

Interview Transcript

Interviewee: Carol Brown

Interviewer: David Gere

Date: October 25, 2024

Location: Online

Duration: 01:09:39

Transcript

David Gere: Hello! I think we'll begin by just introducing ourselves. I'm David Gere. I'm the director of the Art & Global Health Center at the University of California, Los Angeles. I am in conversation today with....

Carol Brown: Carol Brown. Hello! I live in Johannesburg, in South Africa. During the years which we will be talking about, I was in Durban, which is in KwaZulu-Natal, and I had just resigned as director of the Durban City Art Museum. I had started my own consultancy, called Curate a Space.

Since then, I have carried on curating in very many places, mainly South Africa, but also in Europe and Australia, and various other places. My interest is still very much on art and health and medicine, and how it affects us all.

David Gere: I'm thinking what a privilege it is for me to be able to be in conversation with you, Carol, and to bring back memories of all the work that you have done, and that we, in some cases, have done together. It's going to take us all the way back into the 1980s and 90s as a starting place. In fact, as a way to begin, I wanted to invoke your work with the Durban Art Gallery in Durban, which, by the way, is in the eastern portion. KwaZulu-Natal is the name of the province in South Africa.

I wondered if you could talk a little bit about your first awareness of HIV as you were working at the Durban Art Gallery. I did a little bit of reading up. I've actually referenced a wonderful chapter of your own dissertation about the Durban Art Gallery that talks about this history. I noted that it goes all the way back to the year 1982.

You might recall that 1981 was the year in which HIV was first identified in the United States and written about in *The New York Times*. It was the year later that the first cases of HIV—not known as HIV yet—were identified in South Africa.

It was sometime after that that you referenced, in the dissertation, that you started to do some work related to HIV at the Durban Art Gallery. I wonder if you could take us back there to that year, which I believe was 1995.

Carol Brown: Sorry. It was actually 1997.

David Gere: Tell us about the project that you developed that year, and where it came from, if you would.

Carol Brown: Yes, [...] in South Africa, because South Africa was still under the apartheid regime until 1994, when Nelson Mandela was released from prison, where he had been for many years of his life. It was the end of the apartheid years.

Things for South Africans, during apartheid, were very different because we had very little access to legally meet and mingle with people who were not white, and it was very different. AIDS was really, mainly.... We weren't, as white people, in the center of the city. We didn't actually know much about HIV/AIDS, and people were very frightened to speak out. Obviously, there were white people who had AIDS. It was just very difficult to understand or realize that this was really around us.

At that stage, just after democracy in '94, I was working in a place called the African Art Center. When I say working, it wasn't my job, but I was working together with them. Their programs were starting then with women from the rural areas, as well as what is known as the township areas in South Africa, who started making little beaded dolls.

The beaded dolls were almost a language which wasn't always recognized by everybody. But a lot of them were about death and funerals, people dying, and children dying. Actually, can I ask Keith to just fetch one?

David Gere: Sure.

Carol Brown: Keith, can you go to the bookshelf? Can you go to the bookshelf and get that little beaded thing that's on the front? And bring it for me. With all the little people.

David Gere: And Keith, by the way, is Carol's husband. Just so you all know.

Carol Brown: Sorry. I just realized now that I had it here. It would be nice to see the.... Yeah, that's it.

[shows the dolls]

That is a little tableau of people. What it actually says here is that they are going to *eGoli*, which is what Joburgers called...

[shows the base of the dolls with the word "*eGoli*" spelled in all capital letters]

...which is Joburg.

In the front, there is a coffin. It's not easily recognizable as a coffin if one didn't know. They were actually coming to—where I'm now living—to Johannesburg, and bringing the coffin here closer to where the people who had died. The death were being caused by HIV at that stage.

I think the artwork was probably a little bit older than when I first came across it in the city, in Durban. That is where the AIDS chair I encountered. I was working with these people who were actually from the UK. They'd come to South Africa because they'd heard about the problems

here and how it was it was being denied. Our president at that stage, Mbeki, had said that there was no such thing as HIV, and it was you know there was a great level of denial here.

I was very taken by.... I met a group of I think there were two men from—I don't know what city, I can't remember, in the UK. They had brought this little project. They were painting chairs and taking them to different venues and making little exhibitions. I was very excited, I suppose, or pleased to see that somebody was actually acknowledging the fact. It took a little bit of courage to even acknowledge it here because there was a lot of denial.

