

David Zwirner

*With Art/
With HIV*

An interview series highlighting the diversity of voices, interests, and ways of thinking about HIV, art, and culture. Created as part of [More Life](#), an exhibition series by David Zwirner that explores the affective, aesthetic, personal, and political responses to the HIV/AIDS crisis.

As told by Charles Ryan Long, Eva Hayward, Jessica Whitbread, Kairon Liu, Lois Conley, Malaya Lakas, Ricky Varghese, Shyronn Tavia Jones, Sunil Gupta, Szymon Adamczak, and Yuè Begay.

Organized by Theodore (ted) Kerr, a writer, artist, and founding member of [What Would an HIV Doula Do?](#) for David Zwirner, summer 2021.



Kairon Liu, Humans as Hosts 011: This is what I need to do to stay alive, 2018. Courtesy the artist



Kairon Liu, Humans as Hosts 013: Shooting an apple off one's child's head, 2018. Courtesy the artist

Participants

charles ryan long

he/him/beloved, artist, Chicago/South Side, Illinois

Eva Hayward

academic/writer, Tucson, Arizona

Jessica Whitbread

she/her, artist/global community engagement consultant,
Bulgaria via Toronto, Canada

Kairon Liu

he/him, artist, Taipei, Taiwan

Lois Conley

she/her/hers, museum founder/community leader,
St. Louis, Missouri

Malaya Lakas

she/her/hers and [siyá](#), designer/activist, unceded territory
of the Kumeyaay Nation (San Diego, California)

Ricky Varghese

he/they, academic/writer, Toronto, Canada

Sbyrom Tavia Jones

she/her, artist/activist, Atlanta, Georgia

Sunil Gupta

artist, London, United Kingdom

Szymon Adamczak

he/him/his, artist/researcher, Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Yuè Begay

she/her, artist/activist, Los Angeles, California

Share anything you want about yourself.

charles ryan long

I am a project and I am realizing myself daily. I have been shaped by the journeys of my ancestors, enslaved Black people living on these stolen and colonized lands. Being born in the late 1970s in Chicago has also formed me, along with my formal education and my particular class status growing up. Politically; AIDS, drug use, homelessness, my love/hate for men and their ways, disco, dance floors, House music, my admiration/debt to women (particularly Black women), and my sentimentality for our shared human condition motivate me.

Eva Hayward

Central to my intellectual and creative life is a driving force—maybe even a belief—that desire shapes and reshapes reality. Rather than understanding reality as a fixed dimension of existence, of being, I proffer that reality is always in the process of emergence, and

sexuality (not identity, but libido) modifies, interrupts, and even transforms what reality is becoming. This is not to say sexuality is a force we can know to control or direct. Sexuality refuses a politics of agency, often at the expense of our politics. Sexuality is anarchic. Every time we define what sexuality is, our definitions fail. Everywhere in my thinking and art making, this is my central truth.

Jessica Whitbread

I am a queer artist and activist living with HIV. I am many things to many people, though recently I have mostly felt connected to being a mother to twin toddlers and nature enthusiast.

Kairon Liu

I am a Made-in-Taiwan boy who was born in 1992. From the moment I recognized a specific hunger within myself, I have been searching for a solution to my loneliness and have

pursued the knowledge of truth to secure my spiritual belief. There are struggles inside my identities and beliefs, from nationality, orientation, and family loyalty to serostatus, karma, and religion. I placate my unease through what our society calls art making while building a many-faced doppelgänger. You can see my work at kaironliu.com.

Lois Conley

Born and raised in St. Louis's tightly knit Mill Creek community, I was taught to be open-minded, caring, and giving. Inherent in that teaching was the notion to always love and be proud of being Black and love other people, but especially other Black people. Growing up, the more tidbits that I learned about Black history the more fascinated I became, and by association, the more proud. Little did I know that some forty years later that sense of pride would have me founding [The Griot: A Museum of Black History](#).

Malaya Lakas

My name is pronounced "Mah-LAH-yah." La as in lah-tee-doe, no Frito-Lay. Malaya means "free" in Tagalog/Filipino. I'm a Pisces sun, Pisces rising, and Sagittarius moon. If you don't know much about astrology, it means I am hella sensitive and emotional (times 10), and I love nature and adventures. I'm twenty-nine years old, and I'm currently in the thick of my Saturn's return, which has been a wild roller-coaster ride. I'm currently in school for user experience (UX) design, which has been really fun and affirming in many ways.

Ricky Varghese

I am an academic and psychotherapist based in Toronto. I am also training to become a psychoanalyst through the Toronto Institute of Psychoanalysis and am in the process of becoming a member of the American College

of Sexologists. As an art writer, I have had essays and reviews in publications such as [Canadian Art](#), [C Magazine](#), [Esse arts + opinions](#), [Art Asia Pacific](#), [Rungb](#), and [Peripheral Review](#). Furthermore, I am an associate editor with [Drain](#), a journal of art and culture, and have edited two issues there on the themes "[Ruin](#)" (2014) and "[AIDS and Memory](#)" (2016).

Shyronn Tavia Jones

I'm a forty-three-year-old Copper-Colored American Gemini Woman Living with HIV. I was diagnosed with HIV a few days before my twenty-third birthday in May of 2001. 2021 marks twenty years of me being diagnosed with HIV. I was born and raised in the Brownsville/East New York area of Brooklyn. As a teenager, I lived throughout NYC Boroughs and as an adult, I lived in Albany, The Capital of New York, for ten years. For the past eight years, I have been residing in the Atlanta Metropolitan Area. I'm never the loudest person in a room, especially a conference room. Shyness is one of my most prominent personality traits. To counter-balance my shyness, I utilize various forms of art to communicate.

Sunil Gupta

I'm getting older, closer to seventy now than sixty. HIV made me feel that I may not get here so I really hadn't planned adequately. Politics seem globally terrible so I feel like disengaging or at least beginning a process of disengagement. Plus it's COVID time, which has put a big shadow on things. On the other hand, in my professional life as an artist, I'm having a bit of a moment, actually the moment has stretched out to a year now. So suddenly there are new opportunities and less of a sense of continuing financial crisis. So I'm happy.

Szymon Adamczak

I am turning thirty on June 9. My Polish twin sister and my Dutch boyfriend, who is three years older than me, share their Gemini birthday with me. My American stage partner who is placeholder for the virus in my post-diagnosis stage duet [An Ongoing Song](#) also has a twin, a brother. My latest CD4 number is 857, the highest since the counting began. Amsterdam and Warsaw are the cities I move in between. In the latter I am organizing a research platform dedicated to HIV and AIDS in Poland. It is called [Polish EIDS](#); please reach out if you are interested.

Yuè Begay

Yá'át'ééh shik'is dóó shik'é dóó shidine'é.

Yuè Begay yinishyé. Naakai Dine'é nishł. Kinyaa'aanii báashishchíin. Dibéłzhini da'shicheii. Tábaqahá 'da'shinalí. Ák t'éego t'áa diné asdzáan nishł. Ák t'éego t'áa nádleehí nishł 'áld '. Kinłani Dook'o'osłíid Biyaagidi shi'dizhch. K'ad Indigenous Pride LA biCo 'Chair nishł. Freelance Graphic Artist d Consultant 'nishł 'áld '. Public Healthígíí bá naashnish. California State University State, Long Beachd'éé' niniłtááh. K'ad Tovaangardi kééhasht' ndi T' dí Néesh Zhee'd'éé' naashá.

Hello, my friends, family, and my people.

My name is Yuè Begay. I am of the Nomadic People Clan, born for the Towering House Clan. My maternal grandfather is of the Black Sheep Clan and my paternal grandfather is of the Near the Water's Edge Clan. This is how I identify as a Navajo transgender woman (I use she/her pronouns). I was born in Flagstaff, Arizona. I am a cochair of Indigenous Pride LA. I work as a freelance graphic artist as well as a consultant. I work in the public health field. I graduated from California State University, Long Beach. I currently live in Los Angeles, California, but am originally from Kayenta, Arizona (Navajo Nation).

I am a Gates Millennium Scholar.

I am a Pisces.

I am one of the few young members of my Diné tribe who can speak my language fluently. I am Two Spirit and transgender.

I have a Native gay mother and a Native trans mother as well. Both of whom I love. I am a survivor of sexual assault and abuse.

I am the only one in my family who has graduated from a university.

I am biamorous.

I am a graphic artist.

I used to be a sex worker.

I am loved by many.

Describe your relationship to art.

charles ryan long

My relationship to Art (capital A) was as a consumer, a seeker of myself projected into the object or concept before me. The canon is laced with whyte patriarchal supremacy and as such I have always (in one way or another) turned my back to it, as the reflection I sought was not present. With age I have accumulated the necessary desire/dissolution to fill in the gaps of what was not taught to me in my formal education of Art history and I now have the adventure of forefronting and consuming ART (read LIFE) that looks, feels, smells, and tastes like me. I wander through the world now being invited into portals that transport me both through pasts and futures where Black, Brown, Native, disabled, addicted, Fat, Queer, Faggots, Trans, do-gooders lead the way and make a more possible ART (again read LIFE) possible for me and the people I care most dearly about.



charles ryan long, CLEAN, 2014. Courtesy Visual AIDS

Eva Hayward

Ceramic sculpture was my first love. Tactile and wet. I loved working with coils of clay that spiraled into organic volumes. High school in rural Vermont was physically brutal, but my

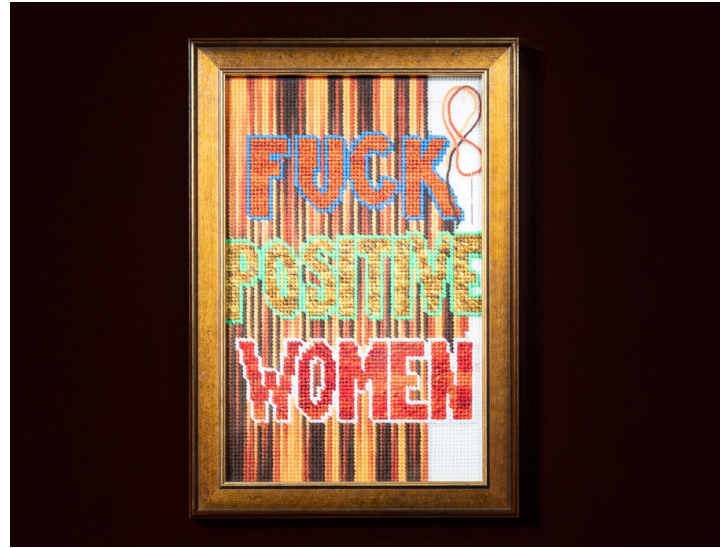
“Faggot!” hands found pleasure in the caking and drying of clay. My fingers have always been my eyes, and clay helped me to appreciate this sensory fold. Two of my ceramic sculptures were shown at a Middlebury College exhibition. Unconsciously, both pieces now look to me like fabulations in genitality, a wanting of my body’s own want.

