

**Not a Still Life**  
**A film by Roberta Cantow**

**Academic**  
**Non-Clinical**

For use in LGBTQ Studies, Religious/Jewish Studies, Diversity Courses, among others.

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(For use in LGBT Studies, Religious/Jewish Studies, Social Diversity, and Gender Studies)

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## **Synopsis**

*Not a Still Life* is a documentary portrait of Steve Stone, a spirited, older, gay, Jewish man who shares the naked truth of his unconventional life. His stories are of childhood ridicule in the 1950's and coming out in the early 60's. He has lived openly gay for 50 years, found true love, experienced tragic loss and subsequent loneliness and aging. His gradual evolution includes embracing sobriety, connecting with a long lost relative and discovering his spirituality—only to find that he is in danger of losing his home and business. His humorous and engaging personality provoke reflections about our own identities, emotions, and cultural experiences.

## **Introduction**

The synopsis (above) references Steve Stone, the film's subject or "character" as older, gay, Jewish and spirited. None of these are absolute. *Not a Still Life* challenges many stereotypes and assumptions we may carry regarding others and our individual sense of self. As such, these are themes present throughout the discussion questions and in the suggestions for reflection about the film.

## **Facilitator Instructions**

This guide includes pre-viewing and post-viewing questions, general discussion topics and specific post viewing questions. Facilitators are encouraged to review this guide in its entirety in advance of a film showing, as some questions may be more appropriate for certain audiences than others. These are suggestions only, meant to help the facilitator with discussion and critical thought

- **Pre-Viewing Questions**

What do you imagine might be the difference between characterizing Steve as an older gay man as opposed to an aging man or a “gay elder?”

If you identify as a younger person, whether straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered or queer, what do you think you could gain by engaging with an older gay man’s story? What are your assumptions about a gay man in his 60’s today?

For those who identify as “young adults,” what aspects of gay cultural history do you feel are important to know? What aspects are you curious about or recognize that you might not be aware of?

What are your criteria for finding inspiration in the life stories of others?

What does “inclusion” in religious institutions mean to you and what might it suggest to you about the importance of a religious community being a supportive one?

- **Suggested Discussion Topics**

What are the differences between Steve’s generation and gay men who have come of age after the late 1990s in relation to their experiences of gay culture?

Discuss Steve’s various identities (spiritual, cultural, sexual, familial, and professional) and their interplay.

Discuss the historic changes, or lack thereof, in the attitudes of organized religion toward sexual orientation. Are you surprised that Steve’s synagogue is accepting of him as a gay man?

Discuss Steve’s issues with aging and how they differ from traditional ideas about aging.

Steve refers to his alcoholism, and that he attends AA meetings, but he doesn’t appear to have a support network of other gay men. What are our thoughts about this?

Some viewers have responded negatively to Steve. What do you imagine has provoked them?

- **General Post-Viewing Questions**

Has your understanding of the person you were introduced to in the beginning of the film shifted in the course of watching it? If so, how?

What do you most appreciate or admire about Steve? Do you consider him to be a nice person, a troubled person, a survivor? Do you find inspiration in his story?

How might the film be seen as dealing with universal themes? Do any of them relate to your own experiences, regardless of how you identify?

### **Summary**

The story of Steve Stone presented in *Not a Still Life* gives the audience an in-depth look at a man who transcends stereotypes of sexuality, religion, and aging. As the filmmaker, my hope is that by the end of the film, Steve is no longer the mysterious and eccentric man he was at the beginning; he is in some ways a reflection of all of us.