Anyway, I made the gesture of purchasing the chair for our permanent collection in the Durban Art Gallery, which is a museum actually. That was the first object which had any reference to HIV in the art collection at that time.

Then that started a little bit when we had then invited them to have a small exhibition there of other chairs as well, which they'd done. I think that started the interest in other people, and probably was more important that has ever really been given any recognition.

Sadly, I've totally lost contact with those people. I don't even know if.... They were called the Open Door. I think it was in.... Wasn't London. I think it was in.... No, I can't really remember. Anyway, in England.

I think that also may have had a little bit of influence in these beaded objects, which were being made, but not brought to the mainstream. We started purchasing the beaded objects, and not in a big way.

The biggest, I suppose, thing that happened was in the year 2000 when South.... There was the World AIDS Conference, and one of the main people there was Edwin Cameron—Justice Edwin Cameron—who was HIV positive, and who was a gay man, but had not.... I don't think he had come out in public until.... We had curated a very large exhibition. There were about six exhibitions in our museum, which is a fairly large museum. At the opening, Edwin Cameron came out, and it was a very brave move in the context of the time, and the art, of course, spoke for itself.

Shall I go on?

David Gere: Let's pause for just a moment to loop back to a couple of things that you were starting to reference.

First of all, I think we should look at that chair. The dissertation that you wrote mentions that the artist was named Lester Skingale-Clark.

[photo of chair shown]

And this was the chair that he painted. He, I believe, was openly HIV-positive, and, as you said, the chair was donated to the gallery's permanent collection at the Durban Art Gallery. Maybe you can tell us what you see when you see this image of the chair. Now what you notice about it, and maybe describe it a bit, and pull out some of its key features.

Carol Brown: I think if one looks at the chair, it really is about death. When one's looking at the seat of the chair, there's the AIDS ribbon in the corner, and there is the body. It's obviously a body, a Black body, because the other thing was, in South Africa, Black people were much more affected by AIDS because of these various circumstances of more poverty and less access to medication—very little access to medication—and so it was mainly a disease that affected the Black South Africans.

And on the head of the back of the chair, there's the ghostly white figure and the black.... Like a death.... Sorry, I can't get the word. What is it? What's that type of bird? It's a....

David Gere: Oh, a bat.

Carol Brown: That's right. So those sort of objects relating to the dangers of AIDS and HIV. It was telling that story that people are dying.

The people are not necessarily all Black people either. That was, he was.... We have to bring race into it. He himself was a white man, and he's just saying that.... In South Africa [it was] considered that white people wouldn't get AIDS. It was only Black people if they did get it. So it was a very racial context as well. I think that is also reflected in the way he presents the chair.

He did several of these chairs. I don't think any other institution in South Africa purchased the works at all, so that would probably be the only one.

David Gere: You suggested in the dissertation that there were several chairs. They'd been donated—unpainted—and they were actually painted in the art gallery through a series of workshops. There were children, there were adults who decorated the chairs, and Lester Skingale-Clark would have been one of them.

Carol Brown: Yes, that's right. Yes, he would have been part of the organization of that.

David Gere: Mm-hmm. And you suggested that this was actually the very first work reflecting the pandemic to enter the permanent collection of the gallery/museum.

Carol Brown: It is.

David Gere: So it's significant from that standpoint.

I also want to just mention a little bit in terms of the infection rates in South Africa at the time. KwaZulu-Natal has had, historically, the highest rates in South Africa. At that time—I just looked up, actually, some figures—the infection rates, sometimes known as prevalence rates, were around 20%. This is basically suggesting that one out of five, or even more, two out of five, potentially, people, at that time, around the year in the years leading up to 2000, were infected, and therefore were directly dealing with HIV, let alone, of course, the larger societal effects that everyone was addressing in their lives.

There's one other project that you mentioned in the dissertation which I wanted to ask you about. It was called square up to human rights, which you described as squares of fabric that were made available to paint in the gallery, or to decorate in some way. They were then sewn together into quilts, which obviously there's a connection with a project in the US that I wonder if you might

talk about as well. How that happened, what that looked like, and how it was connected to the US-based project.

Carol Brown: Yes, I can't recall how it was. I presume we knew about the US project. I'm not sure whether we did or not.

David Gere: The AIDS Quilt is what we're referencing which was, I think, first devised in San Francisco by Cleve Jones in 1987.

