

Interview Transcript

Interviewees: Carol Brown and Stan Pressner

Interviewer: David Gere

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Transcript

David Gere: Here we are on May 13th, 2025, and we have a gathering of co-curators here. We're all happy to see each other. We've been catching up a little bit on Zoom. Maybe we could introduce ourselves. I'm David Gere, the director of the Art & Global Health Center at the University of California, Los Angeles. And over to you, Carol.

Carol Brown: Hi, I'm Carol Brown. I'm a curator working in Johannesburg, South Africa, and was part of the team for the....

David Gere: The *Through Positive Eyes* exhibition, which was the last of many that we worked on together.

Carol Brown: Yeah.

David Gere: So Carol Brown, from now Johannesburg, formerly of Durban, who had a big hand to play in terms of getting us started in our exhibitions in South Africa. And Stan, over to you.

Stan Pressner: I'm a theater lighting and scenery designer, occasionally exhibition designer, occasionally curator for dance, theater, opera, music. You name it.

David Gere: So here we are, the three co-curators of the *Through Positive Eyes* exhibition that started in 2016. I know what got us started thinking about that exhibition, but I can't remember exactly how it is that we each connected. So I wanted to ask you if you might tell those stories.

I'll just set this up by saying [that in] the year 2016, we knew that the AIDS Conference was going to be held in Durban. It was the second time in Durban. First time in the year 2000, second time in the year 2016. We knew that that would be a good time to show the work that was being created under the auspices of the *Through Positive Eyes* project with Gideon Mendel as the co-director of that project. I went back to Carol Brown, of course, because we'd worked together on several exhibitions before then, and we knew that she was the person who could help us to work throughout the various cities and lands of South Africa. And then, Stan, you and I have a beautiful history.

Stan Pressner: Long history.

David Gere: Beautiful, long history. Maybe you could invoke some of it and remind [us] of our first contact around the exhibition.

Stan Pressner: David and I first met through a mutual friend that was a high school friend of mine and someone he went to college with. We met in San Francisco, and then in the early 90s, I was a visiting professor at UCLA. They were looking for someone, and I was among the many people who said you should get David Gere, and David has been at UCLA ever since.

David Gere: I have you to thank for it.

Stan Pressner: What?

David Gere: I have you to thank for that. Thank you.

Stan Pressner: Among others. And then, one day in 2015, David—who I adore—was really bad for the next 10 years at staying in touch. But one day my phone rang and it said it was Rachel Cooper from the Asia Society, who was an old and dear friend. I picked up the phone, and I heard David’s voice. David said, “I want you to do this *Through Positive Eyes* thing with me.” I said, “What is it?” And then we went from there. You were with Rachel somewhere in the city.

David Gere: I was meeting with Rachel, who, as you mentioned, has worked for a couple of decades, probably more now, for Asia Society, with Asia society. We got talking about this idea of an exhibition that would bring together the photographs and the narratives—the photo storytelling we like to term it as—that had been created through the *Through Positive Eyes* project. How to show it, how to do this in an interesting way, and how to start it at that 2016 AIDS Conference. [...] I’d like to think that I thought of you first, Stan. I think probably Rachel was going to say, you gotta work with Stan, which is why that phone call came in from the two of us together that day. I’m so glad that you answered the phone that day, and that you were able and willing to jump in and start working on the concept with us.

Stan Pressner: You know the lovely thing is, the three of us come from very different angles at the work. While it was occasionally contentious, it was always to the benefit of the project, that we did come from these different angles, and could bring different points of view.

David Gere: Maybe this would be a good way for us to start—for each of us to talk about what we brought. What we brought in terms of our skills and interests, and what some of the first ideas were that we were contributing to the mix, as we were figuring out how to do this. Stan, you’ve got the floor, in your car. (chuckles)

Stan Pressner: All right. Well, the best idea I had, David, is when you asked me to do it, before I said yes, I said, “You have to agree that we hire 10 docents in each city who are HIV-positive to tell their stories, and to make sure that....” My idea at that time was that they would bring people through the exhibition, and therefore no one would be able to say, “Well, I don’t know anyone with HIV.” But it turned out that we used them as storytellers, which was one of my favorite parts of the exhibition.

