

Interview Transcript

Interviewee: Carol Brown

Interviewer: David Gere

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Transcript

David Gere: Hello. I'm David Gere, the director of the Art & Global Health Center, and I'm with Carol Brown, who is the former director of the Durban Art Gallery. And we are going to spend some time today talking about the *MAKE ART/STOP AIDS* exhibition, and the exhibition called *Not Alone*, that came from it, and was toured throughout South Africa. Carol, so good to see you today. Thank you for joining.

Carol Brown: Hello.

David Gere: Hello. When we had a pre-conversation, we were trying to set the scene. I think maybe I could tell a little bit about the *MAKE ART/STOP AIDS* concept, and then you could talk a little bit about some works that immediately come to mind when you think about the show.

The context for the exhibition was that, in 2003, there was a grant program at UCLA called the Global Impact Program, and it allowed for some \$50,000 to a few lucky grant winners to work on projects. I was a relatively young faculty member—a newish faculty member at that time—and I went for it with the support of a couple of dear colleagues—one of them being Al Roberts, who we've talked about it actually before. Lo and behold, I got it, which gave me the opportunity to start developing ideas for what would become *MAKE ART/STOP AIDS*.

The other significant thing to mention about the name itself is that it came from the work of Douglas Crimp—he being an art critic and commentator who had written a really amazing essay that's still very important to me, that's about our arts activism and AIDS activism, in which he talked about the importance of making art that would actually do something significant and palpable. In this case, to actually stop AIDS. So in other words, this is being probably too brusque about these very subtle ideas that he was developing, but too often, the idea is that if you're an artist, you can make something that's to sell and you give the money to an organization that helps people. That's not a bad thing to do. But he was saying, that's not enough. We actually need to make work that is capable of interceding in the epidemic.

That was the idea that we were exploring, starting from that grant in 2003. And little by little, it came into focus, especially with the help of my colleague, Robert Sember. He and I were working as graduate students at the same time. He was at NYU, I was at UC Riverside, and we started to to dialog about these ideas and grow them into something. And about that time, I was meeting Carol. So as we developed our concept, we realized that we wanted to feature work that was not just from the US—though, yes, let's include work from the US—including pieces that

were familiar through *Gran Fury*, for example. But let's also include work that represents South Africa, because the greatest prevalence of HIV in the world was within South Africa, and there was a burgeoning art movement addressing it.

Let's also look at India, which happened to be a place that was of great interest to me. I had lived three years in India as a young person, and I had just gone back on a Fulbright. I was thinking about how India was responding, and their numbers were also rising at that point, and we feared that the epidemic would get very large there. Luckily, it didn't, but we didn't know yet.

And then Brazil, actually, as another important location. In part, because, enshrined in the relatively new Brazilian constitution, is the right to healthcare, and that changed the perspective on HIV for that whole country.

So we realized we wanted to work with all of those reference points. And when it came to working in South Africa—Robert was born in South Africa himself, so he had a lot of context to bring—but we also knew we wanted to work with Carol. Carol, the work that you had done in the Durban Art Gallery, which we've talked about already, has been so extraordinary, and deep, and sustained.

We came to you, and we asked if you would contribute as a curator to the project. You agreed, as I recall, right away. This leads us to today, talking about many of the works—especially the works from South Africa—that were a part of the show, and that you have known so much about and helped to contribute contextual information about.

But interestingly, even though we want to focus on South Africa, I asked you, just before we started this conversation, if there were works from the show that were particularly memorable for you. Things that stood out for you that you know are embedded in memory as a result of our work on this exhibition all those years ago, 2008.

You actually mentioned a couple of works that don't come from South Africa, but I wanted to just open up the space for you to talk about those, and what it is that does stay in mind for you, and how you saw those works. So with that, Carol, I wonder if you might launch into talking about some of the works—a few of the works that are particularly in your mind when you think of the *MAKE ART/STOP AIDS* exhibition.

Carol Brown: I think one of the works which has really made a great impact on me, and I often think about—it's two works, actually—and they were not by a South African. They were by Daniel Goldstein.

The first one: I think was actually a found object, which he made into a very beautiful collection of objects. These were leather which he garnered from the gym where he and his colleagues had been members of for many years, and was closing down at that stage. [...] They had benches, which one has in the gym, where the men do their exercises.

