16 (June 1977); “The Leatherneck,” inclusion of A. Jay, *Drummer* 18 (August 1977), “Rex Revisited” (*Son of Drummer*, September 1978), “Domino,” *Drummer* 29 (August 1979), “Martin of Holland,” *Drummer* 31 (September 1979), “A. Jay,” *Drummer* 107 (August 1987), and “Chuck Arnett: His Life, Our Times,” *Drummer* 134 (October 1989).

Like the homomasculine Tom of Finland, Etienne had a natural erotic eye untrained by any academy. His style, open to eros and comedy, was like the best sex graffiti lifted off the walls of the toilets from Lascaux to Montmartre to the present. In the way one can tell a Pissarro from a

Picasso, and a Monet from a Manet, one can immediately identify an Etienne drawing or painting in a line up of his equally distinct peers, Tom of Finland, Rex, A. Jay, Skipper, Domino, and the Hun—all of whom followed Etienne into leather publishing and owe him respect as an activist pioneer who helped remake the laws that made their graphic careers legal in the United States. Many fans compare Etienne to Tom of Finland, but Etienne compares perhaps more closely to A. Jay with his comic-strip style of images, dialog, and humor which he debuted as his *Harry Chess* in *Queen's Quarterly* magazine in 1969. Etienne and A. Jay linked themselves together forever with their joint show at Fey-Way (1978). In their particular artists' salon, Tom of Finland and Etienne and A. Jay were personally the best of friends.

Etienne's style was suitably hyperbolic for a commercial leather culture that in the psychedelic 1960s and 1970s saw gay sex through a gorgeous haze of pot and poppers. Arnett, who was a primal artist, saw masculine sex through a rainbow quiver of acid and crystal meth.

Etienne's view of the homomasculine ideal is of an iconic Olympus populated with men as leather gods as imagined in a mix of Brando's *The Wild One* (1953), Steve Reeves' *Hercules* (1959), and Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising* (1964). His talent for dramatic movement and story arcs, developed on stage in his choreography, informed his cartoon-strip narratives. Nevertheless—and this is the elephant in the X-rated room—Etienne's work, quite important historically, is, like A. Jay's, revered for its heart and humor and qualities other than generating a universal masturbatory response. Unlike cum-minded artists Rex, Skipper, Domino, Martin of Holland, and the Hun, Etienne had other goals than causing guys to jerk off.

Much of Etienne's work—and this is nothing against its inherently beautiful esthetic—was zoned “commercial” in that it was produced as posters and advertising for venues and events within the leather world invented, owned, managed, and promoted by Renslow and Orejudos. Etienne was exceptional in that he is one of the few gay artists who actually made a living from his art.

He succeeds historically because his images relish the fun of leather sexuality, and because he maybe even dares to satirize the golden *gravitas* of the 1960s and 1970s leather scene that was ruined in the 1980s when leather culture went all balls-up, kumbaya, and commercial in the gaystream.

One thing is certain, and this is no idle eulogy, because it was true when he was alive: the person Dom Orejudos was a sweet, gentle, and beloved man. In that regard, he was exactly like the very sweet and gentle

A. Jay and the sweet and beloved Tom of Finland, and very like his mentor, the universally beloved Sam Steward.

- A. Jay (Al Shapiro): February 7, 1932 - May 30, 1987
- Tom of Finland: May 8, 1920 - November 7, 1991
- Etienne (Dom Orejudos): July 1, 1933 - September 24, 1991
- Sam Steward: July 23, 1909 - December 31, 1993
- Skipper (Glenn Davis): November 14, 1944 - Living

For anyone wishing to consider the link between the private art of Sam Steward and the popular art of Etienne, Sam's heretofore mostly unseen drawings, engravings, and paintings can be surveyed in the book *The Visual Art of Sam Steward* by Justin Spring, forthcoming from Elysium Press.

II. The editorial promotion essay as published in *Drummer* 19, December 1977

Reviewing the Best Gay Artists...

Star Trick Artist Dom Orejudos Is Etienne!

Darth Vader has nothing on Dom's "Captain Kirk." In fact, *Star Trick's* Captain Kirk has nothing on at all. At last, *Star Trek's* best special effects hang revealed. No longer is the enterprising spacemeat basketed in those bouncy JC Penney pajamas.

Strip a Trekie. Get a Trickie.