David Gere: It was kind of amazing how that developed. And you’re right. I love that the idea that you contributed first, that you’re recalling now, was not about lighting, per se. You haven’t even mentioned lighting really yet, even though that’s your thing, you know.

Stan Pressner: One of many things. (laughs)

David Gere: But that you were right away thinking about what the experience was going to be like, and what the possibilities for change-making would be.

For what it's worth, I think that was the contribution I hoped to make as well. That it would be an exhibition, not where you drink a glass of wine and eat your cheese on a cracker, but rather it would be an opportunity for really change in those of us who were gathered around, whether as visitors or planners or participants in any way. It brings up a word that's very important in the training that I've received, and that is a part of the department that I'm a part of—the World Arts and Cultures Department at the University of California, LA—which is the notion of liminality. Liminality being the space between things when you're disaggregating the old and re-aggregating the new. I, for one, wanted to think about the exhibition as being a place where that would happen, where we would come out as different people than [when] we went in the door at the beginning.

Carol, tell us about what your contribution was from the start, and what you hoped to contribute to the whole thing.

Carol Brown: Mine goes back to.... It was the year 2000 when I was, at that stage, the director of the city's art museum, and it was an enormous.... The AIDS, it was.... At that stage, there was very little information about HIV and AIDS, and particularly among the rural people in South Africa. In the exhibition, we had.... I think it was an international exhibition. We had a very large exhibition of work, particularly being made by the local.... A lot of it concerning HIV/AIDS, the whole gallery. It was a very large gallery, where later on, we would come back to.

At the time, Alan Roberts, who was a UCLA professor, had come to the large AIDS conference, which was being held in Durban. Just before it was being closed on the opening night, he came up to the gallery and ran in, although the gallery was in the city hall.

He saw beautiful beadwork which had been made by local people. The little beaded sculptures, I think, would perhaps be a possible way of describing it. Local people had been making these beads, which, in each little sculpture or artwork, gave a story about their lives, and how this was before treatment, and some very poignant and beautiful bead works. For example, one was a small little.... I'm calling at sculpture. It's not quite correct. They would.... The one that stays in my mind—and in fact, I've got one of them—is the [...] little beaded tableau, I suppose, of people with a coffin, and about three or four mourners, traveling across to the funeral. I think it was very.... Alan Roberts was very moved by this, and he then took it back to.... And invited me to bring a small exhibition of these beadworks. So I brought the whole exhibition in my one handbag or hand luggage.

The Fowler Museum curated it very well. During the curation of it, David invited me to come and give a talk to his students about the exhibition, and that's how I started. David and I then started keeping in touch and making plans to where we would get what we would be doing next. I think that was the start for me. I think, after that, the rest is history, as they say.

David Gere: The rest is history. One thing that strikes me, Carol, is that, from the start, because you had a long history of working together with me and Al Roberts and other folks in the context of the Fowler Museum at UCLA, we had that connection to build on.

But the thing that actually strikes me most is that without you we wouldn't have been able to work in that beautiful space in Durban, in City Hall. That was the place where the Durban Art Gallery was set up. It's an astonishingly beautiful place. You also had deep contacts at museums across the country. You, right away, brought those into play by talking to fellow directors and curators about the possibility of our working in some other spaces. So you were the connecting link between all of the places we wanted to work, and also taking the approach that was very significant as a participatory approach to showing art.

The exhibitions that you worked on with me—and predating working with me and others—was very much about participation, about community participation, about making special events happen that were intriguing to audiences, and made them really want to come and be a part. So there was an excitement factor that you brought to so many exhibitions, long before I was working with you, and I knew that that was something that you would contribute right away to this endeavor. And you did. The compromise concept was built in the crucible of all the three of us, making contributions together and inspiring each other in some way.

Stan Pressner: Just to add, though, Carol also brought an amazing range of resources, from Max doing the printing, through the framers. All those resources in Durban that we would have struggled to find. And, Carol, you just sort of snapped your fingers, and they appeared. It was quite delightful.

David Gere: Yeah. One other thing, Carol, I want to say about you is that, in starting the exhibition, we knew that there were about 10 cities we'd already visited as a project. The *Through Positive Eyes* project had been to 10 cities around the world, and we had gathered photographs taken by people in each of those locations. I remember sitting with you, and looking through a first set of those photos. There's a level of discernment that I could perhaps try to describe. Your way of looking at the images, and your way of perceiving their power their potential power could be, and the way that I could tell your imagination was already starting to go to work, to think about how to display it, how to use these galleries, and what would work and what wouldn't.