As the gym was closing down, he was there, and he saw all these pieces of leather which had come off. They'd been taken off the benches. And the leathers had imprints of bodies of men over many, many.... It was mainly gay men who frequented. I think only gay men [in] this particular place. The piece, the leather—let's call them pinches—were actually taken off their

frames and were going to the trash heap, probably. When Daniel looked at these, there were very clear imprints of bodies on them. Coincidentally, perhaps, the particular company that had made these benches was called Icarian.

Icarian, obviously, is a reference to the god who flew.... Had wings, and he flew to go to the sun. As he got closer and closer to the sun, obviously the wings melted and he fell down on the ground. Now this a myth, as we know, but it had such a clear link to what was happening with HIV/AIDS, and how perhaps taking risks maybe with men would be contributing to the whole pandemic at the time. And then the other....

David Gere: Before you go, Carol, let's look at that piece. If we could bring that up so that we can look at it together.

[photograph of *Icarian* by Daniel Goldstein shown]

Carol Brown: Now, I think looking at the piece, there is also another reference, which is fairly.... I think it's a very interesting combination. The other reference was to the Turin Shroud where Christ was supposed to.... When Christ was crucified, when the Turin Shroud was found, it was supposed to be Christ's body. So though that [is] very much related, I think, to these, the pieces of leather.

When I saw those, I was really blown away, because it just said so much over many centuries and many myths. Also, I think very much on a male side, that there's no.... I don't think there's any particular link to female.... It's very much a male thing. The beauty of that makes us think of how many people have died, how many people have suffered. What for, at the end of the day? Why?

These are the remnants, in a sense, that are left behind. So I think on a very deep level, those works were wonderful. They still are wonderful, but it takes a very particular talent to recognize why they are wonderful, because most people would, as I said earlier, just throw them away and discard them, or not think.... So that was real for me.

I didn't know Daniel before that, but to me, [he] was a person who had an incredible insight into life, and death, and a great deal of, I think, philosophy. [...] The choice of found objects can speak, often, far more strongly than constructed ideas. That has been a very.... I've never forgotten those. The minute I saw those, I thought, "This is a very special man who has made these pieces and recognized what they are." And the depth of [the] sense of masculinity as well, which comes into that.

Then I met Daniel, and he was all I'd hoped he would be. He is a very wonderful man who has a tremendously spiritual aura about him. [...] At the time he came, he made another piece, which was the *Medicine Man*, which was made in South Africa, I think, or around South African products, if I can call it that.

David Gere: One brief clarification is that there's a series of pieces. Daniel likes to work in series. He's a San Francisco-based artist, by the way, who now lives in Portugal. But he made, first of all, a series of *Icarian* pieces. So there's these leather pieces. There are more than a

dozen, I believe, of them at different proportions—long ones, big ones, square ones, depending on the benches that they were made from.

[photograph of *Medicine Man* by Daniel Goldstein shown]

The piece now that you're talking about, the *Medicine Man* piece. There was an original, and the original was shown in the *MAKE ART/STOP AIDS* show, and then.... And that, by the way, was based on his own pill bottles and the pill bottles of John Capellis, who's a dear friend and connection for him. Here's the piece.

I'll just mention, for future conversation, for a little bit later in this conversation, we should talk about the South African version of it that got made specifically when the *MAKE ART/STOP AIDS* exhibition became the *Not Alone* exhibition, and was shown in Durban.

So this is the original piece that was made from the pill bottles, the prescription pill bottles, that had been collected by Daniel and John Capellis over the decade or so since.... I know that Daniel was first aware that he was infected in 1985, so it was, you know, a good 20 years or so of pill bottles that he had collected and used, along with, by the way, some pill bottles from friends and associates and lovers and other people who were in his network. So tell us more, if you would, Carol, about what you saw in this piece when it first hit your eye.

Carol Brown: I'd never seen anything like that. It was almost like a supernatural creature or being that had sort of come.... There was that sense. I think there was a sense of magic about it. It sounds like a strange way to describe it, but it actually was magic. I think he managed to, without saying anything, to let us feel that something has transformed into something else, and that would be the medicine has made the transformation of, what could have been death, into almost an angelic type of figure. I think, in a subtle way, you begin to realize how much was needed to actually bring this epidemic to an end, or to a much better place. So, again, Daniel's work always seems to have that sense of spirituality and magic about it, and it was very powerful. In South Africa at that time, it was somewhat controversial, because there were political beliefs that [...] AIDS wasn't and HIV were not related—that it didn't exist—and medication was not given to people.