It was not until college that I found experimental film, particularly hand-processed and painted works. At the University of New Mexico, Nina Fonoroff taught me to look at this kind of film with a fetishistic formalism. Both words—“fetishism” and “formalism”—are now associated with political and conceptual problems, but they remain for me a kind of reverie in splendid stuffs. To pay attention to the materiality of 16 mm film (to find the emulsion of the film stock with your lip, the sticky side), to notice how editing and pacing produced a percussive involvement (how the body feels film), and how the composition of the image sculpts light into substance: I was happily lost in experimental film.

Jessica Whitbread

My work as an artist is always linked to community and collaboration. If I have to define the work I do, it generally falls in the realm of social practice and community arts—heavy on the textiles (I love banner making). It draws on my desire to better understand my relationship to others as a queer woman living with HIV and more often than not uses my own body as the starting point. Like social movements, my projects are long-term and repeat numerous times over years. Decades in the case of [*No Pants No Problem*](#) (2004–ongoing). Movement and change are slow and constant, and my practice appreciates that. Some of my projects include [*PosterVirus*](#) (2011–2015, cocurated with Alex McClelland), [*Tea Time*](#) (2012–ongoing), [*LOVE POSITIVE WOMEN*](#) (2013–ongoing), [*The HIV HOWLER*](#):

[*Transmitting Art and Activism*](#) (2016–ongoing, coedited with Anthea Black).



*Jessica Whitbread and Allyson Mitchell, [*FUCK POSITIVE WOMEN*](#), 2011, at Interminable Prescriptions for the Plague, MoCA TAIPEI, Taiwan, 2019. Courtesy MoCA TAIPEI and Taiwan HivStory Association*

Kairon Liu

Art is indispensable in my life: it exerts pain when I practice it, yet it torments me even more when I don’t. I repeat over and over this process of self-salvation (or perhaps of self-immolation, this self-exposure and -contradiction in every form). I have slowly and inadvertently come to see myself as an artist/activist whose hunger fuels my own art and activism.

Lois Conley

I’ve had one “formal” art class (sculpture) in college, but growing up, art/arts and crafts was a favorite pastime for my siblings and me. My mom was not a trained artist, either. Yet, she was very creative. She could take just about anything and make something pretty or utilitarian out of it: a scrap of paper, a fabric remnant, or newspaper could easily be transformed to a report cover, a wall hanging (to cover an unsightly spot on a wall),

or even a Christmas ornament. She had a knack, even, for making our sometimes boring meals look pretty! As an adult, I enjoyed visiting art museums, “reading” art, and encouraging my own children’s creative self-expression.

Malaya Lakas

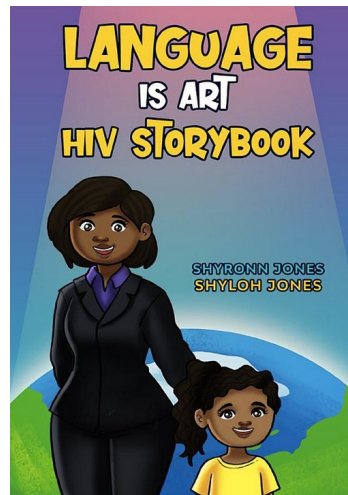
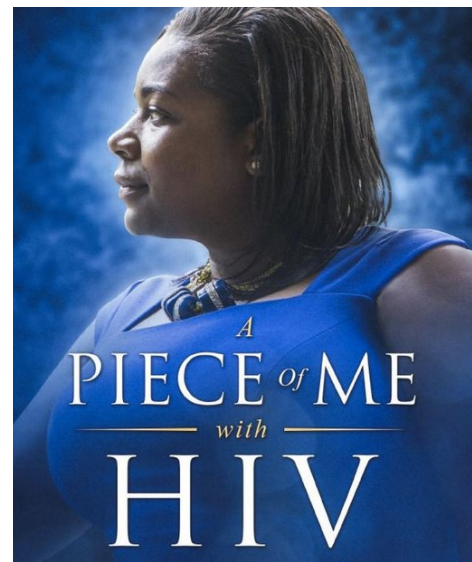
Art is like my best friend from childhood, who I can always count on. Even if I wasn’t always the best friend to her, we would always make up, and pick up right where we left off. Our relationship is far from perfect, but it is always growing. When I saw her working with queer and trans youth in NYC, I remembered how great of a friend she was to me from such an early age. She is how I hope to be remembered. I hold deep gratitude for her. Even during the most challenging times, she has always helped me find my way. Especially after I began my medical transition a few years ago, she’s really been there for me. She is every natural form of expression, of language, of culture and heritage. She is my keeper and guide; the most powerful gift I inherited from my ancestors.

Ricky Varghese

I look at it, I appreciate it, I study it, I write about it, and I think about its capacity to imagine ethical ways for us to live and be with one another across encounters with difference.

Shyronn Tavia Jones

My relationship with art began as a child, with MY HANDWRITING. I found beauty and took pride in writing very neatly. I continued to write neatly in the workforce and when applying for assistance, I use my handwriting as a powerful tool to communicate my seriousness in achieving my needs and wants.



Shyronn Jones, book covers and movie poster, 2018–2021. Courtesy Shyronn Jones

In November of 2013, I created [iknow-Awareness FACEBOOK GROUP](#). I initially shared HIV-RELATED CARTOONS in the group. I later included posters, photography, and writing. In February of 2016, I founded [iknowAwareness LLC](#) to solidify my operations of sharing HIV-RELATED Content.

Thus far, I have SELF-PUBLISHED SIX BOOKS, INDEPENDENTLY PRODUCED A SHORT FILM, COCREATED MUSIC, and CREATED ART for HIV-RELATED Advocacy. The first book I published was [A Piece of Me with HIV AUTOBIOGRAPHY](#) (2018). I published [A PIECE OF ME WITH HIV: MOVIE SCRIPT AND DISCUSSION GUIDE](#) (2019) to enable movie watchers to reminisce

and reflect on each scene of *A PIECE OF ME WITH HIV* MOVIE. [BLOG LOGS, QUOTABLE QUOTES & TEA](#) (2020) is a collection of Blogs I have written.

In 2019 I independently produced a SHORT FILM based on my life titled [A PIECE OF ME WITH HIV](#). Inspired by *A PIECE OF ME WITH HIV*, the soundtrack song, “[PREMATURE DIAGNOSIS](#),” was created.

Three of my books are CHILDREN’S BOOKS BASED ON THE ART OF COMPASSIONATE LANGUAGE: [Language Is Art: HIV ACTIVITY BOOK](#) (2018), [Language Is Art: HIV STORYBOOK](#) (2021), and [Language Is Art: HIV COLORING BOOK](#) (2021).

Sunil Gupta

It’s been pretty ambivalent. I didn’t grow up with it, I grew up with Bollywood movies in India in the 1950s and 1960s. I had never been to art galleries. I picked up the camera as a frustrated filmmaker wanting to tell stories. I really didn’t connect that urge to the art world, which remained a place of mystery. It seemed like it belonged to really rich people and was discussed by very clever people, and I didn’t think I was going to fit in.

Accidentally I went to a photo school that was embedded in an art school. I emerged into a tremendous struggle between art and photography. I was making photography for the wall, I was hesitant to call it art. That seemed like a very bourgeois activity. But then I wasn’t a commercial photographer for hire, so I became an artist.

Szymon Adamczak

I consider myself to be a self-taught artist, though I eventually completed a degree in performance making and research. I often work as a confidant to others, mostly peers. My day job in the arts is one that dramatists do: I am a tailor, a lubricant, a matchmaker, a killjoy, a mediator, a host, a

whisperer, a communicator, an enthusiast, a first and sometimes last eye in the process. In the stage work I am interested in, the spectator is called to thought. I count you in.

Being close to the arts has been a lifeline, a means to survive and to grow. I have deep love and a sense of respect especially for those who work in live arts, in its many dialects, and for people who care for them. The past COVID months have been just brutal for this sector virtually everywhere. Let’s go out on a limb.

Yue Begay

My relationship to art began when I was a young girl. I would always draw on whatever paper material I could find. My mom’s notepad and my brothers’ school notebooks were not safe from me lol. My infatuation with art was so intense that I also drew on my grandmother’s Bible because the pages of the book were so thin and crispy. I had never seen anything like it so I thought the blank pages of the Bible could use some color. My grandmother did not like that and was furious. I would draw various things from clothing to fantastical monsters to landscapes I would see in my dreams. I would draw whatever I could; however, the human body did not appeal to me strangely. Fast forward to the present, I am a graphic artist because I love manipulating reality (photographs) into what I see fit.

Describe your relationship to HIV.

charles ryan long

My relationship to HIV is much the same as anyone who has been alive over the last forty-plus years. I have never lived in a world without HIV in it, I am a person living with AIDS (PLWA). Having been born in the late 1970s, lived on the earth all of my life, particularly in an increasingly “globalized” world, we are all PLWA. I have the privileges of being born Black and gay in Chicago and the experiences of having held young people through diagnosis, splaying my body in the streets of lower Manhattan to convince systems to care, and of watching the life drain from folks that I love(d).

For me HIV has and continues to be a lens through which we can see the worst and best of us. The “us” here being citizens of the world. In so many ways through it we can witness the true beliefs of an individual, a system, or a government. So in lots of ways

HIV is my litmus test to a person’s, place’s, people’s sweet or sour, their toxic or non, their heart-to-mind balance. This test is necessary for me as a PLWA, the results impact my literal survival and impacts the lives of those I consider kindred.

Eva Hayward

In 2008, I had eight T cells. I remember trying to cover my KS lesions with makeup as if those empurpled and ropey skin forms would out me as male. KS lesions present mostly on males from Mediterranean, Eastern European, and African regions. Strangely, it was one of the few times I wanted to “pass” as a woman. Even as I confess this now, I realize how AIDS has been a field of distortion for me, maybe for all of us.

In 2010, I was in the ICU at Duke University Hospital. There was a moment when one of the doctors said, “In all

likelihood, you will not survive this.” I was not particularly disturbed by this statement, but I did find traumatic my wanting not to die. Like many sissies, suicidal ideation was my solution to fagphobia. For me, death had happened at birth; I was dead on arrival. Born still, but still born. Death, I thought, was of a different order—had a different immanence—for girls like me. This reasoning went: If it gets too impossible, too unbearable, I will confirm myself as already dead. However wrong this reasoning, it felt like power and refuge against the unending of fagphobia. But in the hospital, I was confronted by my desire to live, to live with AIDS. Do you see the paradox? Over a decade later and this moment still haunts me: the dead wanting to live.

Jessica Whitbread

Often living with HIV has been a little lonely for me. Not for lack of community or for stigma in my case, but for understanding. I love gay men, and they will forever be my AIDS family. Unfortunately, my access to HIV services and programs, equal pay for work (or even access at times), and access to sex has been drastically different. While I can carve out space in terms of programs and work, I submit to the fact that I will probably never be able to fuck a stranger in an airport bathroom seconds after arriving into a new country. For the last decade, I have been working in the global HIV response, focusing on gender and HIV most notably with the International Community of Women Living with HIV (ICW). Global work has opened me up to new ways of learning and appreciating the diversity of complicated histories that exist in the HIV response. Our collective story does not begin or end in North America and I think that activists here have a very North-American-centric view of the HIV epidemic and response.