Carol Brown: Yes, in fact, yes, we did know about it, I think, because I visited.... I had a scholarship to go to Atlanta when I was in the US. [...] I had the privilege to see.... There is a museum, or a place [...] which is actually dedicated to have all those quilt....

David Gere: All those quilt panels.

Carol Brown: I was shown them, and had the privilege to actually walk there and look at each one. Well, not each one. Obviously that would have taken a long time. But to get a feeling about it. [...]

Al Roberts actually somehow organized that visit for me. I only met him somewhere around that time. We made the quilts. [...] There's 11. I think can I just pause. I just want to think of the story. Oh, yes, that's right.

We did do workshops and have the quilts made, and I think.... One day I was giving a talk about the quilts just recently after we'd had it made. I think I said to the audience of women, "I think we did several quilts. I don't know where the quilts are, or if they still exist." And a person stood up and said, "I want to tell you I work for Nelson Mandela, and he has the quilt on his bed in his house."

So that was one of the quilts. That was really quite an exciting moment to hear that he had [the quilt]. I don't know where he got it from, if he'd been gifted it, but it was one of the quilts we had made. So that was a great honor and very interesting.

David Gere: That's beautiful. Well, you've referenced Mandela a couple of times, and of course he's a hugely significant world figure, let alone his importance in South Africa itself. But you've also mentioned Edwin Cameron, and I want to invoke one other name of a Supreme Court, a Constitutional Court Justice which is the equivalent of the Supreme Court in the US.

So Edwin Cameron—very significantly being involved in projects, especially starting in the year 2000, which we'll come to in a moment—but also Albie Sachs. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about that Constitutional Court Justice, Albie Sachs, and his interests in art, and the ways that he played into this early work that you were doing at the Durban Art Gallery.

Carol Brown: Yes, he was actually not allowed to be in South Africa at some time in the earlier days because he was considered to be a troublemaker and exposing things. Because of his outspokenness, [...] a bomb was thrown at him. He had to have one arm amputated, and he lost the sight of one eye.

He had to be in exile in what was then called Lourenço Marques, and it's now.... Sorry, these names are all coming out of my head. But it was in Africa, and it was not South Africa, and it didn't have the same rules in the apartheid.

He was a fighter for justice always. He actually was the person who planned to institute... It was his vision [...] to have a Constitution. The first South African Constitution. The court was built, and he oversaw the building and the design of it. It was probably one of the, well, certainly in South Africa, one of the first court courts to have a wonderful art collection in it.

People donated artworks, and most [of] the artworks were mainly about political [topics], but about anything, really. They had a political feeling, but it wasn't the feeling of anger. [They were] very positive art artworks, and I had the privilege to be the curator of that collection for two years.

It was a great experience to see how people who came to—and the court itself, where the trials were held about constitutional issues—were full of art, and beautifully, artistically made. It's wonderful. It still is. People still come. There's tours of the court, and it's a wonderful document of the history of South Africa, and what it meant to finally have a constitution and to have freedom for all, whoever they are. He's a very entertaining, wonderful raconteur of all his....

I recently myself curated an exhibition in Joburg in a small gallery, and it was called Binocular Vision, because various reasons. I sent them an invitation to Albie online as I always do. He got back. He said, "Carol, I don't think I'll be able to come because you said you have to have binocular vision to come, and I've only got one eye." So I replied, "You've got 6 eyes, so you're quite welcome." (laughs)

He's that sort of person. This is a work, you know, a very important figure in the world. One can joke and make those sort of comments and have fun with.... So it was a wonderful privilege for me to have those two years working there, and I grew greatly. I've had many privileges in my life through art. Another one is UCLA, and you, you all.

David Gere: Sweet of you to say that. Thank you.

I'm finding myself thinking now we're looping a bit, but I hope that those who might listen to this interview can kind of follow the chronology. We've mostly been talking about the late 1990s. That's a period of time when you, at the Durban Art Gallery, started to make this, I'll call it communal and [...] participatory art being a major focus in the HIV era.

I wanted to just pause for a moment before we get all the way to the 2000 conference in Durban to ask you what it was, in your own sensibility, that made you want to do these kinds of projects. The kinds of projects where people come into the workshop space and paint their own chairs, or they come into the space, and they paint or decorate a square of fabric, and then it's turned into a quilt.

What is it that that made you think, in those terms, as opposed to the kind of rarefied experience of the fine artist who works in their studio, and they bring the work over to the museum?