So just when seeing them, seeing this particular piece in the gallery in Durban, for example—which was its first iteration—it started a great deal of conversations, and people were given a lot of information about what was actually being kept away from them, at that time. There was so much ignorance about medication. What is HIV? And who gets HIV? Only certain people and certain groups of people, certain racial people. It just was a very short-sighted view, generally in South Africa, and the pieces like that opened really interesting conversations.

David Gere: Absolutely, and I love that you've made this connection between this piece, the *Medicine Man* piece, and the *Icarian* piece, because they are similar figures. The outline of the body, the kind of spiritual body, is similar. And I happen to know that he has made other pieces, using glass nuggets, for example, that also are in this basic humanoid shape, but kind of the spirit form of the human body. It's an image that is of great interest to Daniel. He's been exploring in different ways over the course of, now, decades. We will find out later, by the way, that this piece.... Well, I'll tell a bit of a story.

When it came time to move the exhibition in a new form called *Not Alone*, to South Africa, this was a very complicated piece to ship. [...] It's hanging from threads. They have to be very carefully wound and wrapped so that the thing could be unfurled again without being all caught up into knots. And so we were trying to figure out how to get it to South Africa, and we thought maybe it was just going to be too expensive and too difficult. We all of a sudden had a brainstorm that maybe it was going to be cheaper to send Daniel than to send the piece. So in fact, we got the money for Daniel to be able to travel from San Francisco to Durban. He took the piece with him in a suitcase, so he was able to transport it relatively easily that way, and then he was there to put it back together in Durban, and to make it be its beautiful self again.

The process was also so rich, because there were very many HIV-positive people who witnessed the piece and expressed interest in it. He was then able to make a new piece, which was specifically made from the pill bottles of people living with HIV in South Africa. So it was a collaboration with them, a kind of community collaboration, which was very significant. It also involved a group that you may remember, Carol, that is called Mothers to Mothers, which is women who are infected with HIV and who are trying to protect their children from infection, from HIV, and also to live good lives. Strong and important and contributing lives. So there was a series of pieces. I think there, ultimately, were four of them that were made in the *Medicine Man, Medicine Woman, Medicine People* series.

Carol Brown: David, I think, if my memory serves me correctly.... I'm not sure. In the one that he made from the medicine [...] in Durban, the medicine bottles.... Did it have the name of the people who had had the medicine bottles on each bottle? Or am I imagining that?

David Gere: I have a memory that we had to redact the names, that there was some danger involved with the names being exposed. I think what I should do—and I will do, because he's agreed already—is that I should have a conversation with Daniel about the evolution from this original piece to the new piece that he made there, and learn the details from him, which I will do.

Carol Brown: Right, yes. Just something that sticks in my mind, but I'm not entirely sure that it's correct or not.

David Gere: I wonder if we might move to the next piece that we wanted to consider, that does, in fact, come from South Africa. There's a set of them now that we're ready to discuss with one another. This next one is the David Goldblatt *Victoria Cobokana* piece...

[image of *Victoria Cobokana* photo installation shown]

...which is there. Yes.

So just to share a little bit about this piece, in the same context, Carol, as what you were just talking about. The pieces that stayed in your memory, that were kind of most crucial to you in some ways when you thought about the *MAKE ART/STOP AIDS* show. This piece is one of those, for me.

What's extraordinary about it, for me, is the way that it the layers peel from it as you look more closely. I've shown this piece to hundreds of students over the years, and I have grown to love

the process of their describing what they're seeing, and kind of putting the pieces of information together, and then ultimately being given the title of the piece.

One of the first things that students notice is, of course, the two children on the lap of this woman. They recognize right away that each of them has a different expression. That she looks a little on the tired, maybe even [on the] exhausted side, and her eyes are kind of inward focused. They see the child on her lap looking kind of warily at the person who might be snapping the actual photograph. Likewise, the small child in the front standing looking out of the corner of his eyes. Again, a sense of some weariness, but curiosity as well. There's always a lot of discussion about the expressions, and how to read the emotions and all, which are reflected in these expressions.