Kairon Liu

Two sides of a coin: a blessing and a curse ... HIV allows me to meet my traumatized inner child, the alias Tree, who became the subject of my artworks. Together we travel from one region to another and encounter different positive souls while presenting our creations to the world. And yes, that began to be the way for me to find forgiveness for staying alive.



*Kairon Liu, The portrait of Tree #1, 2018.
Courtesy the artist*

Lois Conley

Probably like most folks, my introduction to HIV was that it was a gay, white man’s disease. That was confirmed when a close friend and several of his friends were diagnosed and, ultimately, transitioned as a result of complications, so it held very little relevance for me

other than that. That changed, however, when one of my younger brothers (an IV drug user) was diagnosed and I found myself immersed in the murk and mire of helping him secure social services, basic medical care, and a reasonable quality of life. His illness is what really sparked my interest to learn more about the disease. What an enlightenment!

Malaya Lakas

My relationship with HIV began when I was diagnosed on June 7, 2012. I was twenty years old at the time. As you can probably imagine, my relationship with HIV is really complicated. I don't like to always revisit my traumatic experiences or share it so freely with others to be subject to scrutiny. It has been a process for me in finding the balance of sharing the most intimate parts of my experience, while also finding purpose and feeling like I am able to make a difference. Like my relationship to art, it is always evolving. More recently, I have been finding myself facing new hurdles in the past year, when I moved back to California. It's been exhausting. It has been nine years (I guess I'm almost a long-term survivor? if going by the over ten years "rule"), and it feels like it's catching up to me. The stress from the body, the stress from constantly advocating for my health. Some days when I am feeling chronic pain and headaches, I don't want to do anything but lay in bed and play Animal Crossing.

Ricky Varghese

I have a grandfather who in 1975 may or may not have died of AIDS-related complications. This is quite a few years prior to the first known and reported cases of HIV diagnosis. I wrote about this bit of family history in my introduction to the special issue of the journal *Drain* that I edited, on the theme of "AIDS and Memory," and how this bit of history has informed so much of my

psychical experiences with regard to my coming of age as a queer-identified person.

Sbyronn Tavia Jones

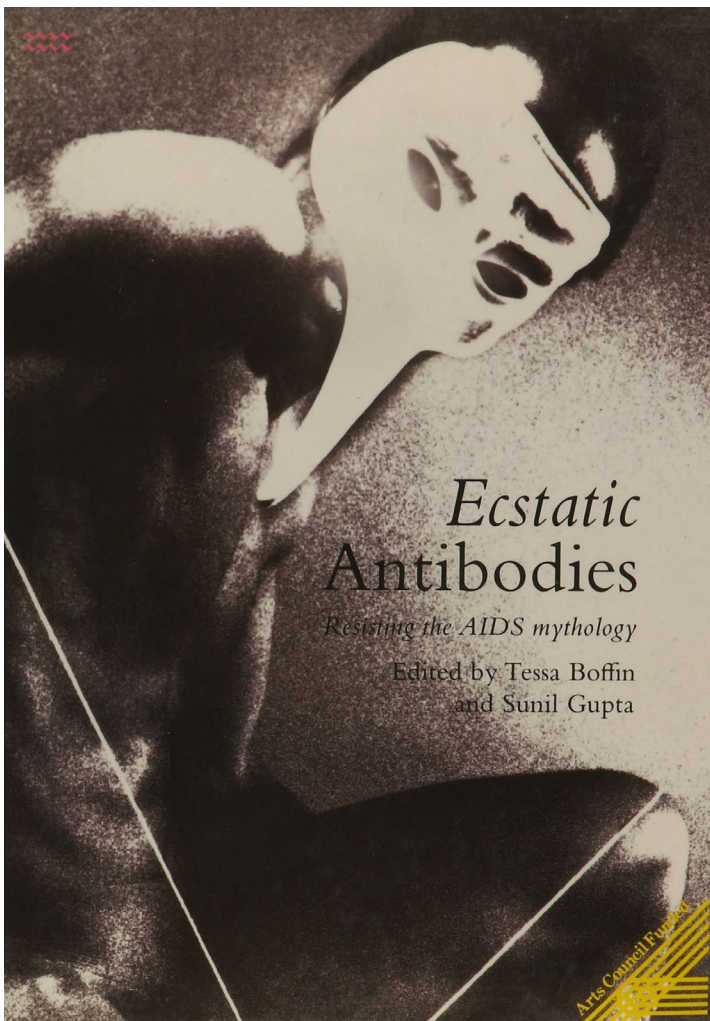
I HAVE A LOVE/HATE RELATIONSHIP WITH HIV. Twenty years ago when I took my second-ever HIV test I had to wait two weeks for the results. To cope with the possibility of receiving an HIV-positive result I thought about the pros and cons, mentally preparing myself for what it would mean to live with HIV.

Since receiving the diagnosis, I can tell you the pros are having an extended community of people and a wide array of resources I can connect with to help me cope with living with HIV. The cons are that the very same extended community and resources come with their flaws.

I have a respectable relationship with HIV. Mostly because the virus hasn't physically battered my body. I flaunt my beauty and boast science-based awareness about HIV with pride.

Sunil Gupta

Right now that is very simple. It's just become a case of managing it, which I can do very well with the help of the NHS. I never think about it in my everyday life, it only comes up during my biannual checkups. In the 1980s we lived through a terrible period of government inaction. I was involved with using photography as a form of cultural resistance. It seemed inevitable that I would make an exhibition about resistance to HIV and AIDS. Tessa Boffin and I created a book and exhibition called *Ecstatic Antibodies*, which featured the artworks and writings of around seventeen people. I only got diagnosed five years after this exhibition opened. I didn't want to make work about being HIV-positive. I felt overburdened as a racial minority and as a gay man. It was four more years before I made artwork about my HIV status.



Cover of *Ecstatic Antibodies*, 1990, edited by Sunil Gupta and Tessa Boffin. Cover photo by [Rotimi Fani-Kayode](#) and Alex Hirst. Designed by John Gibbs

Szymon Adamczak

I never really reminisce how it is to live without it.

HIV, therefore am I. Or: Am I, therefore HIV?

There is an I in it,
after all.

My experience with the virus is that its presence enabled me to see my own humanity, and the humanity of others, right back at you!

I have always been astonished by what a terrific performer this virus is.

Do not assume that my relationship to HIV is like yours.

HIV feels to me like it is bigger than life, at least my own.

Yuè Begay

I first heard of HIV when I was young. On the rez, they teach us about STIs and HIV and curious children will see the STI and HIV posters at the local clinics and ask questions. I also knew about STIs and HIV because I saw it discussed in movies. But that information was not educational. No, through the movies I learned that it was a scary thing to have STIs and HIV and also a shameful thing. It wasn't until I went to school in Long Beach, California, in 2011 that I would come across a program called the Red Circle Project. The program provided HIV prevention services to Native folks such as testing and education. I would not be as educated or have the various connections I've made in the HIV field if it were not for the Red Circle Project.



Yuè Begay, 2020. Photo by Black Queen Photography for *Metanoia: Transformation through AIDS Archives and Activism*. Courtesy ONE Archives Foundation

Tell me about HIV-related art/culture that has been important to you.

charles ryan long

The works I would describe as important are less about HIV than the relations that surround the virus. Just as we are not solely singular pieces, we are also entangled with one another (whether admitted or not). HIV is not simply a virus. It lives in, out, and through us, permeating the creases of our existence, blurring the lines between interior and exterior realities.

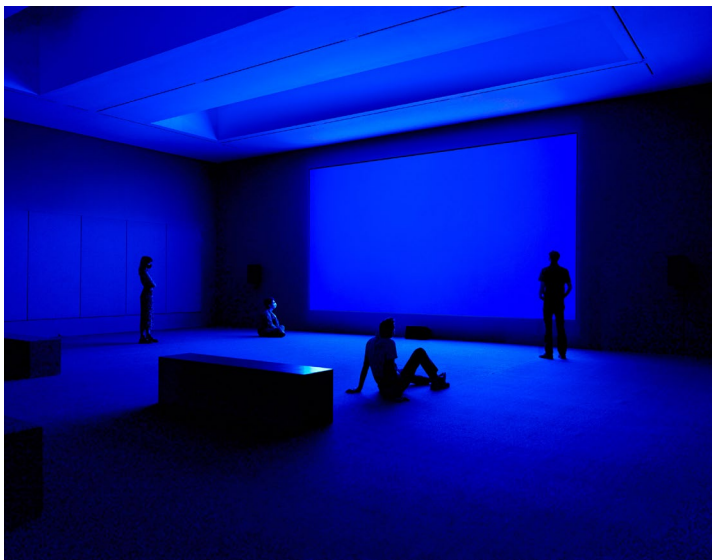
My ultimate favorite cultural product is a phrase, or what I imagine originally something akin to a chant at an event/rally. I originally encountered it in relation to an ACT UP LA poster or button I saw/found along the way ... Dying Diseased Faggot or “DDF” as it so commonly appears. What I love so much about it is that it remains a great retort to the ways that Gay men’s culture polices those who are Poz or use drugs. It takes the culture’s naive version of the DDF moniker (“drug and disease free”), often used to replace formative

conversation about risk on apps, and asserts a pride of place that I identify with. I am admittedly a person who spent much time in their twenties literally teaching myself and other gays (and nons) how to navigate sexual safety practices that made sense for them. So to see this negotiation minimized into a hashtag makes one sad-angry and a declarative redefining of DYING DISEASED FAGGOT (DDF) makes me feel better.

Eva Hayward

In a graduate seminar at the University of Arizona, my student Scottie Bradford re-introduced me to Derek Jarman’s *Blue* (1993). I had seen the film as an undergraduate, but I had then appreciated it for its abstraction and formalism. In that seminar, as the blue of the colored screen washed over me, and I turned to see my students also washed over that same blue, I felt a sense

of devastation. I was overwhelmed. Every teacher has felt it: the material has taken you out of your teacherly mode, and now what. Sometimes anxiety is a rough translation of anguish. Luckily, Scottie's brilliance shined. For me, *Blue* functions as a refusal of our senses to know well. How many representations of AIDS are drifting through us like networks of associations and anxieties? Sensory experience seems like a shared baseline, a shared feeling for something. Blue light washing over my students and me. But this is wrong. Instead, *Blue* teaches me that I do not yet know what AIDS is. Surely HIV alters my survivability, but I am not sure I know what AIDS is. The pessimism of not knowing is also a relief from the repetition of AIDS knowledges and representations that aim at what Lauren Berlant called "cruel optimism" (that HIV is manageable, and risk prevention is the solution to AIDS) and annihilation (that AIDS is a past pandemic and people are not dying from AIDS). Art like Jarman's *Blue* provides space for the not yet, and this is indispensable.