There's a kind of informality in your approach, and a participation orientation of your approach. That's notable. And I wondered if you could just tell us a little bit about where that came from and where that influence is that led you in that direction.

Carol Brown: Whoa! I've never really thought about it. [...] I was just thinking about it recently, David. You might relate to this. What's her name? [...] Mabusi. She's working with TB now.

David Gere: Mabusi, who was one of the project directors—project coordinators—for us as we were moving from city to city in South Africa with an exhibition. Yes, Mabusi.

Carol Brown: Yes. She made me think a little bit about it because.... Whether this is relevant or not, I don't know.

I never went to a formal university in my youth. My father died when I was a teenager, and my mother didn't have.... My father was Czechoslovakian in those days. I suppose my sort of upbringing was a little bit different, and my mother's parents had come from Mauritius, and they had all somehow left. They were nomads.

Anyway, I studied to be a secretary. I met Keith. We married, and after a couple of years, I actually was very, very ill, and I got TB. TB was eradicated at that stage, and I was diagnosed with all sorts of other things. And I suppose there's a racial thing to it because I was misdiagnosed for a long time. I was very sick because, "White people don't get TB," they said. They didn't even test me for TB. There was a TB hospital, which was mainly black people, and it was just sort of [an] accident that they found out that I had TB. I went into the hospital, and I spent nearly four months in hospital as the only white person, really. Maybe.... I don't know. You know, these are all just things.

And then, I had started studying online. We've got an online [university] which was very much ahead of its time—a university in South Africa called Unisa, which is the University of South Africa—and it was way before any sort of.... You had to write your dissertations and your stories, and send them by post, and it was a whole thing. So I sort of spent quite a lot of time. I think that was my final year when I was in the hospital.

I think that experience.... I have never really thought about it myself, but I think maybe that's what it was.... Having experienced being.... I wasn't allowed to be really visited, [but] my family were. Keith was wonderful. We were married then. I think somehow that is what brought me to understanding. Being in a way, I suppose.... I suppose you know when people are frightened of you, they don't want to.... What is the word being....

David Gere: I can tell that you're talking about the stigma associated with tuberculosis.

Carol Brown: Stigma. Yes, that's right. So I don't know. Maybe that's what it was. Art was like a little extra, I think. Oh, my major was psychology. That's right. Psychology and French, which I can't even speak now. But anyway, I think the psychology as well was partly what.... Because, at that stage, I thought [...] of doing arts or not. But I had never studied art at school.

I was at a convent previously, where it was not known—not ladylike, or whatever it was—to do art. I think then, when I started doing art, I loved it. And then I, as a sort of coming out of the hospital time, I got a little part-time job in a medical school. I was a secretary to the professor in the medical school. [...] His wife was an artist. [...] An administrator went away overseas. I was working as a temporary secretary [...] I had my first degree in art by then. [She said,] “Take part.” This person had to go away for a couple of months, and that’s really where it started.

They put me on their board immediately—on the administrator board, or whatever. That’s a long time ago, and that was just how it started. Then I continued the art studying. That’s sort of how that it all grew. It was not really something I’d planned. I really fell into it. I’m very grateful that I did. It would change my life.

David Gere: I can tell that when it came to HIV, that you brought a particular sensibility to that moment in time, your interest in human rights, your interest in health, your interest in participation in the gallery space, things that actually would be considered very bold in American institutions even now. Some of that boldness was being reflected in the choices you were making, starting from the mid 90s and beyond, which leads us to the year 2000.

You started to mention it already, but I want to refocus our attention there on the year 2000. This is a significant year in terms of arts and arts-activism in South Africa because it was the year of the 13th International AIDS Conference in Durban. You started to make a relationship with the organizers of that conference in the year 2000.

There was a significant political background. You mentioned it already that Thabo Mbeki, the president of the country, was suggesting that he was going to align himself with the AIDS denialists, as they’re often known. People who say that there is no such thing as AIDS really, which, of course, was working against the public health folks who were struggling to try to save more lives and to get medical treatments available to those who needed.

It was at that time, planning for that 2000 conference, that you came up with a series of exhibitions for the Durban Art Gallery, one of which had a particular importance moving forward because of what it said about the building: the Durban Art Gallery building, which was city hall. It also fed us, in Los Angeles at UCLA, some ideas about how to think about art in the AIDS era.

I want to ask you if you could talk about those exhibitions that you set up in the year 2000 and leading up to a photograph, that we’ll share when you’re ready, of the building being wrapped.