One of the first things I recall you're saying was, "This exhibition needs to have more than photography in it." And I, honestly, I thought you were kind of crazy because it's a photography project. It's based on photography. Each one of the participants. The artists, as we call them—artist-activist—was contributing a set of photographs that they had taken. So it's about photos. And it's also about the stories that they told to illuminate or to accompany the photos. So why not focus simply on the photos and the stories? But you said that it needed to have some three dimensionality as well, and I don't know if you could go back, Carol, to think a little bit about what it was about three dimensions, or about a different kind of portal, that seemed important to you, that you thought would make this a better exhibition than just the photo-storytelling.

Carol Brown: I think when I'm thinking now about some of the.... And again, this is where I think our partnership, the three of us and other people who were brought in, really contributed a lot to it. Let's think of Daniel Goldstein, for example, who had the [...] syringes. It was the syringes. To make a living.... Well, not a living.... A sculptural piece, which was something quite wonderful. What was so important about that was that it was not something which was

created, perhaps only by Daniel, but he, by collecting empty syringes from various people who had been using them, and making this wonderful figure out of them, that it was bringing the community into the gallery, as it were, and into a different context altogether. It was really about lived experience and feeling, rather than, as they say.... It gave another dimension to the photography as well. Obviously the photography was a very important part of it, but I think bringing.... And also, I think, Stan, you were the person who designed the big circles, which had the photos in the big circles, which have hung from the wall, and, again, became something a bit different from looking at a framed photograph on the wall, or whatever.

David Gere: Yeah, Stan, what's your memory of how this worked?

Stan Pressner: In my life, the thing that I prize in all sections of my career is collaboration. The three of us.... Like I said, it was occasionally contentious, and occasionally very felicitous. It was the development of ideas, right? I don't know if you two remember. I probably sent you 20 iterations of what those walls look like. You would comment on them, and then I would rearrange them, and then you would comment, and I would rearrange them again. And then, of course, when Carol and I were in the space—I think, David, you weren't there for a brief bit—and we rearranged again until it was what we wanted, and that it spoke to us. The variety of our takes, even just deciding on those 50 photographs that we called the Director's Gallery. We all had a different opinion, and we came to agreement on what they were. They're now all sitting in my attic, and I treasure having them there. And I hope that we get to put them somewhere again. It really was an iterative process as we went, and that was the joy of it for me.

David Gere: You know, Stan, one other thing that I recall is that you really wanted to live with photographs while you were thinking through ideas of how to display them and how to use light to them. So I recall that you were taking images, and you were printing them out on the biggest paper that you had access to, even in your own office. When I visited at one point, they were everywhere. Images were on all four walls of different sizes and different kind of patterns. Mosaics, almost.

Stan Pressner: Which later became the basis for the walls of the presentation room.

David Gere: Exactly. Yeah, right.

Stan Pressner: There were so many photographs for us all to go through, that it was the only way I could think of to begin to come to terms with them.

David Gere: Well, you know, one thing we haven't talked about yet is light. Your specialty, but along with all the other things that you do, and the ways that you think, Stan. But I wondered if you could just talk about some of the first light ideas that were coming to you that came to fruition ultimately in that exhibition in 2016.

Stan Pressner: I wanted things to respond to light in different ways. In the foyer, you walked in, and there were self-illuminated panels, one from each city. That has one relationship to the space. In the next galleries, we just sort of softly lit each piece so that they jumped off the wall. And then, as we got to the circular gallery, it became really pronounced. They were etched in the wall with the delight of the daylight changing constantly. In the middle of the day, they were just slightly highlighted, and by night they were jumping off the wall. In addition to.... We

commissioned Ross Levinson to do that sound collage, which I thought was wildly effective. When the crew members who were hanging those lights and those pictures started crying and asked me to turn it off, I knew we had something good.