Derek Jarman, Blue, 1993. Installation view, Derek Jarman, David Zwirner, New York, 2021. Photo by Maris Hutchinson

Jessica Whitbread

Two things: *YM* magazine, circa 1993, had an article about a woman who was HIV-positive and living her life. This article paired with the death of my forever dream date, Freddie Mercury, in 1991, had a huge impact as cultural points of reference when I contracted HIV a decade later. I also remember [an ad by Kenneth Cole from about 2008](#) featuring a very sexy HIV-positive [Regan Hofmann](#) and thought YES I want to see more of this. It was about that same time that I started really engaging publicly. Of course Gran Fury, Guerrilla Girls, fierce pussy, General Idea all spoke to me, but also more recently, I'm in awe of the works of [Kia LaBeija](#). She's a good friend, and I have loved watching her work



Alexander Hernandez, Untitled (Slumber party), 2021. Courtesy the artist and Visual AIDS

grow and her shine. I deeply love the complexities of the late [Frederick Weston](#) (1946–2020) as well as [Nancer LeMoins](#). And if you have not checked out [Alexander Hernandez](#)'s work, you'd be missing out. There is so much going on there; someday I will have one of his pieces on my wall. Pretty much any artist living with HIV who has been featured in any of the editions of *The HIV HOWLER* should be checked out as well.

Kairon Liu

My journey as an artist has been important to me, it has helped me connect with myself, other people living with HIV, and other artists.

I began traveling to whatever artist residency programs would take me, starting in 2017, for a participatory portrait project called [Humans as Hosts](#). To find collaborators, people living with HIV, who wanted to be photographed, I used social media and connections I would make in local health departments and nongovernmental organizations. Through this work I transformed myself into an activist, holding in-depth interviews with each participant, creating a series of images and texts. The artworks and the research were presented in tandem at the exhibitions to reflect the habitus, the social milieu, and economic class of each participant. Over time, they represented an archive, one that exists as evidence against the molds of stereotypes and



Kairon Liu, Humans as Hosts 015: KEEP YOUR PEARLS GIRLS, 2018. Courtesy the artist



Kairon Liu, Humans as Hosts 001: Actually Romantic, Kairon Liu, 2017. Courtesy the artist

discrimination that often limit and erase the diversity of lives impacted by HIV. They urge viewers to comprehend and acknowledge the reality and metaphor of illness in individual and collective lives.



Erick Lin reading his poem “Undetectable” at the opening of Interminable Prescriptions for the Plague, MoCA TAIPEI, Taiwan, 2019. Courtesy MoCA TAIPEI and Taiwan HivStory Association



Brad Walrond performing [Blood Brothers](#), a multidisciplinary poetry work based on his collaboration with five HIV-po_z Taiwanese participants at the closing of Interminable Prescriptions for the Plague on World AIDS Day, MoCA TAIPEI, Taiwan, 2019. Courtesy MoCA TAIPEI and Taiwan HivStory Association

Ultimately, [Humans as Hosts](#) became an international activist and curatorial project called [Interminable Prescriptions for the Plague](#), which featured twenty-two artists, including Marguerite Van Cook, Chuang Chih-Wei, Lee Tzu-Tung, J Triangular, and more. The exhibition also had more than ten public events, such as poetry readings featuring Brad Walrond and Erick Lin, and interventions like The Stage for Ordinary People.

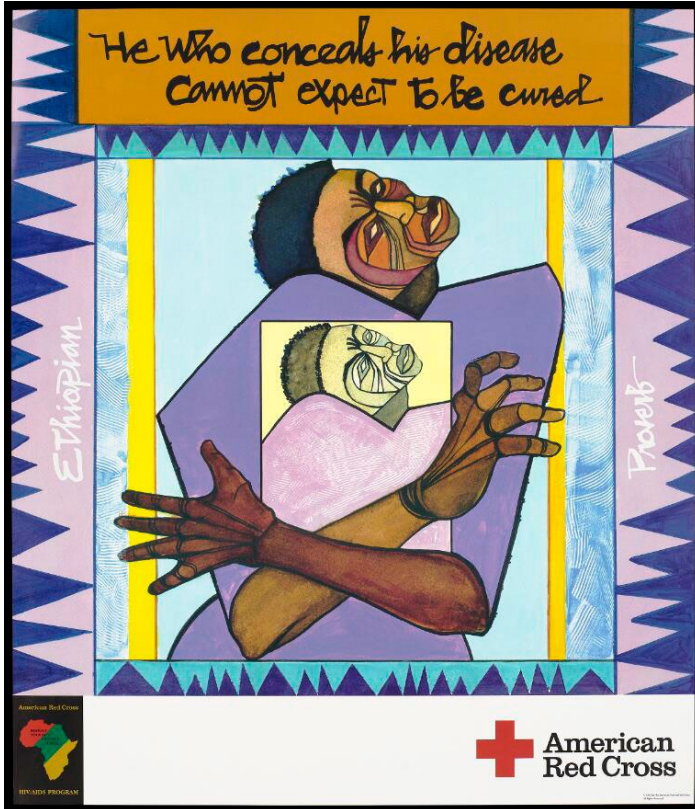


[The Stage for Ordinary People](#), woodwork, megaphone, spray paint. Action by Taiwan HivStory Association for Make Your Voice Heard campaign at Interminable Prescriptions for the Plague, MoCA TAIPEI, Taiwan, 2019. Courtesy MoCA TAIPEI and Taiwan HivStory Association

Lois Conley

The Griot Museum has provided me the forum for continued learning about HIV/AIDS, and I share that with the community. Materials that I collected during my experience with my brother bore new meaning, as I realized I could use them to infuse the history of the illness in the Black community with aesthetically pleasing, nonthreatening artistic expression to inform, enlighten, and empower. My collection of Red Cross posters created in 1992 by artist [Damballah Dolphus Smith](#) to raise awareness of HIV in African countries helped to inspire a flurry of sharing. I used them as

the basis for [Impact HIV/AIDS](#), an exhibition here at The Griot that included T-shirts, photographs, pins, and other AIDS-related items lent to us from community members to tell the long and ongoing story of HIV within Black communities here in St. Louis and surrounding areas. This laid an infinite foundation for developing new and expanding existing community partners. Thinking about ongoing HIV-related projects is a regular part of our arts and cultural programming.



A black figure bugs a picture of another to his chest within a graphic background; an illustration to an Ethiopian proverb; sixth of six posters advertising the American Red Cross HIV/AIDS program. Color lithograph by Damballah Dolphus Smith, 1992

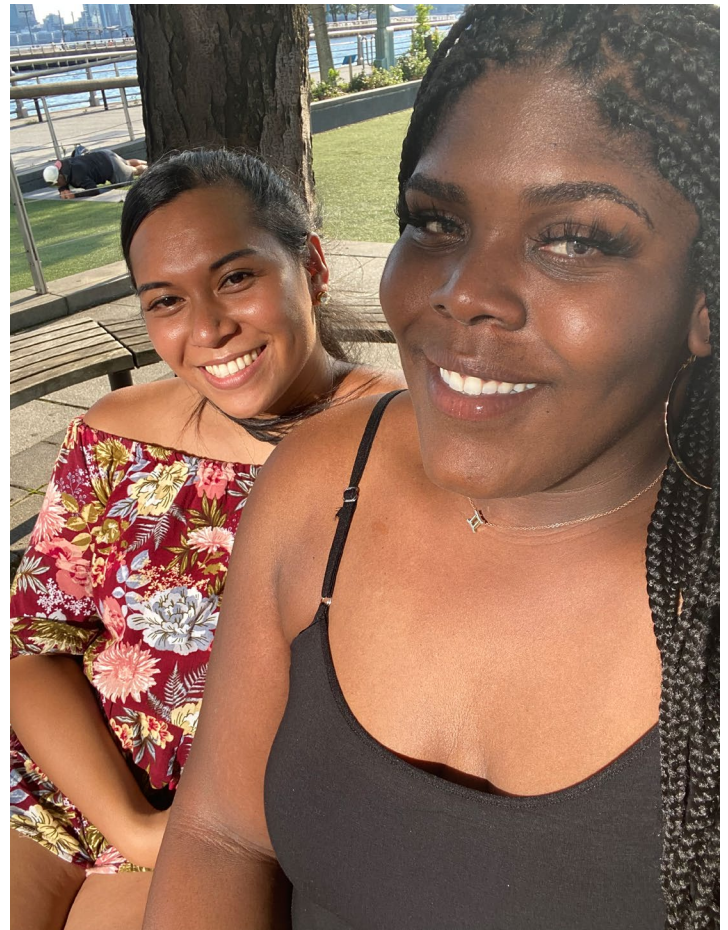
Malaya Lakas

[Kairon Liu](#) first really inspired me to learn more about how our stories can be told through art. When I first met him through a mutual friend, he asked me to be part of his portrait series [Humans as Hosts](#).

Living in NYC really opened my eyes to the world of HIV-related art and community. Kairon later connected me with a project called [Luv Til It Hurts](#), which was how I met [Todd Lanier Lester](#), [Brad Walrond](#), and Ted Kerr.

I am so grateful for their work, but most especially their tender love and care. After meeting them and seeing them at community events, I felt so held by the community. They have all inspired me in many ways, and I am always excited to learn about new opportunities to be involved in some way.

I am super grateful for the ongoing work of [Visual AIDS](#), [WWHIVDD](#), and [LOVE POSITIVE WOMEN](#).



Malaya Lakas and Neicy Carter. Courtesy Malaya Lakas

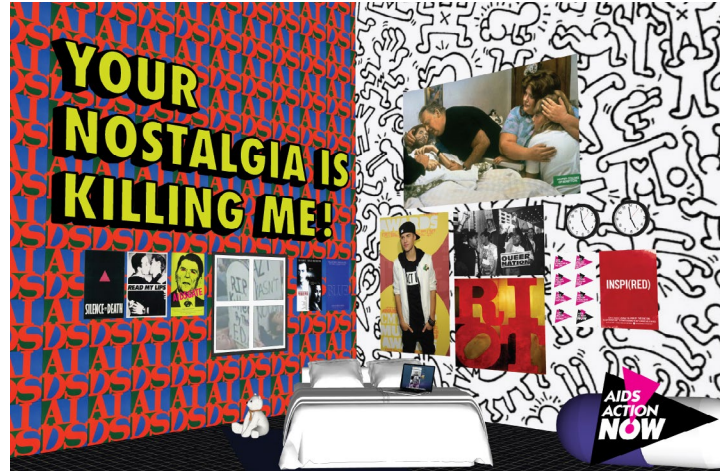
Lastly, I am grateful to my trans mother, Neicy Carter, who has taken me under her

wing, and supported me throughout my transition. She is an icon in the NYC kiki scene, and she took me to my first kiki ball and my first mainstream ball, The Latex Ball, in 2018. Through our community work together, the ballroom community is a place where I also felt seen and honored for being who I truly am. It is a space where all of my identities felt free and at home, most especially my identity of being HIV-positive. It also gave me a space to give back to my community and help educate impressionable young LGBTQ youth of color about HIV and STI prevention, all while being able to engage in critical dialogue and artful expression.