Then there's some things about the setting. Behind her head, a circular window. Kind of a nautical window, if you will. That evokes, at least, in many people who see the image, a halo. Fairly unusual, at least in American circumstances, to have a round window in a room that looks like a dining room. It's notable also that the photographer positioned the figures here in such a way that it would appear to be like a halo, because there are obviously.... You could have taken the photo at any number of angles.

There's always a lot of discussion also about over her head, the candelabra, which gives the sense of crown. So halo, crown. And there's always a moment when someone, usually with an art historical background.... There are art history majors at UCLA. They'll start to talk about Renaissance paintings of the Virgin Mary with Jesus and John the Baptist. Jesus and John the Baptist sitting on her lap. Sometimes a student will say, "Oh, it's this particular painting that I'm thinking of." It, of course, was a set piece that recurred in painting of that era. So all of these holy images are starting to accrue.

But then there are other kind of more quotidian details. Like, there's a broom in the corner. What's the broom doing there? What do we feel about the art that's on the walls? What does this tell us about the home? Now we see the table. It looks like kind of modern Italian furniture. A well-to-do family? Is she a well-to-do person? All of these things are starting to come into some focus. And then, I read the title of the work. Now, this is an interesting thing, because the artist photographer, David Goldblatt, is known for his long titles, which are essentially narratives. All of this information is important to include in what is not just a descriptive piece of narrative, but rather the title itself. I'll read it to you, and perhaps we'll find a way to inset it in the video we're making.

[title text shown on screen]

Victoria Cobokana, housekeeper, in her employer's dining room with her son Sifiso and daughter Onica, Johannesburg, June 1999. Victoria died of AIDS 13 December 1999, Sifiso died of AIDS 12 January 2000, Onica died of AIDS in May 2000.

[image of *Victoria Cobokana* photo installation shown]

(exhales deeply) And always, for very good reason, there's a sense in the room, when I'm talking to students about this piece, of a great hush falling over us, because we get attached. We get connected. We spend time with these three. We start to care about them, and then we find out that

they died, which generally leads to a discussion of medicine. Very much in line with the work that Daniel Goldstein had done with his *Medicine Man* piece.

[In] 1999, antiretroviral treatment was available in the United States. It was available in an experimental way in 1994, but by 1996, it was generally available to anybody who needed it, wanted it, and knew how to work the system in order to get it. This is three years later in South Africa, and the indication is that these three did not have access to those drugs. Why is that? Why were their lives considered to be any less of value than American lives that were being protected, at that point, by ARVs? What does this say about our global economic systems, but also how humanitarianism is interpreted, depending on the instance of the case? How do pharmaceutical companies work? You can see how this tumbles, one thing after another, all coming from just one single image by David Goldblatt.

Carol, I'm interested because, just before we started this conversation, you mentioned that you know David Goldblatt. He's since passed away, but that you've known him and known his work. I wondered if you could tell us just a little bit about him, and what you knew of him as a person.

Carol Brown: No, I didn't really know him well at all. [...] I just had a little anecdote. Perhaps I should tell it to see the sort of person he was.

He and I were at a conference in a small town in South Africa. [...] It was his retrospective exhibition of his 80th birthday. We were both staying in the same residence. He and his wife were there. [...] He lifted me into every morning. We'd go in together in his car. [...] When we arrived on the first day, we came to the gallery where the curator had been putting up the exhibition. He walked in, and there was one of his beautiful photos—a very large photo—on the wall. He walked up, he took it off, and he tore it into pieces. (laughs) I was horrified, and the curator there. We said, "What's happening?" The print was not as perfect as is his standard. [...] That is really perfectionism, because it was an enormous thing. They weren't framed, any of his works. And I say, [he] tore it up and put it into pieces. And we thought, "Whoa," you know, "Where's the trash can?" But anyway, that was, to me, the precision and the high standard that he set for himself, because it would have cost him a lot of money to have printed that. I think other people would have just taken it and sold it off somewhere else. [...]

He told me it was his 80th birthday, because that was what the exhibition was all about, and he invited me to join. His family and his curators from Joburg were coming up for the birthday party, and he asked if I would like to join in them. I was very excited. I went and I put on my good clothes and got dressed for the birthday party. The curators from Durban and his wife and family were all there. We were taken off to his favorite restaurant, which was a wimpy hamburger place. Very simple. That was really how he loved to celebrate with his family.

