Poet Sarah Frank Receives the Mary Bowman Arts in Activism Award

Funded by ViiV Healthcare, the National AIDS Memorial's award honors AIDS activist and poet Mary Bowman, who died at age 30.

March 14, 2022 By Trent Straube

Sarah Frank, a college freshman whose uses her voice and poetry to "raise greater awareness around stigma, bigotry, health and social justice," is the second recipient of the Mary Bowman Arts in Activism Award, announced the National AIDS Memorial, which spearheads the $5,000 prize with funding from ViiV Healthcare.

Born with HIV in 1988, Bowman was a young African-American poet, musician and AIDS activist who died in 2019 at age 30. For more about her inspiring work, read the 2015 POZ interview with her, "Based on Her True Story," which includes her poem "I Know What HIV Looks Like."

To learn more about Bowman's work and the award, check out the AIDS Memorial video below:

The prize is awarded to artist-activists who champion social justice issues such as fighting HIV stigma. In 2022, two $5,000 prizes will be awarded and a fellowship program for artist-activists established, according to the AIDS Memorial press release.

A freshman at Brown University in Providence, Frank is a poet, novelist and performer who also founded Studyist, a nonprofit that tackles education inequity. Her work often addresses feminism, antisemitism and climate change.

"Sarah [Frank] believes that her poetry can do two major things for social advocacy— bring awareness and trigger action," said John Cunningham, CEO of the National AIDS Memorial, in the press release. "Like Mary Bowman, Sarah is not afraid to speak up. Mary Bowman took what she had gone through and what she noticed about the world and used it as fuel for her fire. And while for different causes, Sarah does the same thing. As Mary said, poetry is universal. Poetry can be written in one language but understood by them all."

"As a Jewish person, I have experienced antisemitism firsthand," Frank added. "I performed one of my pieces about the Holocaust at a poetry reading. Afterwards, I was approached by someone

who told me my piece reminded them that there is still much work to do to combat antisemitism. I plan to use this scholarship to continue lending my voice and my poetry to raise greater awareness around stigma, bigotry, health and social justice."

You can learn more about Frank here and watch her perform "The Holocaust in Shades of Black" here.

The #NationalAIDSMemorial's Mary Bowman $5,000 Arts in Activism Award, funded by @ViiVUS, supports young art activists who exemplify Bowman's passion for art as a vehicle for HIV/AIDS activism + expression. For students and non-students. Apply now!https://t.co/74flGtSaX7 pic.twitter.com/Hd9jZd57E7 — National AIDS Memorial (@aids_memorial) March 3, 2022

"Like Mary Bowman's, Sarah's work shows how culture can change stigma and deepen connections with people to breakthrough prejudices and activate action," said Marc Meachem, the head of U.S. external affairs at ViiV Healthcare. "This award supports young artists and activists like Sarah who use their creative talents and share their message of change through the arts."

The AIDS Memorial offers more information about the award, including how to apply, on the page titled "Activism Through Powerful Words and Art." It includes the following:

> This Award supports arts and culture programs that engage and inspire individuals and communities in the fight against HIV/AIDS, and recognizes the power of culture to break down stigma and isolation. Mary Bowman was an icon of hope and resilience and performed at the 2018 ViiV Healthcare Youth and Community Summit, where she inspired leaders across the movement, one of many examples of Mary using her voice and art to make a difference.
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> Artivism harnesses the critical imagination to design events and strategies that provoke new questions and new meaning in pursuit of more respectful ways of being. As an example, with respect to HIV/AIDS, such artistic statements are frequently borne from a variety of perspectives in terms of gender, sexuality, age, class, ethnicity, and nationality, and wield

artistic expression as a tool for combating stigma. Stigma, and all it entails—shame, isolation, embarrassment, exclusion, shunning—remains among the most formidable barriers to fighting the epidemic. Through this award, we hope to inspire the amazing world of art and activism.

In related news, March is Women's History month, and Thursday, March 10, marked National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day 2022.

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