David Gere: Yeah, I'm so glad that you've reminded me, all of us, of the sound score that was a part of that. It strikes me that what was being created, the thing that we were dreaming of, again, was a place where we would experience deep feelings, and that we would change somehow in the process, and that we were using every medium that we knew that was available to us. It was visual media. It was three dimensionality. It was the photographs. It was the stories on the wall. It was the stories we were hearing in the voices that Ross had brought us through the sound score. And then, of course, leading to something we call the Banishing Stigma Room, which I really want to give you big credit for, Stan, because I know you, as a theater person, and as a visually-oriented person, that that was kind of a dream that you had. Maybe you could talk a little bit about that concept, the Banishing Stigma Room concept.

Stan Pressner: It was very tight. The walls were covered in a collage of photographs. Overwhelming! You couldn't possibly look at each photograph. But each city was represented in all of its variety. We did use the ultraviolet light at a certain point. It was an environment for people to tell their stories in, and especially in Durban. What stories they were. I mean, the light was in some ways the least of it. But it was just coming up with a way that the technology was as seamless as possible for them to show their images behind them, and highlight the images around, and make it an important room when they were presenting, and an important room when they weren't. That it was an effective exhibition room as well. But it was meant to overwhelm you with the enormity of it, and the enormity, mostly, of people living their lives. People banishing stigma. And just going ahead and being medicated and coming to terms with how they were living, which is really what the whole project is.

David Gere: Yeah, I think you're right, that ultimately, it was an affirmation of life, and a desire to strike down the stigmas that were preventing so many people—and still prevent so many people—from living their lives fully. But, of course, what we saw was the resilience of this group of about 10 people who were telling their stories publicly, were doing it beautifully, were performing their stories in that sense, and showing their photographs on a screen at the same time.

There was one other element of this that I want to credit you for, Carol. You had an idea that, when groups of members of the public or schoolchildren would come into that room, that they wouldn't just stand there watching, or they wouldn't just sit cross-legged on the floor. You actually came up with an idea for how they would sit that involved the beanbag chairs. I wonder if you could just talk about that, and describe a little bit what your idea was, Carol.

Carol Brown: Yes, I think that room particularly was extremely powerful. And the beanbags....[...] There were a lot of young people—teenagers, I suppose—who were affected either through themselves, or through families, who were HIV-positive. [...] I think it having the beanbags meant you weren't sitting on chairs in a formal way. You could lie on the floor if it made you more comfortable. You could actually relax. It seemed to allow them to open out their thoughts much more powerfully than would have been if they'd been sitting formally, or just standing and walking around. I think that sort of way of being perhaps cozy, and also because of

the lighting as Stan's been talking about. It was fairly dark, and you weren't really able to see who was talking or how they were talking.

Mabusi, she was leading the program in that particular room, and she was a wonderful facilitator. She, incidentally, is doing well still. I don't know if you know, but she seems to be very powerful and still working a lot with TB, particularly, at the moment.

But it was a room where people could be away from the general public and almost anonymous, I suppose, and they were able to share. It was quite overwhelming, because, as Stan said, the walls were totally papered with people and people's pictures. You realized you were not alone, definitely. I think there was a lot of power in that particular section of the exhibition as well. A lot of it is also that you're not.... I think somewhere along we had the [sign] "You are not alone," which is definitely part of what helped people to relax. Because one tends to think, especially for teenagers, that they are different from anybody else, [that] there aren't other people who are suffering as well. So just by those.... And again, I think lighting was extremely important for each work. If one goes through them, the way they were lit made a tremendous difference on how it was received and presented.

Stan Pressner: And I have to just take a moment, David, to give credit to ETC [the lighting company] who gave us the lovely contribution of the equipment that I used to do most of that. It was very generous.

David Gere: Thank you for highlighting that, because there were so many of these beautiful little units that you could pinpoint light in so many interesting ways, and it was phenomenal that they gave that huge gift.

Stan Pressner: Yeah.

David Gere: A couple of other memories are coming up. One is that those beanbag chairs were red. They were made out of faux leather. That was another stroke of your brilliance, Carol, that you knew the people who could make those beanbag chairs, and they were.... The color of them, the feel of them had so much to do with the comfort level that people felt in the room. That was one thing, but another thing that's coming to mind, that I hadn't thought about in some time, is that I remember we were kind of struggling to figure out how to direct those stories. I mean, it's not an easy thing for somebody to do an interview, which is what folks had done—the activists had done a taped interview of an hour, hour and a half—and to turn that hour, hour and a half into a seven-minute monologue. We were kind of struggling with how to make that happen, and how to facilitate that. And, Stan, you might recall that you brought in a friend.