Carol Brown: I just found this cutting from a newspaper during the time about when we wrapped the building, the city hall, our museum gallery.

[photograph of Durban City Hall shown]

Okay, yes, there we are. This is the Durban City Hall, which is the center of Durban’s business, [like other] cities, [with] governments and shops, and so forth. Very much in the old British style of architecture and public buildings. We decided to make a strong statement about the pandemic and the AIDS denialism which it was still happening at that time.

I'm just going to read this here. The article about this, which would have accompanied an image like that said, "What weighs 700 kg, is 500 meters long, 2 meters wide,..." I know meters is a different measurement, but "Red and white and black, and comes with a message?" That was a headline in one of our local newspapers. [...] There were 100 banners. Perhaps we can go to one of the pictures of the banner close-ups.

David Gere: We may not have a close-up available until we turn to the exhibition that happened at the Fowler Museum, but maybe you could just tell us a little bit about the content of the banners.

Carol Brown: The ribbon is made up of a hundred panels. Each one was 4 meters long and 2 meters wide. The panels were handed out to a hundred different groups and individuals, and the request was we.... It was an enormously large operation to do with not much funding.

They were all handed pots of white and black paint, because we wanted to keep it in a design. Otherwise, it would have been crazy. They each were asked to send a message, write a message about AIDS. The groups involved were.... One of them was Artists for Human Rights, and others, individual artists. Several individual artists. There were orphanages, schools, companies, commercial factories. Many, many schools. Obviously artists and health organizations, you can imagine.

Each panel was worked on by 10 people, so there were actually 1,000 artists. I think it must be quite a record, other than the AIDS [Quilt]. There were 40 women from the community who were sewing groups, who were sitting sewing them up. And the rest of 3,000 was made up of performers and marchers because we organized a parade in the center of the city, which came right from quite far down with a band, people also giving out various information pamphlets and talking. So, you know, all sorts.

I'm just looking up a couple of messages on them. For example, "If you want to rub out AIDS, use a rubber." This one I can see here. Oh, there's all sorts of different slogans.

We did this whole parade through the city with, again, thousands of people. It was just a very amazing event, and it involved so many people there. I think it really brought a lot of attention to the issue that we were working with. It was wonderful that people who had never, ever been even into the center of the city, people from outside of the Durban city center, and people, youth. It was a very.... I think it caused a lot of interest and led to a lot of awareness which, after all, was the value of the intention of it, that people become aware.

We took a bit of a chance because we have quite a conventional Durban city council, but somehow or another, we worked with the architecture departments and the architects. It was a very, very big community that joined in. I think it was quite a strong way to also promote the idea that culture can be used to address issues such as AIDS and don't hide away it. It made it very, very open, and very public.

David Gere: One thing I'm conscious of is that you made such a huge effort, and you really demonstrated, with this project, that you didn't have to go inside the city hall, which is where the museum is located, the Durban Art Gallery is located. You didn't have to go inside. You actually

opened up the inside to the outside. You revealed kind of the core of the institution, and you put it in a most visible place and the most accessible place: the outside of the building.

So that seems to have been an amazing aspect of this, and the other is a further echo of the AIDS Quilt. The banner sizes are just about the same sizes as the banners that were made for the quilt at the Names Project quilts in the US. About the same size, the same notion of each group or person building their own banner, and then stitching them together. But you, of course, did it in a very unique way which was special to your moment in time, and special to the conference, and special to the building.

Carol Brown: I actually didn't.... Well, maybe I did, but I didn't realize that they were the same size and measurement as the AIDS Quilt, because the AIDS Quilt looks as if it was much bigger, I think.

David Gere: The individual panels are the same size as....

Carol Brown: Okay, there [would] be much more panels. [...] Yeah, that's interesting because ours were designed just because of the size to fit into the building. So there's something quite interesting in your comment there.

David Gere: This is all leading inexorably to the first connection between the work that you were doing at the Durban Art Gallery and the involvement of UCLA, the University of California, Los Angeles, because, as you shared with me, on the night of the opening, someone walked in the door. And you met that someone. His name is Al or Allen Roberts. He's a professor at UCLA, in the Department of World Arts and Cultures. Very strongly connected to the Fowler Museum, where his wife, Polly Roberts, was serving as deputy director. You told me that he came up the stairs at the very end of the opening, and it was almost over. You connected with him then, and it led to an interesting next stage in this work. Tell us a little bit about that, if you could.