All that proves is that he was a very humble man and a very authentic person. I think that is something also perhaps why his photographs have that quality of really understanding and being able to draw comparisons [in] the way David has just so interestingly explained. Most of them were just.... His landscapes were very simple, but they told their own stories as well. He has a very large amount of landscape paint. He went through various people and landscapes. But they were the sort of, I suppose, quiet moments that he captured, rather than sensational things, or anything that was glamorous. It was all about not the beauty, but what the image.... There's

always a lot in the image, when one starts analyzing how he has just captured those very rare moments.

I think he just captures a moment somehow that people don't even realize they are doing it. Things like the broom in the corner, for example. Most people would have most photographers would have moved the broom or whatever. He actually understood the objects as well, and how people's lives by such simple things, like a broom in a corner, tells you the about the life of that family, and that woman and mother. That is, it's so brilliant to.... Nothing is.... It's all what is there. He doesn't add anything to it, as nowadays, it would all be very photoshopped and so on. But then, this is all.... He is just finding a moment of truth, I think, in what he sees. So it's quite an incredible vision, really.

David Gere: Let's move on. Now, if we could to Zanele Muholi's work, which was also featured in the *MAKE ART/STOP AIDS* exhibition.

[installation photo of three framed photographs by Zanele Muholi]

There were three images, actually, that were shown together on the wall. What we're seeing, by the way, in the right hand side is a reflection of another work in the exhibition, which was the *Silence=Death* neon sign. I'm sorry that it's not the pure version. This is actually the way that the work was seen inside the exhibition, an installation photo. But now we could look at maybe the three images on their own, and if you could share a little bit about your notions of how to read this work, and what you see in it.

[installation photo of *Aftermath* shown]

Carol Brown: Zanele Muholi is now a very prominent international photographer, and this was done when she was still young and just starting. These are her early works, and the one that perhaps we could look at is.... Yeah, I was just going to say that one. When we're just looking at her in her groin, and that's all we can see, that part of her.... The left-hand side, you can see she had stitches in her one leg. The stitches were because she had been attacked. I'm just trying to remember what.... She had been attacked by a group of people—men, I think it was—because she was lesbian. She reported this to the police...

[installation photo of *Case Number* shown]

...which is what the police report is. Then the third one, you will....

[installation photo of *Mpumi Mathabela, Parktown, Johannesburg* shown]

This would be the thing. The gloves are sort of symbolic of sex.

David Gere: Safe sex, actually, was the reading that I had made of the gloves. Safe sexual practices.

Carol Brown: Sexual practices. That's a better way. She started with these quite smallish photos, but there was a lot.

She was very, very.... She was attacked very frequently. Love, for her, was extremely dangerous. There was a great.... Particularly males were very angry of women, of lesbians. They would lead a very difficult life because they were always being attacked, and shunned, and not acknowledged or protected. I think she's fought the thing.... Also, before the picture was taken—the one, I think it was the second one of them—she had actually been raped. Yeah, I think she'd been raped, as well as had the stitches, because that was part of the rape violence as well.

She started studying photography at one of the photographic schools or colleges in Durban, and has built up, since then, a very strong body of work. As I say, now she is extremely one of the world's, I would say, most famous woman photographers at the moment. I think it's quite interesting as well to see the shadow when the photograph was taken from the *Medicine Man*. This was [not deliberate]. I'm not sure it is, but you can see the *Medicine Man* again in the photo, because this was taken on the wall of the exhibition which was held in Durban then. So the whole.... That was probably her. I'm sure it was her intention that those reflections were there. So that is a very interesting way of putting the context of.... This particular photograph becomes something else when it's shown in a curated exhibition as well.

David Gere: I'm so interested in that Carol. The idea that the reflections that are on the glass, which of course, I was apologizing for, are actually part of the experience of seeing a show, where these pieces are in proximity to one another and inform one another.

Carol Brown: I don't know if it was deliberate, but I think it probably was, because I think she would have set it up.

David Gere: I have another four or five photographers, in fact, I wanted to reference. Maybe we could move to the next one. It's one that actually references the significance of the red ribbon in light of HIV, for good and for ill. For good and for ill I say because the symbolism is very effective, and powerful, and pungent, and sometimes overused, but also dramatic, in this case. The photographer is Penelope Siopis. She's a photographer whose work you've seen over the years I know, Carol.

