

A House That Memorializes a Vanished New York

In Lower Manhattan, the former residence of an artist couple remains unchanged years after their deaths.

By [Nick Haramis](#) Photographs by Blaine Davis
Sept. 4, 2024



IN OCTOBER 1976, the artists [Geoffrey Hendricks](#) and [Brian Buczak](#) met at a SoHo loft party. Hendricks, then 45, was associated with the [Fluxus](#) movement, a loose affiliation of 1960s conceptual artists, including Joseph Beuys, John Cage and Yoko Ono, who rejected traditional practices like abstract painting in favor of elaborate performances. Five years earlier, he'd co-starred in a notable one: In the summer of 1971, Hendricks and his wife of 10 years, the artist Nye Ffarrabas (then Bici Forbes), who were both gay, staged a piece called "Flux Divorce," which involved taking a chain saw to their marriage bed and dividing the entryway to their home with barbed wire. (Their young children, Tyche and Bracken, weren't around for the actual show; they only observed the cleanup afterward.) Buczak, a painter who was 23

years Hendricks's junior, had recently relocated from Detroit, where he was raised. As luck would have it, Hendricks had been staying in a dilapidated townhouse in Hudson Square, then a manufacturing neighborhood on the west side of Lower Manhattan, which he'd eventually buy from his younger brother Jon, a Fluxus artist and archivist who lived next door. Buczak moved in a few months later.



The second-floor dining room looks just as it did in the 1980s, after Hendricks and his then-partner, the artist Brian Buczak, renovated the place. Blaine Davis

The pair began renovations, but they had an unusual goal. Instead of modernizing the interiors, they decided that their home and studio — and the eventual headquarters for their publishing project, Money for Food Press — should look and feel like they imagined it would have in the 1820s, around when it was built. They repurposed discarded crown molding and fireplace mantels and acquired only chairs and silverware that seemed to fit the period; one winter, they made breakfast in the fireplace using an 18th-century waffle iron. It was Buczak's idea to paint the walls of the children's room blue and stencil the wooden floors with a floral motif in the style of one of his favorite paintings by the early 19th-century portraitist Jacob Maentel. In turn, the house and its objects — an old kettle, some cups — started creeping into Buczak's own canvases.



Following Hendricks's death in 2018, his husband, the archivist Sur Rodney (Sur), has used their bedroom mostly for storage. Blaine Davis



In the dormer, a pair of archivists in residence, the artists Andrea Evans and Brad Melamed, have spent years preserving and organizing Buczak's paintings. Blaine Davis

Today, even from the outside, the Federal-style building on Greenwich Street stands in striking contrast to the area's luxury condos and wellness studios. Running the length of the facade is a 1984 text painting by Lawrence Weiner, a conceptual artist known for his typographical works, that reads "Water Spilled From Source to Use." (In 1994, [Weiner spoke to The Times about the mural](#): "Think of it as the water carried from wells," he said. "Inevitably, on the way to being used, some of the water spills. It can be corrosive, for instance making something rust. Or it can make something grow.") Both Buczak and Hendricks are now gone — Buczak died of complications from AIDS in 1987, Hendricks of cancer and congestive heart failure in 2018 — but, inside the house, the life they built together has been preserved as a kind of monument to a lost era of New York that might otherwise be forgotten.

The space remains largely unchanged thanks to Sur Rodney (Sur), 69, an archivist who was Hendricks's partner for the last 23 years of his life. Originally from Montreal, he'd been a co-director of his then-wife Gracie Mansion's East Village gallery, which was famous for showing work by contemporary artists in places like a bathroom or the back of a rented limousine. But he quit his job in 1988 to help catalog the work of his friends — including Angel Borrero, Bern Boyle, Tim Greathouse and Andreas Senser, who was also Sur's lover — who were dying of AIDS. "So that if it went to the family, they would understand what they had," he says. "It wasn't just a bunch of stuff." Sur and Hendricks, who'd met earlier through friends, developed a romantic bond while serving on the board of [Visual AIDS](#), an advocacy group established in 1988 that

has helped destigmatize the disease through art. In 1995, the pair held a wedding ceremony — with Hendricks as both groom and officiant — during a memorial service for the fellow Fluxus member Al Hansen. In addition to curating shows, Sur took on the role of Hendricks’s assistant, installing exhibitions and dealing with registrars. “There was always this idea, especially later in life, that I was going to survive him,” says Sur. “We spent a lot of time talking about what he’d like to see happen with his art.”



In a guest bedroom on the second floor, a wig worn by the actress and Warhol superstar Candy Darling. Blaine Davis