Stan Pressner: My friend Paul. Yeah.

David Gere: Paul, who lives in your building. Maybe you could describe a little bit about what made you think of Paul, and what it is that he did when he arrived.

Stan Pressner: Paul is a psychiatrist, a South African, and HIV-positive. In addition to that, he runs programs that teach people to tell their stories, and he's also a playwright. It was just.... He couldn't have blended in better to this process. He was just perfect in the combination of what David and your team did. And then, when Paul came in, they were primed, and he could bring

them. His nephew, whose name I don't recall, who joined us in Cape Town, was equally effective, I thought. It was just an extraordinary.... Oh, and on top of which, his family friend was the wonderful Supreme Court Justice, whose name is escaping me.

Carol Brown: Edwin Cameron.

Stan Pressner: Yeah, who did the opening with us. They were old friends. So it was really.... And he happened to be visiting his mother in Joburg at the time, so he could just come down and join us for a few days. It was really wonderful.

David Gere: It was so wonderful to have him, and he definitely brought a kind of intensity to the experience that we might not have found otherwise. But one thing that I recall [him] doing was that he was encouraging the storytellers to speak to someone, to speak directly to someone. The setup, which we used for a while until comfort came, was that the speaker—the storyteller, the activist—would sit at one corner and would speak directly to someone—one of the friends from this cohort of activists—who would just be there and listen. That person didn't speak. They were just a partner. They were the supportive partner. So we ended up with the speaker and the listener, and you could feel the dynamic between the two of them so intensely. It was so beautiful how it developed over time. And then eventually, I remember that there was kind of a sense of not needing to have that person to sit there and listen. That the speaker, the storyteller, could address the whole audience in that way. But it was a way to learn how.

Stan Pressner: Yeah. It was magical. It really was.

David Gere: It was so extraordinary. Well, what this leads to—in our maybe last segment that we want to talk through right now—is to think about what happened in each location, because there were several. We're speaking mostly about what happened in Durban at the time of the AIDS Conference and the month or two following in the Durban Art Gallery. I'm picturing there was that introductory section with the backlit photographs using a technology that maybe you could remember the name of it, Stan.

Stan Pressner: It's just self-illuminating film. I know there was a better name, but I don't remember now.

David Gere: There was that introductory section. Then there were the 3D sculptural elements in a first gallery that we went into from the foyer. Then there was the round gallery that was so phenomenal, with the framed photographs and the narratives and the sound score. And finally, leading to the Banishing Stigma Room. That was the layout in the first location at the Durban Art Gallery. But then it went to another place that was set up completely differently: the Adler Museum of Medicine in Johannesburg. It was a totally different affair there, and had to be adapted. Carol, you may remember. You know what some of the adaptations were, that you had in mind, knowing that space.

Carol Brown: Yes, I think it was quite different, because it was actually a medical museum. So there were various.... It was not so much of... empty spaces as we'd managed to have in the other places. We had to interact within existing work. It was also, initially, it had been a bit challenging because we realized that there was very little space to actually hang on in that

particular space, but then [...] we constructed or.... I think with it was somebody called Vaughan Sadie, I think.

Stan Pressner: Yeah.

Carol Brown: He came on board, and we had to have big standing screens almost, where you could put the works on. So it was a totally different way of exhibiting. And of course, one of the highlights of there was what was called the I think we called it the *Medicine Cabinet*, by this very talented Durban designer, Xavier Clarice, who had this structure, which at first was just a closed door, and you opened it out to several different.... You could open it to very many other parts of it where there were.... It was based on a cabinet of curiosities, which was the much older type of museum, I suppose. There were all sorts of really interesting things placed into this structure, and stories, and many, many photos, and small sculptures, and beadwork. So that opened out to be a very exciting display as well.

David Gere: And then, of course, just to move us along to the next venue, we ended up at the Slave Lodge in Cape Town, which had a frightening history. It's a space that's imbued with the slave trade that was taking place in earlier centuries. It was a place that, I think, became a very strong show. Again, very different. A smaller space than Durban, certainly, but it had a lot of impact, I think. Stan, you might recall some of the details of how that was laid out.

