

Make Art/Stop AIDS

Fowler Museum at UCLA

(February 23–June 15, 2008)

Make Art/Stop AIDS—an internationally traveling exhibition co-curated by David Gere and Robert Sember—debuted at the Fowler Museum at UCLA. It explored how artists around the world were responding to HIV/AIDS; and how their work raised awareness, inspired activism, and would ultimately help end global AIDS. Featuring examples primarily from the United States, South Africa, India, and Brazil—four disparate nations whose distinct experiences with and responses to the epidemic made insightful studies—*Make Art/Stop AIDS* presented some 60 works, which included contemporary paintings, sculptures, photographs, performance videos, posters, animated shorts, digital media, installations, and more, recording the history of the epidemic and its enormity, and sharing information and ideas about future interventions. The exhibition featured work by Robert Gober, David Wojnarowicz, Fiona Kirkwood, Daniel Goldstein, Jean Carlomusto, the collective Gran Fury, and many others, grouped around key questions.

What is AIDS?

Make Art/Stop AIDS opened by exploring how the AIDS epidemic is a socio-cultural phenomenon, shaped by belief, behavior, migration patterns, phobias, and gender-based inequities. Works of art make a significant contribution to defining the epidemic by reminding us that AIDS arises within our complex social worlds—worlds defined by difference, desire, inequality, and sometimes even violence. Included in this section were photographs that depicted the various social impacts of AIDS by David Goldblatt, Zanele Muholi, Sunil Gupta, and others, as well as Lennart Nilsson's strangely beautiful scanned electron microscope photograph of HIV, and a large-scale video projection by South African artist Churchill Madikida.

Who lives, who dies?

The next section of the exhibition illustrated how artists have made the political and ethical challenges of treatment a key focus of their work. Gregg Bordowitz's installation *Drive* (2003), which included a line of clocks and the statement "The Aids Crisis is Still Beginning," drew a direct connection between the epidemics in the U.S. and South Africa. Daniel Goldstein's and John Kapella's glittering, life-sized mobile *Medicine Man* (2007), made of hundreds of pill bottles and needles, brought into focus the debate over access to life-saving medications. Photographs in this section by Pieter Hugo and David Wojnarowicz boldly addressed deaths caused by AIDS.

Why are condoms controversial?

When used properly, condoms virtually eliminate the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. Yet some governments and religious institutions continue to argue against the use of condoms or spread misinformation about their use: in the summer of 2007, Mozambique's Roman Catholic archbishop accused European condom manufacturers of deliberately infecting their products with HIV. In this section of the exhibition, visitors were asked to ponder why the latex condom—one of the most significant public health inventions of the last century—is so contentious.

Brazilian artist Adriana Bertini's eye-popping hot pink "dress" made entirely of thousands of condoms was displayed along with Fiona Kirkwood's 24-foot-long installation of men's and

women's condoms that spelled out the word "Survival." Both pieces promoted condom use and opened up lines of communication on issues that would otherwise remain taboo. Other works, like the short video *Perdão* (Forgiveness) by Grupo Gay da Bahia, interrogated how moral dogma restricts access to information and products that can most effectively protect one's health.

Are you afraid to touch?

In reaction to AIDS-related stigma, Indian photographer Dayanita Singh and American artist Sue Coe have focused on the simple act of touching—reinforcing the notion that hugs and handshakes are utterly safe activities. Working in a variety of media, artists whose work was featured in this section invited viewers to witness compassionate moments between caregivers and those living with or dying from AIDS. Even the tactile art of puppetry was used to explore AIDS and touch, as evident in the performances by the innovative Indian AIDS activist/artist Anurupa Roy.

When was the last time you cried?

In 1993, the arts collective Gran Fury posed four simple questions on posters throughout New York City. The final question, "When was the last time you cried?" brought grief into the public space of their activism, acknowledging mourning as an essential experience of the AIDS epidemic. Given that sexuality and drug use are closely tied to transmission, many view AIDS-related illness and death as a form of punishment. To counteract this view, artists such as Jean Carlomusto, whose installation *The Portrait Gallery of AIDS: A Living Archive* (2002) was displayed in this section, offered loving visual records, while other artists have created public performances of grief and mourning, such as Tracy Rhoades' video *Requiem*.

Why a red ribbon?

