

## David Terra

Thank God for Saint Clayton

Back in 2005, I founded a magazine called *Beyond Race* to spotlight the independent, underground artistic culture of New York City and beyond. When my vision was in its infant stages, I made a list of the artists I wanted to cover. Clayton Patterson was at the top of that list. For years, Clayton had been a kind of icon to me. He represented New York cool and, of course, the Lower East Side. Clayton was someone I admired from afar, and in my own quiet way I would support what he was involved in, whether it was a book release at his gallery or one of the Clayton Presents screenings at the Pioneer Theater (RIP). I remember when I introduced myself to Clayton at the Pioneer: I explained to him what I was doing with the magazine and that I wanted to interview him. He agreed, and although it took some persistence, I finally got my interview. In the first issue of *Beyond Race*, we featured a four-page article about Clayton, “Thank God for Saint Clayton,” which was a reference to his having been canonized by Robert Delford Brown and Funky Paganism in the early '80s.

Soon after the premier issue of *Beyond Race* was printed, I asked Clayton if he would offer me guidance and advice as I worked to develop the magazine. He accepted, and over the next five years, *Beyond Race* grew from a local zine printed on black-and-white newsprint to a professionally designed, hundred-plus-page, internationally distributed magazine. Clayton was instrumental throughout, as he helped open many doors and made countless introductions. He also wrote articles, took photographs and supported the events we curated. We became friends.

One question I like to ask to younger, up-and-coming artists is, “Is there any person or artist you’d like to model your career after?” I once had someone flip the question on me, and my response was Clayton Patterson. Clayton is highly respected and has done many amazing things on his terms. He was an active player in the downtown art scene of the '80s; an avid attendee of early New York hardcore matinees; a founding member of the Tattoo Society, which helped legalize tattooing in New York; the designer of custom-embroidered hats that went Hollywood and changed the fashion of the baseball cap; the resident photographer of the Wildstyle & Tattoo Messe; and perhaps

most notably, the man who captured the Tompkins Square riot of '88 on film, holding the NYPD accountable for their actions.

With his extensive photographic archives of the past 35+ years in the LES and New York City, the encyclopedic books he’s published covering film, politics, LES and Jewish culture, his role in community organizations and counterculture activism, all the artistic projects he’s been involved in or influenced over the years, and his forever-selfless attitude towards helping others, Clayton is the godfather of all the New York City underground culture that matters.

It’s been a full decade since I first met Clayton, and he’s consistently been in my life as a positive role model who always fights the good fight and never gives up. Clayton exists in my life as a mentor, friend and father figure. Over the years, I’ve seen him help many young artists in a kind of unofficial mentor role. It’s almost as if every New York City artist doing something creative and interesting needs to work with him at some point as a rite of passage. There is only one Clayton Patterson, and as long as he’s here, his life and art should be celebrated, because there will never be another. Thank God for Saint Clayton!