

Get Into Thing, the Legendary 1990s Black Queer Magazine

 blind-magazine.com/news/get-into-thing-the-legendary-1990s-black-queer-magazine

Miss Rosen

April 17, 2025

Some say disco died on July 12, 1979, when 50,000 white men and women turned out in force for “Disco Demolition Night” at Chicago’s Comiskey Park. What began as racist, homophobic rage against disco — a predominantly Black queer art form — invariably ended up as a wholesale riot with few arrested for disorderly conduct.

But disco never died, it just went underground and was reborn on the dance floor. By the mid-1980s, Chicago emerged as the heartbeat of a new sound — house music — that would take global nightlife by storm. But where disco was treated as a novelty and farmed for profits, house music largely resisted co-optation by the music industry, its influence inescapable yet unconstrained.

By the end of the decade, house music had become a way of life. Love was the message, and music its messenger, and those who heard it followed its call. Enter Robert T. Ford, Trent Adkins, and Lawrence D. Warren, the masterminds behind *Thing*, the legendary 1990s Black queer magazine that became a defining voice of the early 1990s scene.

Hailing from Chicago’s fabled South Side, the triumvirate first came together in 1987 to create *Think Ink*, a black and white broadsheet that ran for just two issues before the funds dried up. The final issue pointed to the future in its glossary with a simple but unmistakable word: “*Thing*: A person or Thing of incorrigible and unbearable Fabulousness. As in the salutation, ‘Miss Thing!,’ or ‘Thing’s not buying it!’”

Enough said. In November 1989, *Thing* magazine arrived with a simple promise: “She Knows Who She Is”. Between 1989–1993, they published 10 issues before Ford’s death from HIV/AIDS related causes brought the magazine to an end. In time, Adkins and Warren would also pass.

Over the years, the magazine became a cult classic that few have seen in full — until now with the release of *Thing*, a bound facsimile edition of all 10 issues. Here it is, Chicago’s finest mapping the blueprint of culture through the community that came together through music at the very time it was being ravaged by AIDS.

Can You Feel It

Thing emerged amid the independent zine scene that flourished at the end of the 1980s among a new generation of artists, photographers, writers, designers, and aspiring publishers who understood, as journalist AJ Liebling famously said, “Freedom of the press is

guaranteed only to those who own one.”

From the very first issue, *Thing* signaled the party had arrived. New voices jumped off the page, deliciously candid and sparkling with life. It was like being on the dance floor, in the kitchen, and sitting around the dinner table all at the same time, filled with wit and wisdom delivered with effortless savoir faire.

Thing was a tour de force without compare, a whirlwind of Black queer youth on the cusp, some like RuPaul Charles going on to be a global powerhouse and others like poet Essex Hemphill and filmmaker Marlon Riggs dying from AIDS in the mid-90s. At its height *Thing* blossomed to 3,000 copies, proving the old adage about quality over quantity standing the test of time. Readers feasted on the work of photographer Lyle Ashton Harris and writers Dennis Cooper, Vaginal Davis, Gary Indiana, while reading about Joan Jett Blakk’s revolutionary presidential campaign as it unfolded in real time.

The magazine was an artwork in its own right, carefully crafted by publisher and editor Robert R. Ford in his apartment. “We knew for ourselves what a rich and important cultural thing gay Black men have and share,” Ford told writer Owen Keehnen. “We wanted to make a magazine that would be a way of documenting our existence and contribution to society. Our idea was not so much [to] radicalize or subvert the idea of magazines as to make one from our own point of view.”

Paging through the bound compendium of every issue of *Thing* is realizing the map you hold in your hands is the very treasure you seek. Here are memories you didn’t even know you had; layered with meaning and resonance through the inescapable passage of time they become veritable reliquaries of soul.

Thing is published by Primary Information, \$35.00