Carol Brown: Yes. She is mainly.... Yes, this is a photograph, but she is actually mainly a painter.

David Gere: And of course, the significant thing about this is it makes you think about mother-to-child transmission, and babies who are infected with HIV, but also the kind of fearsome quality of this ribbon being over the mouth and potentially over the nose of this child, that there's something stifling about the ribbon—frightening, scary about it, in this context. It's almost like a kind of bondage. And as a result, it's a very memorable piece, and kind of shocking in its way.

Carol Brown: Yeah, I think especially because it's a baby. [...] We're used to seeing photos of innocent, young, beautiful babies, and happiness and so forth. Again, in those days in South Africa, there was a group of people who felt that curing.... If they if they had sex with a baby—or raped a baby—this would cure them of their HIV. So it was an awful time, because babies were literally being raped and killed, in order to, so-call, cure HIV. [...] I think this relates to that time as well. [...] Penelope Siopis, at that stage, was also doing a whole series of works

which were all red, so this was one of them. It's, as you have just said, it's a very terrifying image that the body.... Well, her mouth is.... She has shut up, a crude way of saying it, so the baby now has no voice, or no power to cry, or to defend itself, also. The way the baby is looking at us is also a pretty terrifying and frightening thing. Gender-based violence is was—I think it still is—a very strong, problematic issue, which was happening around that time as well, and is, unfortunately, not entirely eradicated, I would say. South Africa, at that time, I think—I don't know [about] now—had the highest rape rates in the world. It was actually terrible, really, in South Africa, the rape, and particularly the rape of underage children, and as we say, babies. So that is an extremely strong and terrifying image, and the child is sort of off, eyes closed, staring at us, and is totally bonded, really.

David Gere: This is making me realize the extent to which the images in *MAKE ART/STOP AIDS* were not certainly all scary and terrifying and horrifying, but we also didn't blink. We brought the strongest of the art pieces that we knew of, addressing the issues of the time. And here they are. I want to move on to the next one, which is another example, actually, of this.

[installation photo of two framed images from *The Bereaved* series shown]

This is Peter Hugo. Two images from a series that he called *The Bereaved*. You are actually in a very good position to help explain these images. Because, of course, someone—myself—who sees them without any cultural context, seeing the faces of two dead men of causes related to HIV, can be horrified and terrified by it. But there's also some sense of solace here because of the blankets that surround them. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about that from a cultural perspective, Carol.

Carol Brown: I was looking at them again today, and I was thinking.... These were extremely controversial, because, obviously, having photographs of.... Peter Hugo has always had [a] very sensational type of photography, but it seems like it's almost breaking every taboo. Photographing portraits is what it is, of corpses, and they.... His work has also been very controversial, that he is sensational. But he does his homework, and he is respectful about what he is doing. He had meetings with the families of the people who had died, and gained their permission.

African ways of looking at death, perhaps, are not quite the same as the traditional European ways. When I was looking at it, I was thinking that, in Victorian England, many years ago, when people died, the corpses were laid out in the parlor, and people used to come there and pay their respects to an open casket, or on the bed, or whatever. So it's not actually something that was so.... It wasn't considered so terrible. And over the centuries, we have begun, I think, to push death much further away from our lives.

As I say, he was given consent to show these. I think what they are also.... I think we are scared ourselves to look at death, and look at corpses, and treat them in a.... We shy away from it. It was controversial, but it was also.... Many people were very touched by this. I think it also brought home how much death was happening around us at that time, and how people were.... Because he has actually treated them as a portrait, a respectful portrait. They are. They're actually very beautiful.

I think during those years, there was so much.... People just were losing so many people. [...] It's a really difficult one to talk about, I think, and it's a difficult one to look at. We had a certain amount of people who were extremely shocked by it, and asked us to remove them, because it was against their beliefs, or they felt it was a bad, a bad thing to.... Disrespectful to the actual body. But the families, as I say, were consulted and agreed. [...] It hit you hard. I think that's what the strength of these images were, that they made you realize this is what is happening now. They're beautifully lit, as you can see. They're treated in a very respectful manner. There's no real disrespect in them. It can be, in certain communities, it can be very problematic, but we didn't really encounter much protest, generally speaking.