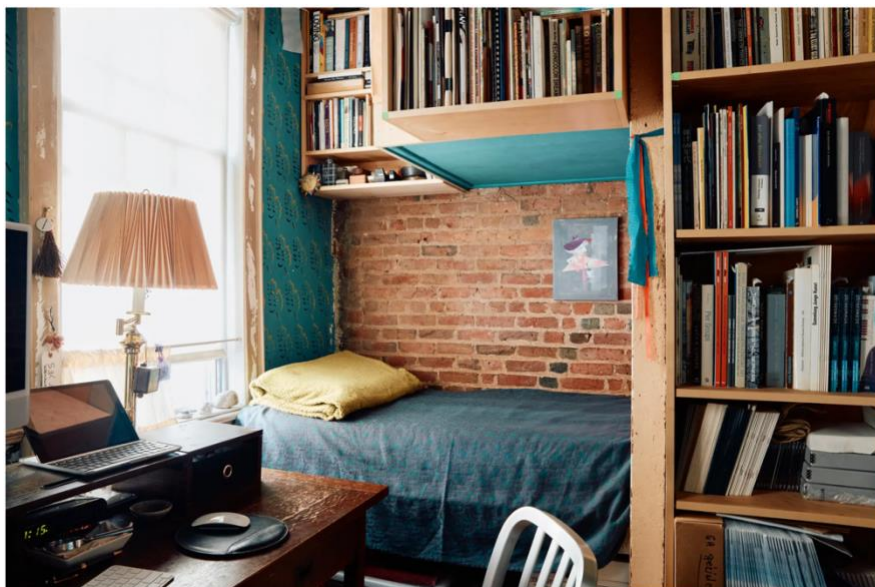
Works by Buczak in the dormer. Blaine Davis

ON A COOL March morning, Sur — whose name is short for “Surrealism” — is rummaging through a cabinet of ephemera in his ground-floor office. “Here it is,” he says, pulling out a glass jar with a label that reads, “Sperm from the American artist Geoffrey Hendricks.” Dated Feb. 14, 1972, it was a valentine to Hendricks’s boyfriend at the time. “There’s all kinds of stuff I’m discovering,” says Sur. “Things that I didn’t understand when he was alive.” Elsewhere in the room are stacks of Fluxus posters, boxes of slides and a framed sign: “I’m always thinking about you even when I’m kissing another boy.” For the past five years, Sur has been studying and indexing the house’s every photograph and piece of correspondence — even Hendricks’s private journals, which date back to 1976. Sur was already acquainted with salacious stories from Hendricks’s past (“John Giorno and the gonorrhea,” for example), but a different kind of revelation surprised him. “Geoff wrote a lot about me,” he says. “There was so much love there.”

For Sur, archiving is a way to return that love — and to channel his grief and guilt. “Everyone I knew was wiped out, like 90 percent of my friends,” he says. “I feel like I have to represent them, in a way.” Although Buczak wasn’t well known in his time, Sur was involved in organizing his first solo show since 1989, a joint exhibition at Ortuzar Projects and Gordon Robichaux in New York, this past January. And in 2021, the library at Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill., acquired Hendricks’s archive for its permanent collection, for study alongside the work of other Fluxus artists there.



In the dormer, a pair of self-portraits by Buczak. Blaine Davis



Phillip Ward, the executor of the actor and writer Quentin Crisp's estate, now resides in what was once Hendricks's children's room. Blaine Davis

Without Hendricks, though, Sur can't bring himself to stay the night in that house. Most mornings, he bikes there from his sixth-floor walk-up in the East Village and spends the day working on preserving Hendricks's legacy. (In his spare time, he manages the studio of the New York-based artist [Lorraine O'Grady](#), 89, known for her collage poems made from cut-up newspapers.) The place has also become a refuge for other archivists. Phillip Ward, the executor of the actor and writer Quentin Crisp's estate, sleeps in a bunk bed in what was once the children's room on the second floor, next to the living area and another bedroom, where he has been building a Fluxus library with books by and about Dick Higgins, Ray Johnson, Allan Kaprow, George Maciunas, Nam June Paik and Carolee Schneemann. A level up, the artists Andrea Evans and Brad Melamed have been mostly responsible for sorting through Buczak's work. They thought they might stay in the dormer for six months. It's been five years.

Buczak was only 32 when he died, but he made over 400 paintings and other works — some were self-portraits with his cat; others were inspired by photographs he found in books and magazines. "It's almost like he had this premonition that it was going to be a short life," says Melamed. After Buczak got sick, his work, much of which is stored in the house, became increasingly personal, with references to blood and sores, and he became even more prolific. In what's believed to be his final piece, he painted Hendricks and a few of their friends sharing a meal together in their dining room — a last supper of sorts, and a familiar scene for the couple, who frequently hosted dinner parties. The night Buczak died, on July 4, 1987, Hendricks would recall how beautiful the sky looked illuminated by fireworks. Over 30 years later, Hendricks's life came to an end in the home they built together, not far from half of the bed he had once sawed apart to celebrate the end of one thing and the beginning of another.



Sur at a desk in his office. Blaine Davis



The archivist has spent years organizing the artwork and ephemera of Hendricks and Buczak. Blaine Davis

If Sur has his way, the house will be preserved and open to visitors. (Hendricks's children, who along with Sur were given the property in Hendricks's will, seem less committed to this idea. "Whatever comes next, it should be in service of moving the art into the world," Bracken says.) As he wanders through the creaky second floor, where the chipped blue walls are covered with pictures of old friends and lovers, most of them long gone, Sur says of all the archiving he's done over the decades, "People ask, 'How much are you getting paid to do this?' And I say, 'I'm not.' So then they ask, 'Why are you doing it, then?'" He stops to look at a photo of him shaving Hendricks's head for a performance and smiles. He tells them what he tells everyone: "Because it needs to be done."

Photo assistant: Paul Fittipaldi