Carol Brown: Yes, it was. Yeah. The art gallery was upstairs, and we were closing for the night. Almost everybody had gone, but somehow the security allowed him in to have a quick last look at it. I met him on the stairs, and he said please, so I said, "Sure, we'll stay open for another ten, fifteen minutes, but we can't stay much longer." We got to chatting, and he was very excited about the exhibitions, that we had many exhibitions there. Among the exhibitions, there was an exhibition with the beadwork, with the women who were making these beadwork tableau, and that's what really interested him as well. He said, "These are small. They're quite easy to travel, and we'd love to show those at UCLA. What about that?"

I was very excited. I never expected anything like that. Then we kept in touch, and it wasn't much long after that. I can't remember exactly how long, but I think it was a matter of six months, or something like that. He invited me to bring an exhibition to UCLA, of the small beaded works, but because it was a small exhibition and there weren't years to prepare, he said, "Well, just come along and put the exhibition in your suitcase." (laughs) So that's what we did. I just brought a couple about, I think, two or three suitcases, with a number of these beaded—I call them the beaded tableau—and there were also some fabric works as well. Panels. It was a small exhibition, but it was very well received.

At the time, David, you invited me to come and give a talk at one of your sessions, and that's how we all linked them. And then, David, you sort of took it further again, and that was the *MAKE ART/STOP AIDS*, wasn't it? Yep.

David Gere: Yes, and the significant thing for me is, as we start to think about all the figures who are connected to each other, is that I was co-teaching a class for the World Arts and Cultures Department called Theories of Performance, and I was co-teaching with Al Roberts.

When he organized this exhibition with you, and you were bringing your suitcases over, we, of course, built it into the class. It became like a significant part of our thinking in the class to see the exhibition, to talk with you about where it came from, to understand more about the residences, and it led me to think much more about visual art in relation to HIV more than I had ever before.

This happened in the year 2002, so it was within two years after the exhibitions that you organized along with the International AIDS Conference in Durban. Shortly after, in museum time. Most people will know that it takes three to five years—maybe 10 years, even in many cases—to organize a museum show.

This was incredibly quick, and the fact that you could bring it into a suitcase is what made it possible, of course. But it did lead to this exhibition, which was called *Break the Silence*, which actually had been the name of the International AIDS Conference in Durban. So it was an echo of that. Subtitle: Art and HIV/AIDS in South Africa.

[slideshow of installation photos shown]

And here are some images from it. You can see these installation photos. This is a good reminder to me, Carol, but maybe to you as well, as to what it looked like in the space.

Carol Brown: It is.

David Gere: Maybe we could roll through two or three of them, and you could tell us what you're seeing here, and tell us a little little bit about pieces that stand out for you.

[installation photo of banner segments shown]

Carol Brown: All these fabric pieces were from the banner that we've seen. They were part of.... I think it's in the archive of the art gallery. I took these pieces, which were actually made part of that banner. Al would have seen that banner, obviously, when he came, and I think that's what attracted him into the art gallery. [...] These are all part of them, and it was just selected to black and white. Well, black and white was all that was allowed for the banner, so that is why every panel was black and white.

David Gere: Let's go back to the first image because you can see the beadwork in that first one.

[beadwork installation photo shown]

There we go.

Carol Brown: Yes, there's the beadwork, you'll see there. There were several big [...] beaded sculptures. These were images of crucifixions. [...] South Africa [has] a very large Christian population, and they would be the people from the rural areas and the townships who were the most affected by AIDS. They are also very beautiful sculptures. [...] The red hats are very typical of a Zulu dress. [For] many Zulu women, it's very common that that is almost a tradition or uniform.

So we are seeing it's particularly the Zulu.... What is the word? Zulu is a group of.... I'm not being an anthropologist. I'm not quite sure what the word is, but it's a group of people. What is David? Do you know?

David Gere: Do you want to use the word "tribe" or "culture"?

Carol Brown: You know, tribe becomes also a bit contested these days.

David Gere: Loaded.

Carol Brown: Yeah. But anyway, they would be Zulu people. You can see AIDS ribbons depicted on the cross as well. It's just a call to Jesus to help them, I suppose.

David Gere: Could you tell us a little bit about the plates or disks that are on the wall, mounted?