Ricky Varghese

[Vincent Chevalier](#), a Quebecois artist, has an entire oeuvre of work that delves into the complexities concerning what it means to produce art about HIV. In incredibly nuanced ways, he explores themes such as historical trauma, memory, migration, and sex with the deftness of an auteur. Similarly, the sparing work of [Felix Gonzalez-Torres](#) has been an immense influence on my thinking regarding HIV-related art. I changed my mind about Keith Haring after seeing a retrospective of his work at the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris in 2013. I used to think of him as being too easily co-opted into the realm of pop art, and thus easily absorbed into the logic of capital. However, this show, titled [The Political Line](#), was so beautifully curated in situating Haring within a very particular political and historical tradition that showcased his fervent commitment to antiracist and anti-colonial conversations that were taking place in the eighties. This show took Haring out of the well-trodden contexts that we are only too familiar with in North America and had the audience confront the political edge his work always already seemed to be informed by. I have a soft spot for the righteous

indignation of [David Wojnarowicz](#)'s work. As a sixteen-year-old queer kid growing up in the suburbs, his work was my inauguration not only to HIV-related art, but also to queer art. His work still haunts my dreams to this day. I owe my commitment to thinking and writing about art to him.



Vincent Chevalier with Ian Bradley-Perrin, Your Nostalgia Is Killing Me, 2013, for AIDS ACTION NOW!/PosterVirus. Courtesy Vincent Chevalier

Shyronn Tavia Jones

The SILENCE=DEATH PROJECT Posters and Keith Haring's Drawings are HIV-RELATED ART that has been important to me. Their art drew my attention because of its simple ... short ... serious ... urgent ... clear and direct messages used for political activism. Their art is an example of "Less is more."

Specifically, Keith Haring's *CRACK IS WACK* Mural on a handball court in New York City resonates with me for three main reasons:

1. First Lady Nancy Reagan's "Just Say No" campaign in response to the destruction caused by the crack epidemic.
2. I lived in the inner city when crack was running rampant in my neighborhood. The crack epidemic also allowed for my father to flourish in his role as leader of the Tomahawks Gang.

3. My mother was a handball champion. In the 1980s a private helicopter came to Gershwin Junior High School's track field in East New York, Brooklyn, to transport her to a championship match but people swarmed and they were unable to safely land.

I admire the ECLECTIC CULTURE of HIV-RELATED ART. Because it allows the ability to creatively express social conditions and one's self; and it inevitably ties us together.



Silence=Death collective, Silence=Death, 1987

Sunil Gupta

Initially, it was mainly those bits that were connected to lesbians' and gay men's culture in London. I met people from the "Gay Left"

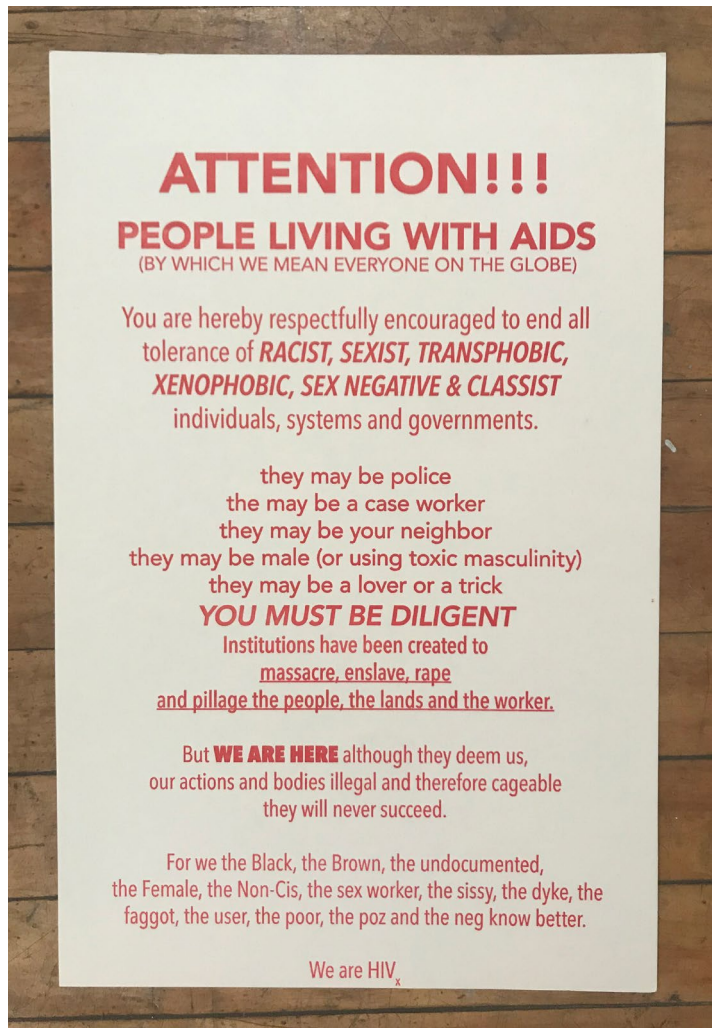
like [Simon Watney](#), who was writing an HIV column in *Capital Gay*, and [Stuart Marshall](#), the filmmaker for whom I did stills. I was aware via cultural studies about American activities. In Houston, in 1988 I met Douglas Crimp when his [AIDS issue of October](#) was coming out. It felt like there was a lot more and quite dominant HIV culture emanating from the US. What I didn't stop to think about though was that much of this output was English speaking and largely white only. When I returned home and got involved with making *Ecstatic Antibodies*, Tessa Boffin and I decided to make it a very British multi-cultural and pro-promiscuity response to HIV. But of course any cultural product related to HIV from anywhere was devoured with much gratitude, including catalogues of survey shows in Australia.

Szymon Adamczak

There are three items I would like to speak about. First, the movie [Longtime Companion](#) from 1989. Back in the days in my teenager-bedroom-cave I was bingeing anything with Mary-Louise Parker I could scavenge on torrents. I remember I was by then having sex, it was always safe but the conditions were not. I was sneaking out at night and finding myself in cars that belonged to strangers I met on anonymous chats. I freaked out after learning what the euphemism meant: a longtime companion is the surviving same-sex partner of someone who had died of AIDS. I wanted love without a tragedy in the making. To this day, I have never watched the film. Hasn't HIV itself become a longtime companion?

The second item is a letterpress print entitled *I am HIVx*, which was gifted to me by Charles Ryan Long during the Amsterdam AIDS Conference in 2018. A whole concurrent universe manifested itself in front of me once I was holding this piece up against the

politically neutralized backdrop of the conference. With the poster in my hand, I felt I found myself in the right place. Now, it is the first thing people see when entering my living room. It makes them diligent.



Charles Ryan Long and Christopher Paul Jordan, *I am HIVx*, 2018. Courtesy Visual AIDS

Third item aggregates AIDS diaries and first-person-living-with-HIV perspective in writing as a cluster of my ongoing interest in bearing witness to this pandemic across times, places, and languages. I have observed a massive shift in my own approach to text making as I am with HIV. I started to live more in my words, too. I started to honor my circumstances and communicate with them. Reading these journals feels like embracing someone familiar. A sentence from Pascal de

Duve's *Cargo Vie* stuck with me: "HIV, it's pretty much you who are doing the writing here." You can also listen to [part 1](#) and [part 2](#) of *Unbecoming = Undying*, a two-part audio journey through AIDS diaries I made with artist Richard John Jones and our friends and peers in Amsterdam, in December 2020.

Yuè Begay

Growing up, especially in my later teens in high school, it was nearly impossible to look up queer art without it incorporating some type of HIV-prevention or HIV-care related messaging. By this time in my life, I had come out as trans and as such, felt a duty to look up queer history. It is a sad but also a resilient thing that HIV and queerness went hand in hand in the past. A community that was left to die by the hands of an unfit government, no wonder queer ancestors at the time rose up and demanded rights and access to treatment.



Sarah Patterson, *Red Circle Project* logo; Yuè Begay, *Indigenous Pride LA* logo. Courtesy Yuè Begay

One art piece that I fell in love with was actually the Red Circle Project logo. It featured a red circle with a line in the middle. I asked the founder, [Elton Naswood](#), what it symbolized. He said at a pow wow he saw an HIV/AIDS support ribbon on a tie in the wind blowing around. For a moment, he saw the ribbon make a circle and that's how the Red Circle Project logo came to be. The line in the middle represented the disconnect

and disharmony that happened because of HIV and the stigma Native community had toward it. The goal was for the circle to be whole again. For Native folks living with HIV to be back with their community and to be loved once again.

What do you need or want from HIV-related art/culture?

charles ryan long

Hmm, I want the same from HIV-related art as I do from “regular” art (and society at large); the white, patriarchal, capitalist systems that have traditionally been in place to crumble and for new functions to grow in their place.

Like the meme of last summer “[You about to lose yo job](#),” I want the people in power now to relinquish those seats, step aside, bow down, and make way. I want their replacements to be all those who have traditionally not been in those spaces and I want those folks brought on as leaders and drivers of what’s next. Not in some tokenized diverse (for whom?), equitable (again for whom?), and inclusive (where?) manner, but in ways that cause tectonic shifts.

When this comes to pass the culture will speak/sing to me and provide me with what I need. I need new voices in leadership, I need to imagine a world that doesn’t yet exist and

feels tangible in my lifetime. I need to know what I don’t know and to hear voices I’ve possibly neglected. I need works that turn shit upside down over and over again and demand that resources go to our most vulnerable.

Lastly, upon reflection on the world’s response to COVID and the subsequent research that went into finding a vaccine ... I want works demanding the same response to HIV and a whole host of currently “incurable” maladies. I want works that reflect our total humanity without borders of body, land, or sea.

Eva Hayward

Che Gossett and I just finished editing a special issue of [TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly](#), “[Trans in a Time of HIV/AIDS](#).” Working with Saidiya Hartman’s insights on “the afterlife of slavery” and memory, part of our introduction centers the importance

of creative expression in the archiving and remembering of AIDS. We started with the work of scholars Adam Geary and Cindy Patton to ask how the homophobic and racist structuration of AIDS discourse was in the form of a disavowal of libidinal or unconscious sexuality. AIDS marks our desire—all of us living in the time of HIV/AIDS—with intensifying repression. To think about AIDS and art, Che and I proposed that artistic form and aesthetics are imbued with sexuality—Sigmund Freud’s account of poetics as formal constraint that fore-places sexuality as a provocation for others. Art, in this way, is a seduction. We asked: How might this seduction help us understand the force AIDS has had in disfiguring our relationship to desire? In this question, we also wanted to ask how antiblackness and homophobia continue to work to define one another—often in distorted and deranged formations. For us, given that the special issue was about trans and trans studies, we wondered how these racial and sexual distortions have also shaped transgender identity and politics—and here we historically situate the institutionalization of trans studies within the AIDS epidemic in the US. We wanted to say too much and ended up not saying enough! But—and I hope readers will appreciate our effort—there has been *no* sustained effort to think through AIDS and trans, specifically how trans politics and analytics emerged with and through these disfigurements of AIDS. Che and I wanted to return sexuality back to trans (“transsexuality,” you might say) to understand the role of AIDS in defining this identity politics. To do so, we turned to Black artists and activists—Kiyann Williams, Tourmaline, and Monica Jones—who are desiring back into the archiving of AIDS.