Drummer gladly sneak previews *Star Trick*. This strip is the latest by starwalker Dom Orejudos who signs his murals and paintings as "Etienne" and "Stephen." Dom aims to please. *Drummer* aims to tease. After all, no preview ought to expose the great lengths to which Dom's drawings go. Suffice it to say that a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away, Captains Outrageous dived head first into the ultimate space probe.

Star Trick is a marvel of a comic. For men who appreciate uncut cockamamy plots and tongue-in-cheeks humor, *Star Trick* is a collectible available in this galaxy from New York's Target Studio.

May the farce be with you.

Opposite page. Top: Invitations, Eons Gallery, Los Angeles, Sunday, May 7, 1978, and Fey-Way Studios, San Francisco, Friday May 26, 1978. Etienne and A. Jay each drew half of each invitation. Used with permission of Chuck Renslow and the Leather Archives & Museum and the Estate of A. Jay, administered by Dick Kriegmont.

Excerpt source: ©[Jack Fritscher](#), [Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer](#), San Francisco: [Palm Drive Publishing](#), 2008

III. Eyewitness Illustrations

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Bottom: “*Drummer* Salonistas A. Jay (Al Shapiro) and Etienne (Dom Orejudos),” at the opening of the Etienne and A. Jay Joint Exhibit, Fey-Way Studios, Friday, May 26, 1978. Editor in chief Jeanne Barney had first published Etienne in *Drummer* 10 (November 1976). Publicity kit photograph by Efren Ramirez. ©Efren Ramirez.

Excerpt source: ©[Jack Fritscher](#), [Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer](#), San Francisco: [Palm Drive Publishing](#), 2008

Telegram from owners “Lowell and Herb” of the Eons Gallery to Etienne and A. Jay on their joint opening at Fey-Way Studio, May 26, 1978. The last closet in the world is exited by revealing one’s true surname. Used with permission of Chuck Renslow and the Leather Archives & Museum and the Estate of A. Jay, administered by Dick Kriegmont.

Left to right: Tom of Finland, Chuck Renslow, and Dom Orejudos, 1983 International Mr. Leather Contest, Chicago. Publicity kit photograph by Jack Sitar for IML Inc. Used with permission of Chuck Renslow and the Leather Archives & Museum.

Excerpt source: ©[Jack Fritscher](#), *[Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer](#)*, San Francisco: [Palm Drive Publishing](#), 2008

Two posters by Etienne for the Gold Coast bar, Chicago. Top right: The inscription is to Tony Tavarossi from Etienne, and in Etienne's hand reads: "For Tony—Fondness & Hickeys [*sic*]. —Etienne (Dom)." The poster itself was a gift from Tavarossi to Fritscher. Used with permission of Chuck Renslow and the Leather Archives & Museum.

Longtime Fritscher intimate, Lou Thomas, co-founder of Colt Studio, founded Target Studio and was quintessential in creating the *Drummer* look. He and Fritscher worked together on several projects: photography, writing for the *Target Album*, and the private publication of Fritscher's 1969 novel, *I Am Curious (Leather)* aka *Leather Blues*. Lou Thomas shot the covers of *Drummer* 13 and *Drummer* 14, and his work continued to appear inside *Drummer* long after his death January 7, 1990.

Out of the salon around *Drummer*, Lou Thomas presented the triumvirate of Etienne, A. Jay, and Fritscher.

Excerpt source: ©Jack Fritscher, *Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer*, San Francisco: Palm Drive Publishing, 2008

©Jack Fritscher

Excerpt source: ©[Jack Fritscher](#), *[Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness](#)*
[Drummer](#), San Francisco: [Palm Drive Publishing](#), 2008

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“Le Sport des Matelots,” metal circle plate, etching, by Samuel Steward, signed and dated December 12, 1954. Gift from Samuel Steward to Jack Fritscher, 1970. More than just an intimate of Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, Sam Steward was an author of novels and short fiction as well as a fine artist who, in the 1950s and 1960s, wittily combined his love for art with his love for men and set up his own tattoo studio in Chicago and in Oakland. Editor in chief Jeanne Barney published two of his stories in *Drummer 5* and *Drummer 6*. Used with permission and copyright by the Estate of Samuel Steward, administered by Michael Williams.

Opposite page: The *Drummer* salon segued absolutely to the “Virtual *Drummer*” of *Man2Man Quarterly* in 1980 with the publication of the Phil Andros (Sam Steward) story, “This Is My Body.” Ever-true Samuel Steward and Jack Fritscher met in 1969 through the Catholic leather priest Jim Kane. Longtime pals Kane and Fritscher took a formative and fabled 1969 road trip by Harley-Davidson from Denver to Taos and Santa Fe. Riding together and writing together for editor Kane’s diocesan newspaper in the early 1970s, they developed roots for the gay press that emerged with Fritscher editing *Drummer*. In the first decade after Stonewall, Fritscher, with permission, edited the elderly Steward only enough to keep his nostalgic stories from seeming dated.