Carol Brown: Yes. Those are made from telephone wire. I presume the system's the same in the US. I don't know that South African.... The wires that were used for telephone communications, they're quite easy to purchase because there was a great industry of making wires for the practicalities of telecommunications and phones. Artists were using these wires like embroidery. There were many baskets and flat plates, which again were narrative. There was text on these plates, also very beautifully patterned. But again, the issue of HIV at that time was being reflected as well onto these wire baskets—what we call baskets here—and they can be flat and they can be basket-shaped. 3D.

David Gere: Tell us about the three that you can see on the screen. The one on the right is quite explicitly referencing HIV and AIDS. I'm having trouble reading upside down. What's on the bottom of that? It might be a place name. But we see on the right-hand side red ribbons, the text HIV and AIDS, more ribbons, patterning, circular patterning. Basically, it's using design elements that are associated with these wire disks, but now applying them to the HIV/AIDS context.

Carol Brown: Yes, that's right. Yes. They're also very beautiful objects.

David Gere: Similarly, the middle one, I can see has the words HIV, top and bottom, and ribbon motifs kind of filtered throughout.

Carol Brown: Yeah. The ribbon. The ribbon became a very great marker of HIV. The ribbon was very widely used.

David Gere: There was a moment when I started to feel that they'd become trite because they were so overused, but I can see how, especially in those earlier years, that it was very significant

to use a symbol that was immediately identifiable, especially in the context of wrapping [Durban] City Hall, and including those gigantic ribbons at the entrance points.

Carol Brown: Yes, the ribbon was very important. Yeah. One doesn't see that very much anymore, which is good.

David Gere: Alright, so there's just one more thing that I want to talk about today, Carol. So much of the work that we've done at UCLA has been connected to you. We have to have one more interview to talk about the later exhibitions, including the *MAKE ART/STOP AIDS* exhibition. That will come separately.

I wanted to reference one of the things that came up as we were beginning to develop ideas for the *MAKE ART/STOP AIDS* exhibition that ended up being a very significant in-between exhibition sponsored in part by the Fowler Museum, also by the Art & Global Health Center, and it involved an altarpiece. So I want to just see if we can go back to that moment.

Here we are. 2002. The work that you had done in Durban has been brought to UCLA. It's at the Fowler Museum. We meet each other. We start to have conversations leading to the possibility of a future exhibition, *MAKE ART/STOP AIDS*. And in between, there's a moment when I get an email from you. We're in good email conversations at this point. In fact, we even are on Skype, because this is the era of Skype. We're starting to have direct conversations online, but especially through email.

You say, in this very brief email to me, "I've just been to the Grahamstown Arts Festival," which is near where you lived in Durban. "And I have seen a masterpiece." What was it that you had seen, and what happened as a result?

Carol Brown: Yes. I was trying to find that email, but I still haven't. [...] It's a festival where I was actually curating another exhibition by.... I think the artist was Andrew Festér, who was a gay white South African artist, whom I did a tremendous amount of work with. My exhibition was in one of the big galleries there. It was lunchtime, I think. I thought, "Well, I'll walk around to see what other exhibitions there are." There was an empty.... There was a church, I think it was. [...] There was not much branding or any labeling outside.

I wondered what's in there, and I walked into the open door, and I was just blown away. I don't think I've ever been so affected to see something. I couldn't believe. I thought, "What on earth is this? Why is this in this little place, which is not actually being shown, or not much attention paid to it?"

It was this most incredible altarpiece which.... Well, I think one has to see a video just to.... We will be able to show those. But it was just amazing. It was so poignant, and it was.... The artwork was incredible.

It was closed, and then somebody came and said, "Would you like me to open it now?"

[photo slideshow of the *Keiskamma Altarpiece* plays]

They opened it, and it was just magic here. Yes, here it is. [...] Each panel opens out from... and grows as you... When you see it like this, it's not as amazing as it really is. It's also the scale. It's very, very big. I haven't got the exact measurements yet.

David Gere: I just looked up the measurements. It's 13 feet tall and 22 feet wide.

Carol Brown: Yeah, so it's really large. Every time you open the door—I think it's three openings—it's magical. There's just amazing images and wonderful characters. I think it should be a world-famous object.

David Gere: I agree. You know the photograph....

Carol Brown: And a really important one. I don't understand why it's not in an important museum.

David Gere: Yeah, as I see these pictures, I'll just say, once I saw it in person myself, I understood why you were so overwhelmed by it. By the strength of it, the beauty of it, the power of it, and the history of it, which we'll get to in just a moment. But one thing I'm missing in these photographs is the feeling of the opening.