Stan Pressner: Well, the interesting thing, David, is when you first approached me, the idea was that I would design an exhibition that could sort of unfold anywhere. That it was a fixed thing that we could sort of open up, and, you know, make. As it turned out, given the various venues we've been in, that was an impossible task. Not to mention, even as I thought about it, we could never have afforded it, right? Because it would have been a full build of something. So, sort of fortuitous that we didn't go down that path.

But the Slave Lodge.... The oppression of what it had been was a jumping off point for us in some ways. The ceiling is much lower. It's much more constrained. And so it was trying to find some kind of expansiveness in that constrained space. I think we did all right. I was pretty happy with the way it ended up there, but vastly different than.... Durban, to me, will always be the sort of the exhibition really as we wanted it, even though it was just.... We designed it for that space. It just happened to be a great space. I thought it worked out very well in Durban. And of course, you two will both remember my great tragedy in Durban of putting a spike through my foot.

David Gere: Actually, you mean Cape Town?

Stan Pressner: Cape Town. I'm sorry. Yeah. I actually recently came across those pairs of flip-flops. I was about to throw them out, and my son said, you can't throw those out. (laughs)

David Gere: They have a story to tell!

Carol Brown: I fell and also was very wounded. The pair of us arrived at the opening, bandaged and bruised. It might have been what David did to us. (laughs)

David Gere: It might have been a metaphor for how everyone was feeling at that point. Kind of exhausted. Yeah, for sure.

I do remember that there were some particularly powerful things that happened at the opening. I remember that one of the activist participants, who was telling her story publicly for the first time, she brought one of her relatives. I think it was her uncle.

Stan Pressner: It was her uncle. Unbelievable.

David Gere: Stan, what do you recall about that moment?

Stan Pressner: I just recalled him coming to talk to me afterwards. Well, I remember him getting up, asking if he could get up and sing, which he did. And then afterwards him explaining to me, or perhaps us, that he had no idea. This was the revelation to him, and that he was totally supportive of her. Emotionally, financially. And it was just, okay, this is the power of what we're doing. That she could make this revelation and find the support that she needed was just boggling. What are your memories of it?

David Gere: Well, I remember that room being just full to capacity. It's like we were on top of each other, and people were just kind of reverently listening to each story that was being told. You could feel the reverberations in the room. This was a case of very deep listening happening, and it's being palpably deep. So that's what I mostly remember is the atmosphere in the room, and how it felt like the thing that we would want to do for the rest of our lives. Like this was the Lord's work that we were involved with. Carol, I don't know if you have any specific memories of the time at Cape Town, at the Slave Lodge, that you might want to recall while we're still there before we move to LA.

Carol Brown: No, I can't think of anything specific. No.

David Gere: Yeah, well you probably remember you had fallen and you were injured. That was probably the memory from that moment in time.

Carol Brown: Yes. (laughs)

Stan Pressner: Just to put it on the record, David, it was Paul Broad and Daniel Broad, his nephew, who joined us in Cape Town.

David Gere: Great. Thank you for the full names, for sure. And his nephew also was fantastic, and wonderful, and organized the activists who were working in Johannesburg, actually. And then he came again in Cape Town, as well.

Stan Pressner: Yep.

David Gere: All right. So the last location for the *Through Positive Eyes* exhibition from that era, because I hope there's going to be another one—but from that era, it was the Fowler Museum at UCLA, in Los Angeles. It was visually different, but conceptually, actually, it was the same, which is to say that the organization of the parts was really similar. There was an introduction where all the cities that we had worked in workshop form were represented with one photograph each. Then you came into a main space that looked very different from what we had ever done before, because it wasn't photographs on the wall. Instead, it was stanchions that had been made, designed about the size of a human being. And so you were looking at images that were.... It's almost like you were facing another person as you looked at the image, and as you

walked through the space. It was like a gathering of humans. Then there was a kind of transitional space that was created by Alison Saar. She's an HIV-negative ally, and someone who was well known in the Fowler Museum context. She'd shown work frequently there before. In that space, she was encouraging contemplation. She was encouraging people to think about what they were feeling and experiencing, and what thoughts were in their minds. There were actually slips of paper for them to write these memories or ideas. They were clipped onto strings, and there was a fan that flooded them, so they were like prayer flags. Beautiful. Which led finally to that same banishing stigma room concept, maybe even more fully realized than before. Though we didn't have those red beanbag chairs. I missed those.