Cover of the November 2020 issue of TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly, edited by Eva Hayward and Che Gossett, featuring a photo of Kiyann Williams performing Reflections, 2017

Jessica Whitbread

I need more focus on non-US-based artists and culture producers. I need more women. I need more dykes and queers. I need more drug users. I need more sex. I need more mothers. I want to hear more about the Indigenous experience. I want artists living with HIV prioritized in telling their own diverse stories through their work.

Kairon Liu

I need connection. I remember how isolated I felt when I did the first presentation of *Humans as Hosts* in Taiwan. I started looking for references on the internet of other artists making work about HIV. Jessica Whitbread’s *LOVE POSITIVE WOMEN* with Visual AIDS were early and important inspirations

of how I found the spirit to continue my projects—not only for my own sorrow, but also to hold a dialogue with local POZ communities.

Viewing and witnessing other beings using different ways to pursue similar goals can make you feel less isolated. It shows that you have companions, and even if you never meet, you can be each other's driftwood in the flood, something to hold on to when you think everything you had is lost.

When I first heard my diagnosis, I had no way of expressing my feeling of disconnection to reality. Talking to friends about HIV is hard because of the criminalization of people living with HIV in Taiwan and, of course, prejudice. Pretty soon though I realized talking about it can never truly make me feel safer. That is why I started to transform (or perhaps contain) my mourning into my art and connecting with others about our positive status. We comfort and support each other through extensive conversations and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Lois Conley

I just want to be able to continue to use art to raise awareness and to inspire folks to think differently about the illness and to think differently about how they treat people who are living with it.

Malaya Lakas

I have a need and desire to continue finding more HIV-related art/culture that centers QTBIPOC narratives. I desire more spaces for trans women of color, living with HIV, to be in collective with each other. I don't believe art or culture has to always be transactional, but coming from an anti-oppression framework, it is often queer and trans people of color, queer and trans people living with HIV, who do so much of the labor of public health efforts and who are paid the least. Yes, the ones who are

on the ground, on the frontlines, doing the face-to-face and now virtual STI/HIV prevention, education, screening, case management, linkage to care, etc. It is the frontline staff who do all the hard work, with never enough resources. I understand firsthand how challenging and tiring that work is, and I am very much not okay with how funding and resources are unequally distributed. I desire a redesign of the system that allows for this to happen. I desire for everyone who cares about HIV-related art/culture to take this call to action to think creatively about how they can support the most vulnerable and marginalized in our communities. This is the culture I envision and build for. I need and want HIV-related art to include these kinds of analyses, and I want HIV-related art to be able to help us work toward a more sustainable and abundant future that works for everyone at the bottom of the pyramid first. Lastly, I've been passionate about [healing justice](#) and [pleasure activism](#), so I need and want HIV-related art to be a form of healing practice, and a pleasurable and delightful experience.

Ricky Varghese

In a word: thoughtfulness. By thoughtfulness, what I mean is a commitment to really think through the ethical, sociopolitical, and historical dimensions of an aesthetic work. So much effort is being made of late to conjure up window dressing in the contemporary gallery setting when it comes to this, but I, sometimes, wonder what actual thought process has gone into laying out the stakes involved in a manner that is simultaneously articulate and undidactic. I don't want art that does my thinking for me, nor do I want art that appears instructive and pedagogical. What I would like is art that pushes the limits—I don't mean this in a cliché sense. I really want the aesthetic work to take into

consideration the traditions and historical references that it appears to be responding to. All art, in a sense, is referential and therefore in dialogue with a tradition. In the context of HIV-related art, I would like to see that an acknowledgment of the history of art be at the forefront, and here that history of art is one that is informed by the trauma of the AIDS crisis and the losses incurred by it, and, as well, the ongoing sensibilities of that epidemic. Thinking of the present and the future, I would imagine HIV-related art would also respond to the conditions presented to us by the current contagion, the COVID-19 pandemic. This is not a call to make reductive comparisons that may be seductively easy to make; rather it might be an opportunity for the historical context to be situated within and alongside the present crisis.

Skyronn Tavia Jones

Vital matters I would like to see highlighted utilizing art to CAPTURE Community and Policy Stakeholders' ATTENTION:

- RESPECT for People Living with HIV
- COMPASSIONATE PEOPLE-FIRST COMMUNICATION
- PROGRESSIVE-BASED CONNECTIONS to BUILD NETWORKS in favor of ADVOCATING PROGRESS on ISSUES like:
 - HOUSING Opportunities for People Living with HIV/AIDS (HOPWA),
 - Modernization of HIV CRIMINALIZATION LAWS,
 - CURING HIV,
 - Fair EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES, and
 - FINANCIAL COMPENSATION for People Living with HIV.

Sunil Gupta

This is a tricky one. I think way back in the 1990s there was an urgent need to make HIV-related art that was directly addressing

the misinformation and the fearmongering of the government-related public health messaging. Following that, there was a great period of silence with only a handful of organizations like Visual AIDS operating in New York and none where I live in London. I am trying to think if I was missing HIV-related art or culture during that period of silence and I must say that I don't think I was. Maybe that had to do with the fact that for a while now I have had a stable undetectable viral load and the whole clinical process has just become another one of those things that one has to do like file tax returns, that doesn't need a cultural expression. In the last few years there seems to have been a revival and I think my first new encounter with this was the [workshop at The Showroom gallery](#) I attended, organized by Aimar Arriola, Theo Gordon, Theodore (ted) Kerr, Conal McStravick, Jaime Shearn Coan, and Dan Udy. Ever since then there's been a growing interest in the 1980s and what we did regarding HIV. In the last year, this seems to have become mainstream entertainment. We have had "[It's a Sin](#)" on broadcast television in England, which I think should have featured more moustaches though, and just the other week I went to see "[Cruise](#)," a West End theatrical performance also about the 1980s HIV experience for gay men in London. For me, it's great that such an important decade in my life is being remembered and that a new generation is becoming informed about it. For my own work, I only come back to it periodically. In fact it's been since 2009 that I directly made work with HIV as my subject. Because of COVID I'm suddenly making work again trying to re-imagine what the new virus has brought to long-term people with HIV. For me HIV-related art is a means of telling my story and not merely consuming other people's stories as entertainment.

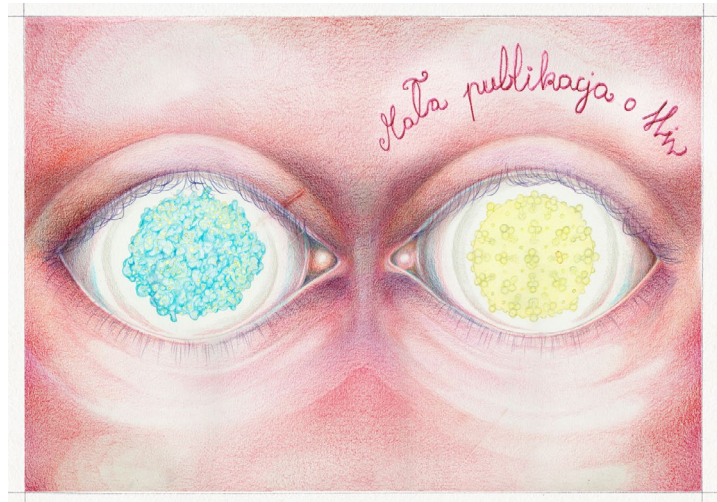
Szymon Adamczak

Keep rendering HIV visible as it is incessantly entangled with life, people, and the communities they form. I want HIV-related culture to remain vital, contextual and time-sensitive, transnational and abundant. I need it to be concerned with drugs and sex. I wish for it to have a say in a postcapitalist world to come. I want it to be transformative and rehumanizing.

In the past two years I have been investigating and talking tons about HIV- and AIDS-related culture in my native Poland while preparing a *Minor publication on HIV*. It is a collection of oral histories, artist submissions, and testimonies with a selection from archives, to be released independently later this year. *Minor* as the AIDS crisis has never been (or more precisely never become) a major concern for the culture I was raised in; my center is your periphery. Among the activists we say this country suffers from the *Philadelphia* syndrome. Which denotes a general attitude of unwillingness to move beyond the mainstream image of HIV/AIDS from the 1990s, to stay with the second-hand, safe-for-majority perception. Yet it doesn't mean that HIV-related culture in Poland won't flourish. With the absence of HIV-positive voices from the past, I am thrilled to highlight people now in the publication, especially those who are making their presence known in the present. My intention is especially concerned in reaching those who are living with HIV in Poland. I want to tell them you, too, have your culture and your artists you could identify with. You are not completely abandoned nor need to live a borrowed life.

Yue Begay

Native art needs to be highlighted in the HIV field. I have attended many HIV conferences and have seen NO Native art pieces either



Cover of Mała publikacja o HIV (Minor publication on HIV), 2020, edited by Szymon Adamczak. Cover art by Bartek Arobal Kociemba. Courtesy Szymon Adamczak

showcased or incorporated into the many presentations. The HIV field needs to do better in terms of not only giving visibility to Native folks but also advocating for programs and services.

Native HIV-related art needs to be encouraged amongst our own community. If someone is living with HIV, they have a right to express how they live with it. I would love to see Native HIV-related art at non-HIV settings like festivals, pride events, non-HIV-related health conferences, and even in the offices of Native providers. Native HIV-related art needs to be bold. Native HIV-related art needs to be uplifted. Native HIV-related art needs support. It is out there but there is little to no patronage. Natives living with HIV need to know their voices and stories are valuable. That includes the arts and crafts they produce. [R.I.S.E.](#) and its founder, Demian DinéYazhi', are of the many Native artists who create HIV-related art who should be recognized and supported. Seek them out. Build relationships with Native peoples.

*What should people consider when making or viewing
HIV-related art/culture?*

charles ryan long

For the Makers: Consider your role and placement, is it your story to tell? Do you live your life as a PLWH, no matter your status? Is it safe for you to make this work? (Criminalization.) Otherwise be free, allow the work to be a portal where you get to have all the roses that you deserve while you yet live. Let it be the place where you scream about the unfairness of it all and how fucked we all seem at times, a place for your RAGE to live in its full glory. Let the work be the expression of the deep compassion you were once shown and therefore be the LOVE you want to reflect back to us. If it helps, let the work take you through all the grief and allow it to hold the space for what we have lost.

For the Viewer: Once you know, take it as an invitation into what's next, don't allow apathy to run through you and don't look away. Think less about what you know and more



*charles ryan long, tote for Visual AIDS, 2019.
Courtesy Visual AIDS*

of what you don't, remaining so curious that you go home and search for what intrigued you. Don't make an ass out of you and me and place your presumptions down. Realize that much of the propaganda you have been fed around HIV has been the narrative of those in power, but that there have and continue to be counternarratives. Is what you are viewing/experiencing one of those? Whose voice was in the forefront and who wasn't even represented/invited?

Eva Hayward

In a Duke University Press interview about the coedited *TSG* special issue, I wrote this: "There is a presumption that AIDS in the US has gone, that we live in the afterward of AIDS. This is simply wrong. AIDS continues to function as a material and political process in administering ontological and epistemological racial and sexual orders in the contemporary." What I meant, here, is that AIDS continues not only as an illness, but also a structuring logic in contemporary life and politics. So, efforts to historicize or represent AIDS must be careful of not evocating a post-AIDS ideology, which figures AIDS is over and HIV as manageable and livable. Post-AIDS ideology performs an antiblack and anti-sexual erasure of how HIV and AIDS are ongoing necropolitical agencies. I am not the first to say this, but I continue to feel compelled to repeat it—AIDS is not over; AIDS is now.

