

Dress Up against AIDS: Condom Couture by Adriana Bertini

Fowler Museum at UCLA

December 1, 2006–March 11, 2007

Dress Up against AIDS: Condom Couture by Adriana Bertini featured 14 magnificent garments designed and produced by Brazilian artist Adriana Bertini and made entirely of condoms rejected by industry quality tests. By appropriating an object of protection and using it to create works of vibrant and original style, color, and texture, Bertini sought to raise awareness of and inspire the use of condoms, the critical vehicle for preventing AIDS transmission. These colorful, sensual clothes, including ornate evening dresses, vivid skirts and tops, and elegant suits, demystified and destigmatized condoms and “refashioned” them as objects associated with pleasure.

Context of the Project

The annual World AIDS Day aimed to bring attention to the worldwide challenges and consequences of the AIDS epidemic, in order to prevent the spread of HIV and improve the lives of people living with the virus. On December 1, 2006, UCLA presented a day-long, campus-wide, cross-departmental commemoration of World AIDS Day 2006, including the opening of two major art installations: *Dress Up Against AIDS: Condom Couture by Adriana Bertini* at the Fowler Museum, and *The Keiskamma Altarpiece: Transcending AIDS in South Africa* on display in the Glorya Kaufman Dance Theater.

Collaborators:

Fowler Museum at UCLA

The Fowler Museum explores art and material culture primarily from Africa, Asia, and the Pacific, and the Americas, past and present. The Fowler seeks to enhance understanding and appreciation of the diverse peoples, cultures, and religions of the world through highly contextualized interpretive exhibitions, publications, and public programming, informed by interdisciplinary approaches and the perspectives of the cultures represented. <https://www.fowler.ucla.edu>

UCLA AIDS Institute

The UCLA AIDS Institute is a multidisciplinary think tank drawing on the skills of top-flight researchers in the worldwide fight against HIV and AIDS, the first cases of which were reported in 1981 by UCLA physicians. Institute members, led by Dr. Irvin Chen, included researchers in virology and immunology, genetics, cancer, neurology, ophthalmology, epidemiology, social science, public health, nursing, and disease prevention. Their findings have led to advances in treating HIV as well as other diseases, such as hepatitis B and C, influenza, and cancer. <http://www.uclaaidsinstitute.org>

The Art & Global Health Center at UCLA

The Art & Global Health Center at UCLA serves as the umbrella for the international *Make Art/Stop AIDS* project, a network of artists working with experts in public health and medicine to intervene in the AIDS epidemic. The exhibition of *The Keiskamma Altarpiece* marked the inauguration of this new center, directed by David Gere, at the

time associate professor and co-chair of the UCLA Department of World Arts and Cultures.

Artists for a New South Africa

Artists for a New South Africa (ANSA) was a nonprofit organization dedicated to combating the African AIDS pandemic and advancing democracy and equality in South Africa. ANSA also worked to further civil rights and safeguard voting rights in the U.S. In partnership with South African and American organizations, grassroots movements, leaders, artists and activists, ANSA worked to make a difference through public education and mobilization, advocacy, grantmaking, media campaigns and the provision of material aid.

Exhibition Credits

This presentation was part of MAKE ART/STOP AIDS, an arts and AIDS awareness and prevention initiative developed by the Art & Global Health Center at UCLA in partnership with the Fowler Museum, UCLA AIDS Institute, Artists for a New South Africa, UCLA's Department of World Arts and Cultures, James S. Coleman Center for African Studies, and School of Film, Theater and Television, Durban Art Gallery, Magic Johnson Foundation, and Los Angeles Unified School District.

The exhibition and accompanying public programs were made possible with support from UCLA's Center for Community Partnerships and Office of Instructional Development, University of California Institute for Research in the Arts, and Gere Foundation. Additional support provided by the Consulate General of Brazil in Los Angeles and Hotel Angeleno.

Adriana Bertini—Artist's Statement

Condoms must be basic like a pair of jeans and so necessary like a great love.

"Dress up against AIDS presents fourteen elaborate garments made from thousands of male condoms rejected by industry standards. Normally, these would have been incinerated—an action harmful to the environment. Here, however, they have been employed in an unanticipated 'fashion' to draw attention to some of the most important issues facing contemporary society: the use of condoms, which are the only method truly capable of preventing AIDS, and caring about one's sexual life.

I use an artistic medium to demystify condoms and generate new meanings and associations for them so that people will think about them in new ways. Certainly, seeing condoms, once thought of as exclusively male, transformed into women's garments—albeit garments that were never intended to be worn—causes us to rethink what it means to 'dress up' and to 'wear protection.' Joining aesthetics and preventative measures permits us to approach condom use without relating it solely to disease. It facilitates communication, making it possible to educate, inform, and inspire reflection about health, prevention, fashion, behavior, aesthetics, politics, and the environment.

It is my hope that this exhibition will foster reflection on issues surrounding sexuality and that educators, parents, and health professionals will begin to use art as a means to discuss condoms in a healthy, humorous, and non-intimidating way. I further hope the works on view will promote meaningful dialogue across social, religious, and

cultural boundaries. Such conversations are essential for each of our distinct communities and cultures so that these important issues may be treated with greater acceptance by society.”

—Adriana Bertini, 2006

About the Artist

Activism has distinguished the career and life path of Brazilian artist Adriana Bertini. Growing up she was active in International Amnesty and Greenpeace, and after receiving training as an artist and educator, she began to work with HIV-positive and other at-risk children and teenagers. At the same time Bertini pursued a career in design and fashion and gained renown for her creative work. Since 2002, however, she has devoted herself exclusively to projects related to AIDS prevention through the arts, leading educational and activist efforts in countries around the globe. Her work in a range of media has garnered numerous awards and distinctions and has been exhibited widely, including installations at UNESCO-BREDA/Dakar, Senegal; the Museum of World Culture, Göteborg, Sweden; the Life Home Project, Phuket, Thailand; the Centraal Museum, Utrecht, The Netherlands; and, most recently, the XVI International AIDS conference in Toronto, 2006.

Credit

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Dresses

For each dress, usually inspired by earlier fashions and famous designers, the artist included information on the technique employed in the creation of a given piece, the number of condoms used (often in the thousands), hours of labor it took to make each dress (well over a hundred and, at times, more than 300), and the total weight. A sample explanatory text read as follows:

“This evening dress is designed with a fitted bodice overlapping a tiered skirt, a fashion innovation dating from 1936. The bodice consists of 450 undyed condoms, which have been glued together, and the skirt is made of 900 condoms, which have been opened out. The bolero jacket comprises 1,970 condoms, arranged and sewn in a variety of patterns. The classic style of this dress is inspired by the evening gowns of Gabrielle “Coco” Chanel. All condoms utilized in this dress were rejected by industry standards.”