Stan Pressner: Well, I was going to say that in our earlier discussion. As you both know, I was not happy with the design of the rest of the exhibition in LA, and I especially wasn't happy that the designer thought, "Oh, well, beanbags. It's so déclassé." And it didn't matter how many times I spoke to him and said, "You don't understand the impact they have. I get that they're not elegant. That's not their purpose." And he didn't want to hear any of it. So I thought that was somewhat less effective than in the other locations.

David Gere: Well, for what it's worth, I agree. And that was just a place where there was disagreement amongst good people about the best way to show the work. We'd seen it done so successfully in Durban and in the other sites in South Africa, so it was hard to give that up. Well, what I would say is that the concept remained the same in the sense that there was a meeting of all the activists, the local artists who had gone through a workshop to tell their stories. They were there, and they spoke eloquently and beautifully.

Stan Pressner: Indeed.

David Gere: We introduced the international concept. There were the photographs that you had laid out, Stan, from each city. We were surrounded by photographs that were taken by people from all over the world, which was phenomenal. And there was a sense of richness, of emotional richness in the room that kind of grew over time. Because we were there for, I think we were there three months that we were at the Fowler, having shows for school kids and for members of the public most days of the week. And it was cumulative. It just felt like it got stronger and stronger, until finally, we had a finale gathering that was just packed. People returning to the scene of the crime, if you will. Returning to have the experience one more time, or to have it for the first time if they'd missed it in the previous months. And then Covid happened. It was just before the whole Covid experience, when the museum and everything else in the world seemed to shut down, that we were able to complete the arc of our experience there at that museum. That was the last time that the work was shown in that form.

Stan Pressner: I just want to give a shout out, though, to the Seattle activists, which.... We had the show designed for Seattle and ready to go when the pandemic happened, but the activists went ahead with you, David, and I thought, did some really strong presentations.

David Gere: They did. Just to explain this, for anyone who wasn't aware, the Gates Discovery Center at the Gates Foundation in Seattle had seen members of.... That delegation had seen the work in Cape Town, and they contacted us and said that they wanted to bring it to Seattle, which we were thrilled about, as you can imagine. So we ran a workshop there. We had a new set of activists. We were all ready to open. Covid. So on account of Covid, we weren't able to open,

and then they leapfrogged over us to the next show, and we were never able to actually show it in the form that we had planned. But the stories got told. We actually ended up working on Zoom with groups of people—from school children, members of the public, et cetera—over a period of several months. A lot of beautiful work got done by artists in Seattle and amazing photographs taken, so they're very much a part of the overall *Through Positive Eyes*.

Stan Pressner: I know. If we, if we ever do it again, David, I am going to have to get those photographs because they're the only city I haven't collaged.

David Gere: Right. That will still remain to be done. Actually, the Ukraine work that was done in Berlin is the other one that we would want to collage as well, which completes the current site. We hope that there'll be more in the next years, but that's where we are right now, having completed Seattle and also Ukraine, Kyiv, Berlin.

This is bringing us to just final thoughts. Things that we, the three of us, learned along the way. Things that we especially loved around the process of doing this. And things that we are dreaming still for the future. Just all of the those kind of yearning feelings that we may be invoking for ourselves right now, having brought all this back to life in our memory minds.

Stan Pressner: Hmm.

David Gere: Stan, maybe you could start us out. What are the first things that come to mind?

Stan Pressner: The first thing that comes to mind is just how much almost all of Durban made me happy. The shape of it. So to have another really distinctive space that I would trust the three of us to mount the show in again, in yet another new way, and maybe to expand even our storytelling in some way. Because that, to me, was the most potent part of all of it. But all of our.... All three of us work.... The other forms. The artist who did the small book. You know that....

David Gere: Parthiv Shah.

Stan Pressner: I really loved having things in different forms, and I think we could explore that a little more as well, and involve other artists in interpreting it. I thought that was very effective. Yeah. I would love to be able to mount the full show again with enough space. Some people found it overwhelming. I thought we paced it very well, so that it wasn't overwhelming. That you move through the different spaces, and they work together. I think that was a function of all three of us.

David Gere: Yeah. Well, it brings us back to the very beginning of our discussion about how each of us was contributing. Maybe a key idea of something that we represented, and that was an important part of our career lives even before we started working together, but also that we were discovering things with each other.