Jessica Whitbread

When making HIV-related work ask yourself, Are you living with HIV? If yes, why are you making it? If not, why are you making it? Is this a question that you want to answer for yourself? Is it important to others? Is it part of a longer conversation and therefore you should celebrate/uplift/honor your HIV-positive history?

Then I guess when viewing the work, ask similar questions. I have made pieces

previously that have upset people, but I think because they didn't investigate the artist and their experience. At the same time, I question the trend of making AIDS art because it's cool or edgy. I think that fad has passed again, and you can no longer buy ACT UP shirts in hip stores, but yeah, we need to really think critically about these moments of cultural production. Is it good or bad? I don't really know. You go deep with that one.

Kairon Liu

People often resort to the worship of successful outcomes and lose sight of whatever reality is in front of them, or the emotions behind what they are seeing. I have seen people engage with community work only on the level of aesthetics and appearances without proper research and on-site observation. It shows the classic colonizer mindset where all the diversity gets dumped into containers with labels.

From my viewpoint, if an artist wants to engage in a topic like HIV/AIDS, seeing the vulnerability of our community is unquestionably important. Every research subject that you see is coexisting with a virus and the stigma that comes with a diagnosis. People need to be heard, and witnessed for what they are fighting for.

In the end, art cannot be the solution to our problems. Yet, I still have belief in it since it continues to help me in my journey, helping me connect with myself and others. Project by project, I am curious where art and HIV will lead us.

Lois Conley

In my opinion, folks should understand that people living with HIV are no different than anyone else. They feel; they hurt; they love; they are loved; they give, they live, they die, just like every other human on this earth!

Malaya Lakas

I don't think I can speak for other artists and what is the meaning behind their artwork, but I hope people will always think critically with a race, class, and gender analysis. Which artists have access or lack access to having their artwork displayed in a museum or exhibit, or their writing featured in a publication? I hope people are able to constantly challenge themselves, to learn more about HIV-related art and artists living with HIV in a global context. How are communities and art uplifting and centering people living with HIV? What does it look like to uplift and center people living with HIV? What does it look like to find resources and allocate them to the community members who do not have their basic needs met? To the community members who have the most barriers standing in their way?

Ricky Varghese

I have been thinking a lot about the relationship between art and ethics—if these are actually possible to be situated alongside one another, or if everything ends up becoming co-opted by power structures as these structures have been laid out and defined under the headings of neoliberalism and late capitalism. I'd like to think of myself as perhaps an idealist—cautiously so—and not so much an optimist, but an idealist who believes that another kind of world is possible, even when it comes to thinking about and creating art. When it comes to making HIV-related art, I would like artists, writers, and other cultural producers to be sensitive to the ethical dimensions and implications of what they are doing and be aware of the precise historical contours that they are responding to through their work.

Sbyronn Tavia Jones

People should consider allowing themselves to connect to HIV-RELATED ART when they are viewing it or making it. Too often, people who are not living with HIV disconnect and disassociate themselves from HIV, as if being aware of HIV will make them HIV-positive—go figure. In actuality, everyone has a role and the responsibility to know about this medical condition that impacts sexual health, family planning, social stratification, morbidity, and many other parts of life.

VIEWING HIV-RELATED ART and culture can privy people to pertinent insight on social behaviors, societal norms, knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, customs, capabilities, and habits of individuals.

When people are MAKING HIV-RELATED ART they should consider personalizing and tailoring art to themselves. Interconnections will inevitably link other individuals and groups to art.

Sunil Gupta

I think the main thing that people should consider when making HIV-related art is their point of view. I think subjectivity can play a huge role especially in the visual arts. Can I draw upon my experiences or do I have to go out and research an HIV-affected population? And then who I am can make a lot of difference. Very often cisgendered gay European men will make the assumption that they can draw upon their experience and then generalize that into some universal truths that are to be applied to everyone. This assumes that they have access to all kinds of knowledges. But as we know that is not the case and that experiences of all kinds of diverse people, including women, trans, Black, Asian, Latino, and Indigenous people, all have their own cultures and their own very specific knowledge to draw upon. Most of these have been ignored in favor of mainstream cis white

male narratives. Where “others” have been included, the information is sourced from dubious anthropological studies of “native” subcultures. Therefore I think that when you commission or make an HIV-related art project you should consider employing HIV-affected people from different kinds of backgrounds to work on the making of the project rather than simply being its subject. The same can be said about the viewing public. Again there are often general categories of who the viewer might be. It’s often forgotten that HIV-affected people are part of the viewing public and they have special needs. They may be coming in to see the work as a form of validation of their own experiences. So some aspects of the presentation have to allow for such possibilities to occur.

Szymon Adamczak

Before considering anything, I’d ask to stay curious about it and in front of it. Most of the people making and viewing work about HIV are not living with HIV but the landscape they inhabit has been changed and HIV has had a part in it. And it keeps on changing, so is how we view HIV, which cannot be reduced to ART, only by ART. (HIV medication pun intended.)

I had been amazed by the richness of HIV-related culture and its dialects. It’s impossible to wrap your head around it once you start to sense the vastness of its catalogue. It’s impossible to witness it all. Each encountered work is a new beginning.

Making art and culture with HIV in mind is for me the most valuable when anchored in lived experience. I tend to be alert and less interested if I see an exhibition that is concerned with HIV but it doesn’t bother to include people who are now living with it. It’s myopic to deny the present its urgency or to look for it elsewhere, be it in the past.

Yuè Begay

When making HIV-related art, do not forget to celebrate the present. I know the pain and stigma of HIV is still prevalent; however, it is not like it was in the past. We have elders with HIV and the first wave of babies born with HIV now have families of their own, many children who did not contract HIV from their parents. I’m more of an asset-based person so looking at what one brings to themselves, to their families, to their communities, and to their environment is always on my mind. We have enough trauma art. Create art that is healing, that is mending, and that is asset- or strengths-based.

When viewing HIV-related art, as a person not living with HIV, always be mindful of the past. HIV was a recent epidemic and still is in some parts of the world. Many movies and shows like the groundbreaking *Pose* on FX have rehighlighted the atrocity of the HIV epidemic and the US government’s inaction that led to the deaths of many citizens. Even in “developed countries,” medication for HIV still evades many living in poverty. Staying on treatment is easier than it sounds for some. HIV is still an ongoing fight even here in the United States. View HIV-related art as a message but also as a call to action. It would be naive to view HIV-related art as just pretty and illustrious. No, the artist put a message there. Read it. Take it with you to the polls. Take it with you to your families and friends.

Do you make art about HIV? Why or why not?

charles ryan long

Sometimes on purpose, other times on accident, but yes, as a PLWA, the HIV makes its way into my work. At times it has been commissioned works or my thoughts/energies, other times I have done it out of sheer grief or anger with little to nowhere to turn or so it felt. Always when I do it I can be conscious of the inherent risk with publicly declaring yourself as a PLWA and what that signals from others. Whether it be disdain, confusion, sympathy, or allegiance, it's a tightrope that those of us who DO have to navigate.

I also think that making any work really is a seeking of representation of self or idea out into the world, again it's a seeking to show, feel, touch, smell, energize, decenter the maker's version of what is. It is the marrow of what it means to be alive in this world to seek connection and understanding from

others. By which I mean bone would simply be empty if not for the marrow, I think making art is a form of filling in the space, impregnating your timeline with the essence of you and your perspective.

In this way the HIV lives within my work whether seen or unspoken, whether stated or otherwise it makes up the filling of who I am, so therefore the work cannot exist without it.

Eva Hayward

I am not sure if I do. AIDS defines me, perhaps most especially in the places where I think AIDS is *least* present. I make art, my art is a gathering-up and feeling-through the vicissitudes of subjectivity. When I make art, there is a falling into the materials, a kind of lusting for form and matter. For instance, I begin to build up layers of gel, ink, salt, spit, and other substances onto a film strip. Each

material has properties and capacities that solicit my curiosity, my pleasure in making. In that layering, I lose my intentional directionality—I do not know where I am going, but I begin to rely on the matter of my materials. It is not animism—I do not mean that ink or gel has agency—instead my pleasure finds a hold in the sensuousness of the material. How the pellucid qualities of gel or nail polish refract light into my eye as I layer onto the gel the refulgent opacities of ink. At the same time, I am imagining the temporality of sixteen frames per second and the sculptural effects of projection. AIDS has altered my body and my imagination—I am otherwise to myself and to my place in the world because of AIDS. “Do I make art about AIDS?” Perhaps not; but my art making is *of* AIDS.

Jessica Whitbread

I totally make work about HIV. I guess I am a cliché in that way. I never really identify as an artist, I came in through the back door. I was just always friends with the artists, the queers, the underdogs. I hosted politicized parties and ridiculous themed events with friends for years, and just kind of landed here. When I first tested positive I went and bought a sketchbook. In it I drew little girls who were saying things. Years later I realized that was actually my diary, and the girls were processing my thoughts and feelings. My banners, I think, are an extension of that, sharing my frustration of AIDS profiteering, misogyny, and literally how unsexy HIV-positive women have historically been depicted in the media. One of the main reasons I do what I do is to bring people together and to really let the world know that there are these amazing people around the world—making, creating, building community in some of the more dire situations. She will never call herself an artist, but my friend and poz activist [Norlela Mokhtar](#)

(Malaysia) I first heard on the back of a truck, mic in hand MCing (then breakdancing later on) at a protest in Bangkok. She blew all my personal stereotypes out of the water. Check her out and then you’ll see.

Lois Conley

No. I present arts/cultural programs about HIV. I wish I was talented enough to make art about HIV.

Malaya Lakas

Being a person living with HIV, and choosing to be open about my HIV status, is just one fragment of myself. I have and hold many identities. All of the art I create holds this special part of me. It just may not always be seen. I would say I’ve done more writing than visual art about HIV. I do hope to make a lot more art about HIV because even today, our stories are not heard enough. Especially in the era of PrEP and PEP, and COVID-19, people living with HIV are still not being centered. I have been able to work alongside people who have been living with HIV since birth, whose voices and stories also need to be centered. Many people believe HIV is a thing of the past now that we have PrEP, PEP, but the sad reality is that there are still young people (who often don’t have education or access to these resources) who are seroconverting and who are still at higher risk of becoming HIV-positive. This is why I am motivated and determined to continue making art in general, and in the future I hope to create and cocreate more art about HIV.

