

**Virtual**   
**LAVENDER**  
 **Labels**

**JOHN GIORNO**  
**(American, 1936 – 2019)**

*We Threw A Party For The Gods,  
And The Gods All Came, 2012*

**Acrylic on canvas, 48 x 48 in.**

The Alfond Collection of Contemporary Art at Rollins College,  
Gift of Barbara '68 and Theodore '68 Alfond. 2015.1.53  
Image courtesy of the artist and Elizabeth Dee, New York

**WE GAVE A PARTY FOR  
THE GODS  
AND THE GODS  
ALL CAME**

John Giorno, born in 1936 in New York, NY, integrated his identity as a gay man throughout his life, work, and activism. Identity being a central theme and tenet among the queer community, Giorno defined himself as both a gay poet and artist. Sexually explicit and unflinchingly profane, his work is confrontational and critical of heteronormative culture and the mainstream white male perspective often centered in U.S. media. Channeling inspiration and the lived experiences from his marriage to artist and curator Ugo Rondinone, and from partners of the last 20 years, his work is deliberately disruptive.

Its messaging advocates for his own right to be himself and for others to freely exist.

To contextualize this work, listen to John Giorno's recording of his poem [available on YouTube], "Hi Risque," which includes the text from this work:

"It's worse than I thought,  
And now, everyone one of them,  
I ever made love to,  
Every single one, is dead,  
And may they be restin' in equanimity,  
We gave a party for the gods, and the gods  
all came"

As the title suggests, this text is risky and risqué, given its context at a time where queer voices were silenced, and it may make you question its appropriateness. However, Giorno's proxemics contributed to a reflexive, iterative multidisciplinary practice centered on presence and participation in public spaces. At the time "Hi Risque" was generated in 1993, AIDS-related deaths were sky-rocketing in NYC and on both coasts. They would peak in 1994. The visible, vocal presence of commanding public activists was an intentionally disruptive response to the government's near silence on the epidemic.