Stan Pressner: Oh, you know, what we didn't touch on was that moment, at the very beginning, when we were trying to decide on themes for different sections. What would the different sections be? I don't know that we ever hit the perfect solution, but I think we hit a good one.

David Gere: I would agree. Yeah. Carol, where are you in final thoughts? The things we learned, the things we loved, things that we'd like to do, even in the future.

Carol Brown: Yeah, I agree totally with what Stan is saying. It's collaboration.... Collaboration is really an important aspect to do something. An exhibition, or whatever one does. I think somehow the three of us all gelled. I certainly hadn't known David and Stan before this project, although I have worked with.... Like all of us, have worked with many different groups. Somehow the magic happened with the three of us, I think, because each of us had slightly different viewpoints in a way that we could put together and pull out to make sense of. And it was a very.... There was no sense of competition between us, or who's gonna be best, or who's the boss, or.... I think for that, we can give a great thanks to David particularly, because he was the overall head of the.... Got everything going so well. But we never felt that we were overwhelmed by him, and anything that we said was stupid or not worth trying. I think there was a great sense of collegiate work that came into it. I think it's also because we came from different perspectives—my experience and life being in Africa. It was to me, a very special and a wonderful experience to work with you, both of you. Again, we get back to collaboration, and that's, I think, that's how we can develop and win that way.

Stan Pressner: Agreed!

David Gere: Well, that leaves me wanting to just express my gratitude to the two of you. How fun it's been to work together on this project. How much I've learned from each of you. How much I acknowledge the things you contributed, that I could never have contributed. So there's so much that you brought to all this and making this possible. The thing that's lingering in my mind is something that we discovered after the Fowler Exhibition in Los Angeles, which was that people had come through, and they'd written on these slips of paper what they were thinking about, and what they were feeling, and what memories it was bringing up for them. At the end of the exhibition, like any good museum, the Fowler was returning materials to us, and they returned those slips, and there are 1,200 of those slips.

Carol Brown: Oh, gosh!

David Gere: So imagine 1,200 people who wrote down for them at that moment of the exhibition.

Stan Pressner: Yeah, wow.

David Gere: And I'm here to tell you that the snapshot that that provided was of people who were in a kind of... I'll call it a positive turmoil, which is to say that they were full of memories. They were full of thoughts. They were full of relationship feelings that they were having for the people whose stories they were reading and whose photographs they were witnessing. And it was the beginning of the stigma being dispelled. Because, what we didn't see was people who were saying mean, nasty, rotten things. It was people who were prepared to let go of the stigma and to replace it with compassion and love.

Stan Pressner: Great.

David Gere: What a remarkable thing for an exhibition to aspire to, and to even be able to do. I feel like the contributions that you made, and I hope I made some contributions that help that as well...

Stan Pressner: Indeed you did.

David Gere: ...made it possible for that kind of a magical chemistry to take place.

Stan Pressner: Yep.

Carol Brown: Yeah, I think that's a good way to put it, because three people who.... [...] I mean, I didn't know you at all before, and I think we all just somehow gel together amazingly.

Stan Pressner: Yep. Carol, I'll just say, I remember arriving in Durban and meeting you for the first time and just feeling like, "Okay, we're in good hands. I'm totally comfortable with this woman, and she's brilliant, and this will be great."

Carol Brown: Yeah, it all just gelled perfectly, which is wonderful.

David Gere: I will say, as we're closing, that I am hoping that there's going to be another opportunity for us to construct and reconstruct elements of the earlier exhibition, but in a new way, as we come to what will soon be the 50th anniversary of the discovery of HIV, which was 1981. So in the year 2031, we will be at 50 years, and I think that that might be a moment to kind of encapsulate the work that's happened, *Through Positive Eyes*, to find a final form for it, and to be able to show it again.

Stan Pressner: That'd be great.

David Gere: I'm dreaming of that. I hope you hope you'll be there with me as we arrive, and it's not that far off. I mean, it's only what? Five, six years now, from the moment that we're sitting in, and it takes that long to put together a good big museum show, so we might have to start soon.

Carol Brown: Yep, I'm ready. We're in.

David Gere: With that, I want to thank you, and say goodbye for the moment, and hope to see you again very soon.

Carol Brown: Thank you.

Stan Pressner: Bye!