[*The Harsh Divide: Treatment Action Campaign Office* photograph by Gideon Mendel shown]

David Gere: I want to move actually, to Gideon Mendel's work and talk a little bit about that. It happens that around the time of this exhibition, we were beginning at UCLA, at the Art & Global Health Center, we were beginning a collaboration with Gideon on what has become the *Through Positive Eyes* project. But of course, we were joining an activist photographic tradition that he was very much a part of, and was even at the lead of. The images that we used in the *MAKE ART/STOP AIDS* exhibition highlighted that aspect of his work before *Through Positive Eyes*.

This piece in particular, this big panorama, is kind of an extraordinary piece. It was made in the year 2003, and it was a commission from the Treatment Action Campaign, which was the main activist AIDS activist organization in South Africa. Gideon said that he made a request of Treatment Action Campaign that he could meet with one or two people who would be willing to be interviewed and also be photographed about their being HIV-positive. When he arrived for that meeting, there were 24 people waiting for him, which says something about the desire on the part of people living with HIV, in Johannesburg, to participate in the political action around HIV.

So as you can see, some people are covering their faces with the statements that they've written on pieces of paper. This is to conceal their identities because they didn't feel that they could face the reaction, the stigmatized reaction of family members, community members, et cetera. But others are very boldly showing their faces, and exposing themselves, and revealing themselves as being HIV-positive.

If we could get in a little closer to see any of the texts, these are messages that people have written, each of them individually. "Treat the people," is one that's now coming into focus. "Treat me now with antiretroviral treatment, ARVS." "Treatment now. We don't want to lose our lives." Some of them are easier to read for me than others. We'll see if we can get a version of this that's stronger digitally so that we can read all of them. But you know, the range of people, younger, older, men, women. "Treatment now! ARVs can remove stigma." This is a really significant one, because I think the overall message here is one of: we want to tell our stories. We want treatment. If we had treatment, we wouldn't be stigmatized. We would be healthy. "Do it for our kids. We need AZT, ARVs." AZT was another of the drugs that were commonly used at that time.

This is an extraordinary piece that Gideon made, and he stitched together this panorama. Now, it's very common that we have cameras that allow a single image to take in the entire panorama. In this case, he used a computer to stitch together, I think about 12 or 15 separate images to create the panorama.

I want to look at the next piece of Gideon's, if we could.

[*Breaking the Silence* photograph by Gideon Mendel shown]

This one interestingly overlaps, Carol, with your work in Durban, as we've talked about in a separate video. The year 2000, the Breaking the Silence conference was held in Durban. This was the International AIDS Conference that year, and you, at the Durban Art Gallery, had wrapped the entire city hall, and gallery—which is part of the city hall—in a gigantic red ribbon. There was a procession, a parade that was held beside it. This is an image from that parade.

Treatment Action Campaign. You can see the sign just behind them, and also the significance of wearing t-shirts that openly declare, that confront stigma by saying, just upfront and out loud, "I'm HIV-positive." It's significant also to know that at one point, Nelson Mandela himself wore an HIV-positive t-shirt, because there's an important alliance between people who are HIV-negative and people who are HIV-positive, that if we all declare ourselves HIV-positive, then that takes the onus away from those who otherwise would feel stigmatized.

The joy of this photo, the choreography of the photo, the voices that you can hear, inherently, the shouts you can imagine, the chanting, the energy, the buoyancy, the aliveness, is what comes through for me in this photograph, which Gideon took in, again, the year 2000 and *Breaking the Silence*, which is the name of the photograph as well.

I believe that there are two more images from Gideon that we have in our list, that we used actually in the Durban and South African *Not Alone* exhibitions. We did not actually include them in the initial *MAKE ART/STOP AIDS* exhibition.

[*HIV-Positive Mother Regains Her Strength* photograph by Gideon Mendel shown]

The significance of this. This is from 2004 a series called *We Are Living Here. HIV-Positive Mother Regains Her Strength*. This was a commission to Gideon to take photographs of people who were, for the first time, getting access to antiretroviral treatment, and to see how they were able to recover and to prove also that they were able and willing to adhere to the treatment regimen. One of the reasons, actually, that that medication was not provided earlier to places like South Africa, [was] because there was a general feeling, a general sense, that people living in areas in South Africa would not adhere to the medication and it would be wasted. And of course, this was not true. In fact, the people who were provided with medication wanted it really, and would have the positive effects that come from taking the medication. So this is a woman—in I believe it's the [inaudible] province—who is not yet, or just starting to take the medication. And then we see another photo of her sometime later.

