



Fire in the Belly: The Life and Times of David Wojnarowicz (Lambda Literary Award - Gay Memoir/Biography)

Cynthia Carr

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In December 2010, the National Portrait Gallery in Washington made headlines when it responded to protests from the Catholic League by voluntarily censoring an excerpt of David Wojnarowicz's *A Fire in My Belly* from its show on American portraiture.

Why a work of art could stir such emotions is at the heart of Cynthia Carr's *Fire in the Belly*, the first biography of a beleaguered art-world figure who became one of the most important voices of his generation. Wojnarowicz emerged from a Dickensian childhood that included orphanages, abusive and absent parents, and a life of hustling on the street. He first found acclaim in New York's East Village, a neighborhood noted in the 1970s and '80s for its abandoned buildings, junkies, and burgeoning art scene. Along with Keith Haring, Nan Goldin, and Jean-Michel Basquiat, Wojnarowicz helped redefine art for the times.

As uptown art collectors looked downtown for the next big thing, this community of cultural outsiders was suddenly thrust into the national spotlight. The ensuing culture war, the neighborhood's gentrification, and the AIDS crisis then devastated the East Village scene. Wojnarowicz died of AIDS in 1992 at the age of thirty-seven. Carr's brilliant biography traces the untold story of a controversial and seminal figure at a pivotal moment in American culture.

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