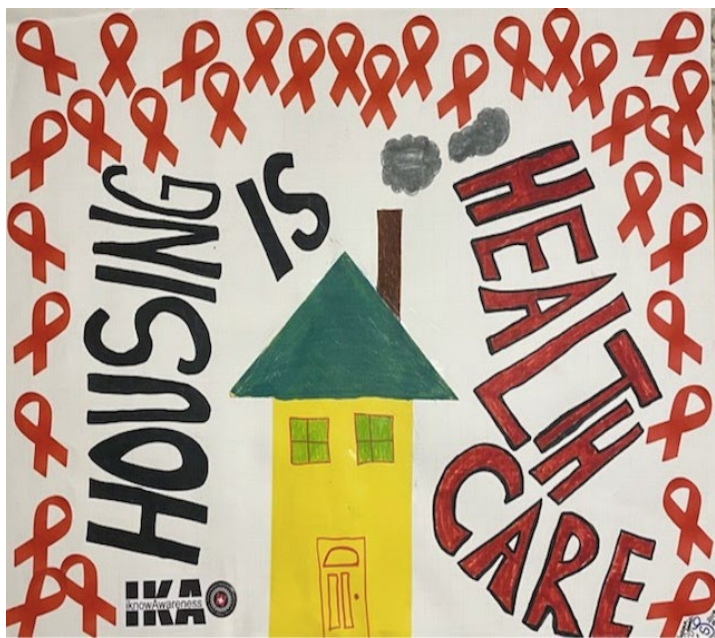
Ricky Varghese

I write about art that is about HIV. I leave the work of creating to those more skilled than myself. My contributions are more theoretically charged, I figure.

Sbyromm Tavia Jones

I make ART ABOUT HIV because art can make communicating about HIV more comfortable for both the maker and the viewer. Art has maintained a presence in my HIV advocacy locally, domestically, internationally, professionally, and personally.

My children and I have created several pieces of HIV-RELATED ART together. In 2019 my daughter and I created posters to tackle [Atlanta Housing Opportunities for Persons Living with HIV/AIDS \(HOPWA\) Federal Housing Program CRISIS](#). In 2018 my teenage son had captured a powerful picture to [engage with lawmakers about why HIV criminalization laws should be repealed](#).



Skylob Jones and Sbyromm Jones, Housing Is Healthcare, 2018. Courtesy Sbyromm Jones

In 2018 I also created *AR[v]T in the HEART*. My hand-drawn art piece stems from having an understanding of the steps taken for the virus to survive. *THESE COMPONENTS COMBINED COMMUNICATE THE ABILITY TO INTERCEPT HIV TO KEEP PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV SAFE.*

Lastly, my collage *RACE & HIV* includes memorabilia of my journey from abstinence

to an HIV diagnosis. My path is a common rite of passage for many Afro-American young adults, and many more will live through the experience of being diagnosed if we don't intercept the cycle.



Sbyromm Jones, Race & HIV, 2019. Courtesy Sbyromm Jones

Sunil Gupta

In 1999 I made my first HIV project, called [From Here to Eternity](#). My title was referring to a film and a book that were about a post-nuclear world. Actually the original quote comes from a Rudyard Kipling 1892 poem, which goes something like this, "Damned from here to Eternity / God ha' mercy on such as we." The soldier's barrack-room ballad written during the Boer War. I made that project as a form of phototherapy since I had been quite unwell. But my first instinct, a response upon diagnosis in 1995, was to avoid HIV as subject matter for art making as I thought I already had the rather heavy burden of race and homosexuality, and I didn't want to add yet another bit of "othering" to my practice. That project led to a much larger one, [Homelands](#), which I did between 2000 and 2003 that looks at the three geographies that I call home through the lens of an HIV person.

The last time I did HIV work was in 2009 in India. But I am in fact making art about HIV at the moment, although it's been triggered by the COVID crisis. I will be the artist in residence at the HIV OPD at Saint Mary's Hospital in Paddington, London, one of the oldest HIV clinics in the city. This would've happened over the previous year but it was delayed by the COVID lockdowns. My plan is to do some research involving the gathering of testimonies from the users of this particular OPD and then write a fictional script based on them, which I will then illustrate by studio photographs. However, this is unusual in that it is a commission.



Sumil Gupta, babe/fist, 1999. Courtesy the artist

Szymon Adamczak

Performing my work *An Ongoing Song* has been a way for me to keep track of how I feel about the virus. I was looking for a dramaturgy that centers this relationship. I think my understanding shifted from the state of codependency to a sort of a camaraderie. Living through another pandemic will color the way I revive this work and how it is received, as luckily it becomes a distinct possibility to pick it up again.

When I started to work on this piece I asked myself: *my theater won't cure HIV, what can it do?* I am more concerned afterward with how I can utilize my writing and skills to organize reflection around HIV and bring people together. I am getting familiar with

organizations that support people living with HIV in Poland and in the Netherlands and I am learning other areas from the HIV point of view. I find a lot of joy in connecting because of HIV. Probably the most satisfying thing I do is being a buddy, someone who holds space for people who have just been diagnosed.

Yuè Begay

In addition to being the prevention training specialist and later the program coordinator, I was also the graphic artist when I worked for the Red Circle Project. From 2017 to its programming ending in May 2020, I designed almost all of the visual materials for the program, ranging from pamphlets to event flyers to even the website design, which is now gone. Much of these materials, including the ones before my time at the Red Circle Project, is going through a process to be archived at the ONE Archives at USC.

As for making HIV-related art now on my own personal time, I do not. As a person not living with HIV, I'm not sure if it is my place to make such unique artwork that speaks on issues and celebrations I do not know and cannot relate to. However, I'm more than happy to help people living with HIV migrate their traditional or fine art to the digital realm for preservation or personal reasons. As graphic artists, one of our popular demands is to digitize paper, canvas, and traditional art mediums into a JPEG, PNG, SVG, or whatever our clients want.

Is there anything you want to share that has not been asked?

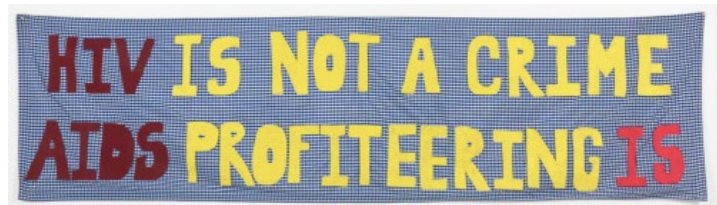
Eva Hayward

I was asked: “Did AIDS alter your spirit?” My immediate reaction is, I don’t know how to answer that question. Does spirit mean a transcendental state or a state of belief? I am sure a philosopher or a spiritual person would have a very specific response. I worry that spirit means the ego’s self-aggrandizement or a fantasy of returning to pre-individuated states. This said, I do recognize an unknown of self or of subjectivity—a dimension of existence that has no representative in the symbolic order and exceeds what I can know or feel about my imagination. Spirit, for me, means what cannot be metabolized into meaning or feeling, and is sustained by the hidden poetry of myself. Did AIDS affect my spirit? Yes, but I do not yet know how or in what way. I may never know. What I do know is that I continue to make space for feeling

what is unknowable. Much of what AIDS has meant for me is unknowable.

Jessica Whitbread

Not really. But I’d like a babysitter. Holy shit is it hard to produce with kids and limited access to community. For those who have been mass producing during COVID—how the fuck have you done it? Without kids probably, eh? Happy to switch places for a couple weeks.



Jessica Whitbread, HIV Is Not a Crime, AIDS Profiteering Is, 2013. Courtesy Visual AIDS

Lois Conley

A highlight of my venture into the world of HIV has been my own self-enlightenment. I have learned more than I ever knew about the subject. I've met some of the most genuinely caring people I know. AND I've learned what an [HIV doula](#) is.

Ricky Varghese

I am generally critical of the rhetoric of care and healing that has become so much a part of contemporary art world discourse. I take this position of critique precisely from my double-edged role as a clinician, on the one hand, and as a writer on the other. I am interested in how “we” can more explicitly ask after the question of harm, as in ask after how cultural institutions and ecosystems actively cause harm to and against marginalized communities, and how it may be possible to work against this. This might appear, at first glance, to be a show of care in itself, but I find the discourse around care has become a device that seems so easily co-opted by the powers that be. To be more explicit about asking after the question of harm is to be committed to a kind of epistemological humility that I often find so lacking in mainstream art world conversations.

Skyronn Tavia Jones

MY HOPE is for HIV-RELATED ART INITIATIVES to be MORE INCLUSIVE and considerate in the RECOGNITION of HIV-RELATED ART created by Copper-Colored AMERICAN WOMEN LIVING WITH HIV like myself and to FINANCIALLY COMPENSATE US in exchange of our GOODS AND LABOR!

Szymon Adamczak

I think a lot about my grandma (babcia) who passed away this year. The youngest among seven brothers. Her name was Maria

Adamczak. She was a child during the Second World War and she never completed any education as the family was poor and working the soil was exhausting. My grandfather died in 1973 from lung cancer. He was an orchard man. She never remarried. Each autumn we biked together to the alley brimming with chestnut trees and collected as many as we could pick up. Marylka was later on sewing them into pillows, and sleeping with them in place of grandpa. It has been heartbreaking to see her reunited with him in the grave half a life after. I was somehow relieved, too. My grandma was someone from the pre-AIDS era. I never needed to tell her about HIV. She would understand in her own way if I had. I will be forever grateful for her gift of Remembrance.



Szymon Adamczak and his babcia, Maria Adamczak, 2017. Courtesy Szymon Adamczak

Yue Begay

Native HIV-related art is out there. We just have to collectively uplift and support these Native artists. There are many stories waiting to be told out there in Indian Country, Native America, the rez, or however Native folks identify our collective community. I come from the Navajo Nation and have heard some stories of HIV community members just missing or not being heard from. I did not

know that a few of these people contracted HIV and their families hid them or they chased them out of their homes due to ignorance and fear. I have also heard of families who still loved their relatives and helped them live with HIV, which I think should be highlighted. Not all Natives are scared and fearful of HIV. Some of us are educated and choose love instead of fear and hate. All Natives living with HIV deserve to have their stories told.



Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network and CATIE, a promotional image for [Strong Medicine](#), 2018. Courtesy CATIE

WITH ART/WITH HIV is part of *More Life*, an exhibition series organized by David Zwirner senior director Robert Goff, director Thor Shannon, and associate director Alec Smyth.

Featuring the work of Ching Ho Cheng, Derek Jarman, Frank Moore, Mark Morrisroe, Jesse Murry, Marlon Riggs, the Silence=Death collective, and Hugh Steers, the series explores the affective, aesthetic, personal, and political responses to the HIV/AIDS crisis through the lens of the gay male perspective—from artists who were part of communities that were disproportionately affected by the virus, although certainly not the only demographic to experience its devastation.

For more information, including exhibition and programming dates and locations, visit [More Life](#) on davidzwirner.com.

WITH ART/WITH HIV was organized by Theodore (ted) Kerr, an HIV-negative, cis white gay writer, artist, and founding member of What Would an HIV Doula Do? He edited the “What You Don’t Know about AIDS Could Fill a Museum” issue of *OnCurating*. He teaches at The New School. For more information, visit [tedkerr.club](#) and [hivdoula.work](#).

David Zwirner Team:

Produced by Molly Gottschalk, Alec Smyth,
and Fan Zhong

Designed by Jena Myung

Copyedited by Anna Drozda

Research by Kara Carmack



Kairon Liu, Forgiveness and Fallible Beings II, 2015. Courtesy the artist