Through Positive Eyes

Through Positive Eyes is a collection of photographs, videos, and stories by people living with HIV and AIDS from 10 major cities around the world. The exhibition is part of an ongoing art project organized by South African photographer Gideon Mendel and the UCLA Art & Global Health Center. Launched in 2007, the project has, thus far, provided a platform for 130 HIV-positive people to share their experiences—both ennobling and dispiriting—while coping with this chronic illness.

The common theme is stigma. Even though HIV is now treatable, people living with HIV and AIDS are often still seen as outcasts. In this exhibition, for example, the participants are identified by their first names only, in part to emphasize their individuality, but also to protect those who live in locations where stigma remains dangerous, if not literally life-threatening. These "artivists"—artists and activists at the same time—are seeking to undo irrational stigma, to dissolve distrust and fear, in order to re-enter all spheres of daily life. In line with the early writings of the late art critic Douglas Crimp, *Through Positive Eyes* aspires to intervene directly to stop the epidemic. It forms part of MAKE ART/STOP AIDS, the movement first proposed by the UCLA Art & Global Health Center 15 years ago, featured at the Fowler as an exhibition in 2008.

In 1981, UCLA researchers identified five cases of "newly acquired immunodeficiency." Almost 40 years later, UNAIDS, the United Nations organization dedicated to ending the epidemic, estimates that 75 million people have been infected with HIV around the world; 32 million have died. Given the huge scale of the epidemic, AIDS is not somebody else's problem. It is our collective problem. Banishing the irrational stigma associated with it can be our contribution.

Through Positive Eyes is organized by the UCLA Art & Global Health Center with the Fowler Museum at UCLA and cocurated by David Gere, Director, UCLA Art & Global Health Center, Professor of World Arts and Cultures at UCLA, and founder of MAKE ART/STOP AIDS; Carol Brown, independent curator based in Durban; and Stan Pressner, New York theatre and lighting designer. The exhibition is made possible by major funding from the Herb Ritts Foundation. It is also supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts and a gift from Elizabeth and Graeme Gilfillan in honor of Sarah Gilfillan.

The *Through Positive Eyes* project is codirected by David Gere and London-based South African photographer and AIDS activist Gideon Mendel.

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Additional funding for the *Through Positive Eyes* project is provided by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts; Electronic Theatre Controls (ETC); The Ford Foundation; Teiger Foundation; Gere Foundation; U.S. President's Emergency Fund for AIDS Relief; Brazilian Ministry of Health STD/AIDS Prevention Department; International AIDS Society; UNAIDS; University of California Institute for Mexico and the United States (UC MEXUS); City of Los Angeles AIDS Coordinator's Office; Heroes Project; UCLA AIDS Institute; UCLA International Institute; UCLA School of the Arts and Architecture; and UCLA Office of the Chancellor.

Photo Educators: Crispin Hughes with support from Ricardo Funari and Luciana Saldanha (Rio de Janeiro), Mikhael Subotzky (Johannesburg), Parthiv Shah (Mumbai), Vinai Dithajohn and Apichart Sritakae (Bangkok), Marie Arago and Tatiana Mora Liautaud (Port-au-Prince), and Simanga Konstant Zondo (Durban)
Video footage: Gideon Mendel, Mo Stoebe, Katja Kulenkampff, and Jesse Phinney
Video editors: Gideon Mendel, Cut and Cue
Community Organizer: Hanni Ress
Education Consultant: Timothy Kordic

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