There's something that happens as each of the panels is opened that's so dramatic. You feel as though you're taking a breath and encountering something visionary each time that the thing is open. This is the first image, by the way, that we're looking at right now. And then it opens up a little wider with each subsequent pull. We'll have to see if we can get some images which are video images that actually show the opening which again is significant and impressive.

You, luckily for me, have been in touch with Carol Hofmeyr, who is the person who helped to conceptualize this piece with a community of women who live in a little town called Hamburg, like the German Hamburg, which is in the Keiskamma region. There's a river called the Keiskamma River that runs through it. So this is known as the Keiskamma Art Project. It's a collective of mostly women—some men, but mostly women—who have created this work together under the direction, in this case, of Carol Hofmeyr. We are looking forward to having a separate conversation with Carol about that, so that we can hear more of the details of the imagery and the process that she and the community and collective went through to create it.

But I just want to say at this point that once you had identified from your experience in Grahamstown, that something extraordinary had appeared on the scene in relation to HIV and AIDS, that reflected responses of that community to the loss of so many and the illnesses of so many in that community. It seemed clear that we needed to share it with more people, to help to share it with more people.

And so, in fact, it went on an amazing.... I shouldn't call it a global tour, because it didn't go everywhere, but it went a lot of places. It started in Canada, in Toronto, at the International AIDS Conference. There it came to Los Angeles. It went to San Francisco. It went to Washington, DC. A lot of this was facilitated by an episcopal church in Chicago. Perhaps when we have the next conversation with Carol Hofmeyr, I'll tell the story of how a friend of mine at that episcopal cathedral helped to facilitate the support and funding necessary to make this happen in so many places around the world.

But with that, why don't we come to closing statements, for now, knowing that there's more to come. I wonder if you might speak, Carol, for just a moment about what it's been like for you to kind of pull back this history that you've been such a large part of, and to think about the significance of the works of art, the importance of art-making in the AIDS epidemic, and other things that have been on your mind since you've been going through this memory-evoking process.

Carol Brown: I think it's been, as they say, a journey, which I never planned or expected. That little one chair, I suppose, raised my interest and knowledge about the issue of HIV/AIDS, and the importance of.... I wouldn't say it was highly powerful, the chair, but it was the beginning of what became a very powerful project altogether.

Bringing in so many people and awareness was very important because there's been that stigma around HIV/AIDS that was really dreadful, and such a sad issue that people who were dying and suffering were being treated so badly. [...] I think it did have a.... It doesn't have the effect that medicine has, but I think that it's been very successful in reducing stigma, which is, that in itself a really important thing that the art has done.

You can actually see it happening when people come into a gallery and talk about it, and also that people are able to talk about it in a safe space and share their experiences. I think that has also been with—particularly with the exhibitions we've done together with UCLA—that public come there, and quite openly, will say that they are HIV-positive, and that has been very important for so many people to be able to realize that they are still accepted, and they are not stigmatized. There aren't many other mediums that would allow such openness. The art galleries have become a very safe space, which is something I—galleries and museums—which I don't think I have ever in my studies of art history, and art in Europe, and so forth, I don't think it's ever been. I think that has been something quite new which has happened here with the HIV. Yeah, that you can actually be there and know you are allowed to talk about it and share it with other people. I think that's been for me perhaps the most important part of it.

David Gere: As you're invoking the importance of art and counteracting stigma, it makes me think about a resident of a Durban area—I think one of the townships—by the name of Gugu Dlamini. Gugu Dlamini was an AIDS activist who came out openly as an HIV-positive person on a radio program, and soon after, her neighbors.... This is a horrifying story, so forgive me for sharing it, but it's important.

This is in 1998. Her neighbors were so furious, and afraid, and stigmatizing of her, that they stoned her to death. She became a symbol of the dire consequences of stigma left unchecked. Seeing the role that art can play in counteracting stigma is really significant, because it really, literally in South Africa and in other places in the world, including in the US. It can be a matter of life and death.

With that I think maybe we'll pause, knowing that we've got more discussion to share about the case, comma altarpiece about *MAKE ART/STOP AIDS* and other exhibitions we've worked on together, including *Through Positive Eyes*. We'll save that for the next time. Thank you so much, Carol.

Carol Brown: Thank you so much for setting this up and also bringing it all back to life. It's great, and it's great that it will be passed on to future generations and people, and that they learn something from it.