Excerpt source: ©Jack Fritscher, *Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer*, San Francisco: Palm Drive Publishing, 2008

Samuel
Steward
in his 20s
in the
1930s

The 1966 *Stud*
book jacket was
drawn by Etienne
referencing
Chuck Arnett's
Tool Box Mural.

What happened in Bilignin did not stay in Bilignin. In 1969, the diligent leather priest Jim Kane introduced Jack Fritscher and the elegant Sam Steward (1909-1993) into a mutual-admiration friendship. In 1974, forestalling the demise of the frail sixty-five-year-old Steward who fanned himself gallantly feigning eighty, historian Fritscher received a grant to record the oral history of the author, tattooist, and longtime confidant of Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas for the documentary, *My Shy Bashful Sammy: A Literary Biography—65 Years in the 20th Century*. Steward, whom Fritscher lightly edited and published in *Drummer* and *Man2Man*, autographed many of his books to Fritscher whose *Some Dance to Remember* (1990) he called “possibly the great gay American novel.” On June 6, 1978, a playful Steward wrote on the first page of the first edition of his priceless 1966 hardcover *Stud*: “Pour Jack Fritscher—co-travailleur dans le vignoble, en souvenir d’une nuit memorable a Cap d’Antibes. —Tou amant fidele, Phil Andros. [For Jack Fritscher—co-worker in the vineyard, a souvenir of a memorable night at Cap d’Antibes—Your faithful lover, Phil Andros].” In 1984, Steward penned on the cover page of his *Different Strokes*: “For Jack Fritscher—He knows more different strokes than I ever did. —Phil Andros aka Sam Steward.” In the zero degrees of separation, Tom of Finland’s drawing of Fritscher’s lover Jim Enger with Clint Lockner was published on the cover of Sam’s *Bullenhochzeit*, the German translation of his novel *The Boys in Blue* (1984). It was Sam Steward, intimate of the Alfred Kinsey “salon” and the Stein-Toklas salon, who coined what he called “the moniker” for Fritscher’s “Drummer salon.” Photograph and dedications used with permission and copyright by the Estate of Samuel Steward, administered by Michael Williams. Cover used with permission of Chuck Renslow and the Leather Archives & Museum.

Excerpt source: ©[Jack Fritscher](#), [Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer](#), San Francisco: [Palm Drive Publishing](#), 2008

Top: Two 1950s photographs of Dom Orejudos document the evolution of the Kris Studio image. Photographs by Chuck Renslow. Bottom: Artist Etienne (Orejudos) and photographer Renslow at Kris Studio turned the style of Chicago-American leather international in their publication *Mars* which joined the homomasculine movement in *Tomorrow's Man* and Bob Mizer's *Physique Pictorial* which Jack Fritscher injected directly into *Drummer* for 1970s readers raised on virile Old School 'zines predating 1980s political correctness. Photographs and covers used with permission of Chuck Renslow and the Leather Archives & Museum.

Excerpt source: ©[Jack Fritscher](#), [Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer](#), San Francisco: [Palm Drive Publishing](#), 2008

“The Football Huddle: Go, Fisters, Go!” Felt-tip ink on paper, color drawing by Skipper, 1979. ©Jack Fritscher. First published in *Gay San Francisco* from the Jack Fritscher and Mark Hemry collection. Skipper Davis’ first work in *Drummer* appeared in *Drummer* 15, and he created a specific drawing to illustrate Jack Fritscher’s story, “Foreskin Prison Blues,” in *Drummer* 186 (July 1995). Along with Chuck Arnett at the Tool Box, Etienne at the Gold Coast, Tom of Finland at Tom’s Bar in Hamburg, and A. Jay at the Leatherneck, Skipper was part of the “Gay Muralist Movement” of the 1960s-1970s: he painted the large panels at the Sanctuary bath which were later installed at Dick Saunders’ Probe Disco in LA. The film *The Skipper Video Gallery*, directed and photographed by Jack Fritscher and edited by Mark Hemry, was a Palm Drive Video feature release (1994). Because the quintessence of gay art is eros, it often must censor itself in public venues in order to reassure the GLBT community of its remarkable survival in underground collections. (As shown, the original is obscured.)