[*Nomphilo stands with her two sons Lindithemba, 10, and Pumlane, 8* photograph by Gideon Mendel shown]

I'm going to guess it was about six months later, where she is with her two children. She herself has recovered her strength. She's embracing those boys, and you're suddenly so aware that you know we need her to live. They need her to live. That it's so essential. And also this beautiful landscape that she is part of now, and that she will be able to enjoy because she had access to those drugs.

This was a very important project. It was a kind of a world-changing project that Gideon participated in. It was a commission, but it was something to which he was personally dedicated as well. I don't know, Carol, if you might want to say something about the role that Gideon had played in photography in relation to HIV, or other things that you've noticed about his work over the years.

Carol Brown: Well, he's a wonderful photographer. His work has generally been—I think, almost entirely been—on human rights and advocacy and so forth. He's very brave because it's a very difficult thing to photograph people who are suffering so much, and making that suffering.... Bringing it to other people's notice. And, of course, the HIV ones were also marvelous. And his eye for picking the problems.

David Gere: That's the thing about Gideon that's been phenomenal in my experience over the course of the 20 years or so that we've been working together side-by-side, is that he keeps deepening his engagement, and he stays with it. He doesn't dance in and out of an issue or a problem that he wants to address. He finds a way to engage, and he stays close. That dedication is unusual and extraordinary. I applaud him and it as he does this work, and he's continued to work in HIV. We're going to talk separately about the *Through Positive Eyes* project, of which he's the co-director with me.

We're getting close to needing to close now. And of course, I recognize that there were 75 works of art in the *MAKE ART/STOP AIDS* exhibition. There was so much work, and there were more pieces that were included in the *Not Alone* version of the exhibition that came to South Africa.

Maybe what we'll do is just jump to the last question that we talked about earlier, which is a retrospective one. I wonder if you have had the experience, as you've been digging back into your materials, and looking at the images, and thinking about things that were featured in the *MAKE ART/STOP AIDS* and *Not Alone* exhibitions. I wonder if you could talk about what seems most significant to you in retrospect. When you look back at that project, and what was in it, and what it expressed, what it was addressing—both *MAKE ART/STOP AIDS* and *Not Alone*—what seems most significant to you now?

Carol Brown: It's been a very important thing that we've been doing now, because it was quite a long time ago. When one looks back and goes through all these moments and images, and how bad it was, we tend to sort of think it's all gone. It's finished. It was long ago. The realization comes in. How many people suffered. How much was lost. How much.... It was just [...] because of the South African situation and government, I am sorry to say, who totally ignored the issue of HIV, and the terrible things that were happening, and how many people were dying and suffering. The AIDS denialism was shocking when one think about it. [...]

From my perspective, and obviously my community and peers, that the art exhibitions, and the connections we made, and how your group from the US came in and worked with us, you really started something that was really important. Because had we not had that conference in 2000, I think we might still be back where we were.

What one can never quantify is how art is.... How there's no way of measuring it. But I think that the... What we all were involved in.... They spread a lot of information, which I think allowed people who otherwise would not have had any access to knowing how treatment was....

How to access treatment and what to do, and also to ignore the very strange information that was spreading around. Siopis's baby, for example, bundled up and red. [...] There was this feeling, this superstition that having sex with a baby would cure AIDS. When they came into galleries and museums, we could actually explain to them, and there would've been no other way of accessing people who are not in the mainstream, should I say, and international knowledge. I think it opened up a lot of doors for a lot of things which grew out of all these. There were many, many, of course. There were people on the ground and medicine. That was a different thing. But I think that art brought people into the context who would never have had the opportunity to learn anything about what was happening globally and in their own life, which is the power of art and the power of collaborations as well.

David Gere: Which is the power of art and the power of collaborations, which is so much about the ability that you've brought to working with folks across the world, including us. Thank you for inviting us into your life as an artist and curator, and thank you for sharing so much about the work that was in the *MAKE ART/STOP AIDS* and *Not Alone* exhibitions in our talk today. Thank you.

Carol Brown: Thank you.