In the late 1980s the red ribbon emerged as a direct reference to bureaucratic red tape, alluding subtly and poignantly to the need to speed up the pace of drug trials conducted by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and to immediately provide experimental treatments for the ill and dying.

Since that time, the tension between ribbon as fashion statement and ribbon as activist symbol has been catalyzed by artists on several continents—making it one of the most recognizable, if perhaps overused, icons in the world. Creative artists continually strive to reinvigorate the symbol or, at the very least, to question its meaning.

This section included a photograph documenting how community artists in Durban, South Africa wrapped a civic building in a huge red ribbon to demand governmental action, while David Goldblatt's record of faded and tattered red ribbons across that country underscored failed promises to act against the epidemic. Artists in India, meanwhile, reinterpreted the ribbon in particularly novel materials, such as a display of 21 ribbons, ranging from a glitzy profusion of gold and silver to the more humble terracotta.

Are you ready to act?

This final gallery was designed to inspire museum visitors to learn more about the epidemic and to share that knowledge with others. A recreation of Gran Fury's and ACT UP's iconic neon sign SILENCE=DEATH, originally installed at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in 1987, as well as a video installation by the collective Ultra-Red and other works, demonstrated that acts of intervention can take many forms, and asked visitors to consider their own role in this crisis.

Partial list of artists

Adriana Bertini, Gregg Bordowitz, Jean Carlomusto, Chandannagar Light Collective, Sue Coe, Lewis Evans, General Idea, Robert Gober, David Goldblatt, Daniel Goldstein, Gran Fury, Sunil Gupta, Pieter Hugo, John Kapellas, William Kentridge, Fiona Kirkwood, José Leonilson Bezerra Dias, Brenton Maart, Churchill Madikida, Gideon Mendel, Zanele Muholi, Lennart Nilsson, Tracy Rhoades, Anurupa Roy, Dayanita Singh, Penelope Siopis, Jiten Thukral and Sumir Tagra, Ultra-Red, Clive Van den Berg, David Wojnarowicz.

Additional Information

Make Art/Stop AIDS was a joint project of the Fowler Museum at UCLA and the UCLA Art & Global Health Center and was co-curated by David Gere, associate professor in the UCLA Department of World Arts and Cultures and director of the Art & Global Health Center, and Robert Sember, South African artist, activist, and public health researcher. Associate curators included: Marla C. Berns, Shirley and Ralph Shapiro Director of the Fowler Museum at UCLA; Carol Brown, independent curator from Durban, South Africa; Sarah Gilfillan, associate director of development at the Fowler Museum at UCLA; Ivo Mesquita, curator at the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, Brazil, and visiting professor at Bard College; Nandita Palchoudhuri, curator, consultant, and chairperson of the India Foundation for the Arts, Bangalore; Mysoon Rizk, assistant professor of art history at the University of Toledo; Polly Nooter Roberts, deputy director and chief curator of the Fowler Museum at UCLA; and Allen F. Roberts, professor in the UCLA Department of World Arts and Cultures.

Make Art/Stop AIDS was made possible through grants from the Ford Foundation, Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, and Peter Norton Family Foundation. Support for accompanying public programs was provided by the UCLA Executive Vice Chancellor's Arts Initiative Program; UCLA's School of the Arts and Architecture, Center for Community Partnerships (UCLA in LA), Office of Instructional Development, International Institute, Office of Research, and AIDS Institute; UC Humanities Research Institute; UC Institute for Research in the Arts; UC MEXUS; Macy's Foundation; Flourish Foundation; Gere Foundation; Liberty Hill Foundation; California Endowment; and Yvonne Lenart Public Programs Fund. Special thanks to the Brazilian Consulate of Los Angeles.

We also acknowledge our project partners: Artists for a New South Africa; Los Angeles Unified School District HIV/AIDS Prevention Unit; Magic Johnson Foundation; and the following UCLA Centers: James S. Coleman African Studies Center, Center for India and South Asia, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Center for Latin American Studies, and Globalization Research Center—Africa.

The Fowler presentation of *Make Art/Stop AIDS* was dedicated to Sarah Gilfillan (1981–2007).

The Keiskamma Altarpiece

Transcending AIDS in South Africa

The Keiskamma Altarpiece was created by more than 120 women (and a few men) in the rural Eastern Cape region of South Africa, as a means of commemorating the dead and recommitting to life. The implicit subject of the altar is AIDS, which has deeply affected the whole of sub-Saharan Africa, and which has taken a particular toll on Hamburg, a fishing town where the Keiskamma River meets the Indian Ocean.

The altar is especially significant as a dialogue across centuries and thousands of miles: it is modeled on the famous Isenheim Altarpiece, painted in the sixteenth century by Matthias Grünewald in Alsace Lorraine, now part of Germany. Grünewald's altar, considered to be his masterpiece, was commissioned by the order of St. Anthony in response to that era's plague, known as St. Anthony's Fire—a disease of the nervous system caused by rye fungus. The predominant image is the crucifixion of Christ, the lower portion, or predella, depicting the entombment, with St. Anthony and St. Sebastian looming from the side panels. The intention was that patients in the infirmary of the monastery should see that their suffering was shared.

Dr. Carol Hofmeyr, a South African doctor who was trained in the fine arts as well as medicine, viewed the Isenheim Altarpiece while on a European tour, was moved by it, and brought images back to share with her patients, friends, and colleagues in Hamburg. Her husband, Dr. Justus Hofmeyr, created a wooden frame in the exact dimensions of the Isenheim Altarpiece. Then, the women of the community began reinterpreting Grünewald's images in ways they found resonant. Using imagery of the Xhosa people of the Eastern Cape, as well as imported needlework techniques, such as stump work (tufted embroidery), that were taught to them by skilled artists from England, they depicted life in the region before—and after—AIDS engulfed South Africa. Their artistry portrays the years before 2004, when those infected with HIV were dying without antiretroviral therapy (the AIDS death and funeral are depicted on the bottom panel). Fully opened, the inner panels reveal images of hope, when access to drugs would make it possible for the infected, including some of their very own orphaned grandchildren, to live robust lives (as depicted in the life-sized photographs by Tanya Jordaan).

The Keiskamma Altarpiece was stitched over a six-month period, and fully assembled and displayed at the Anglican cathedral in Grahamstown, South Africa, as part of the 2005

National Arts Festival. The video recording shows the community's first boisterous reaction to what it had created: a transcendent work of great power and beauty in the age of AIDS.

[Video Credit

This video clip documents the inaugural opening of the Keiskamma Altarpiece in Grahamstown, Eastern Cape, South Africa, in July of 2005. Videography by Graeme and Robert Hofmeyr; presented courtesy of Carol Hofmeyr and the Keiskamma Trust.]

Keiskamma Altarpiece Recognition Statement

This presentation is 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 Department of World Arts and Cultures, UCLA School of Film, Theater and Television, Durban Art Gallery, Magic Johnson Foundation, and Los Angeles Unified School District. The exhibition was made possible with support from UCLA's Center for Community Partnerships and Office of Instructional Development, UCIRA, and the Liberty Hill Foundation. Note: Still pending, EVC funds through SOAA/TFT joint initiative, Nicholas Endowment, California Endowment. Secured: Richard Gere (\$10,000). You could also list Michael Leppen, who provided \$20,000 for the Chicago showing, some of which subvented travel to LA. Pending: Ford. The Art|Global Health Center receives support from UCLA Arts, UCLA AIDS Institute, and UCLA International Institute.

The Keiskamma Altarpiece has been touring across North America, beginning at the Cathedral Church of St. James, Toronto (August 2006), followed by the St. James Episcopal Cathedral, Chicago (August-September 2006). Throughout winter 2006-07, it will continue to travel to churches in Los Angeles under the auspices of Artists for a New South Africa. The churches include Holman United Methodist, Metropolitan Community Church, and First African-American Methodist Episcopal.

Special thanks to Dr. Carol Hofmeyr, Dr. Justus Hofmeyr, Eunice Mangwane, Jackie Down, Keiskamma Art Project; the South African Consulate General, Chicago (and LA? Will they offer support of some kind?); Sharon Gelman, Paymon Ebrahimzadeh, and Kristen Thompson, ANSA; Ned Bayrd, UCLA AIDS Institute; Eugene Botha and Adele Lloyd, Fine Art Logistics; Sunny Salas, Freeman Company; Iain Muirhead, NFA Space; and Carole Jablon, Rosemary Muir; and Michael Logan.

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