

**Introductory image**  
**William Hogarth**  
*A Harlot's Progress: The Arrival of the Harlot in London 1732* steel engraving on paper 49 x 65 cm private collection

**Mohd Zamal Arip**  
*Sexual Paradox, Economical Dilemma, Cyclical Havoc, Mindless Hysteria* 2000 collage on board 80 x 100 cm courtesy Action for AIDS, Singapore

**Bronwyn Bancroft**  
*Everybody's Business (Caring for People with AIDS, Education About AIDS, Prevention of AIDS)* 1992 watercolour & gouache on paper board 91 x 71 cm each collection: Australian Department of Health and Aging

**Barton Lidice Benes**  
*Palette* 1998 AIDS medications 28 x 26.5 x 2.5 cm courtesy the artist & Lennox Weinberg Gallery, New York  
*AIDS Reliquarium 1999-2002* mixed media 127 x 122 x 6.5 cm courtesy the artist & Lennox Weinberg Gallery, New York

**Chan Tuck Yew Ernest**  
*Peach Sharing* 2000 pencil on paper 40 x 60 cm courtesy Action for AIDS, Singapore

**Peter Cherone**  
*Maybe (Anonymous portraits series)* 1999 acrylic on wood 61 x 61 cm courtesy the artist

Virus series (Branch, Boogie, Diva, Fidelity, Rise, Rudentia, Vessel) 1994 acrylic on laminated wood 30.5 x 30.5 cm each courtesy the artist

**Boy Dominguez**  
*Kakayahan* 1997 watercolour on board 46 x 60 cm collection: Health Action Information Network, Philippines

*HAIN* 1998 watercolour on board 34 x 43 cm collection: Health Action Information Network, Philippines

**Felix González-Torres**  
*William Hogarth* 1990 red, silver & blue cellophane-wrapped candies, endlessly replenished supply, ideal weight 300lbs (136kg) dimensions variable collection: The Museum of Modern Art, New York  
Gift of the Danneheiser Foundation, 1996

*"Untitled"* 1992-93 offset print on paper (endless copies in original) 122.5 x 84.5 cm private collection

**Max Greenberg**  
*Lazarus* 1997 mixed media, photography 77 x 61 cm courtesy the artist  
*Killing the Enemy* 1998 mixed media, photography 61 x 77 cm courtesy the artist  
*Shattered* 1998 mixed media, photography 77 x 61 cm courtesy the artist

**Ludmila Maliarenko**  
*AIDS is not a Bird (If You Let It Go, You'll Never Catch It Again)* 2000 gypsum, copper wire on marble pedestal 20 x 26 x 9 cm private collection

**Ng Slow Lee Yuki**  
*Adam and Eve* 2000 pen, wax, acrylic, and mixed media on board 80 x 100 cm courtesy Action for AIDS, Singapore

**Scott Redford**  
*Above the elbow on the guy's arm at the Wickham / fourth version (for Roy L.)* 1997 acrylic & spray can enamel on canvas 45.5 x 37.5 cm courtesy the artist & Bellas Gallery, Brisbane  
*Everything that happens in culture happens because it is needed / PURE MASSACRE – silverchair* 1996-2002 acrylic paint mixed with drugs & stenciled text on wall dimensions variable courtesy the artist & Bellas Gallery, Brisbane

**Frank Holliday**  
*Garden of the Night* 1999 oil on canvas 162.5 x 203 x 7.5 cm courtesy the artist & Debs & Co., New York

**Zoë Leonard**  
*Tree and Fence* (set of 3) 2000 C print 25 x 20 cm each courtesy the artist & Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

**Andres Serrano**  
*The Morgue: AIDS-Related Death* 1992 Cibachrome, silicone, plexiglass, wood frame 125.5 x 152.5 cm courtesy the artist & Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

**Joseph Stabilito**  
*Untitled* (set of 2) 1998 acrylic & found objects on canvas 167.5 x 152.5 cm each courtesy the artist

**Brian Gothong Tan**  
*Put Your Hand on My Skin* 2000 watercolour on paper 80 x 100 cm courtesy Action for AIDS, Singapore

**Felix Tan & Neo Hock Hua**  
*Being Apart Hurts* 2000 pen & silkscreen on paper 60 x 80 cm courtesy Action for AIDS, Singapore

**Steed Taylor**  
*Wiggly Worm* 1999 translucent photographic print 38 x 30 x 5 cm private collection

*Low Tide* 2000 tiled photographic print 92 x 338 cm courtesy the artist

*Me and Sudie* 2000 silver gelatin photograph 92 x 62 cm private collection

**Benjamin Trimmer**  
*Sepia Dreams (and False Alarms)* 1994 oil on wood panel 183 x 122 x 5 cm courtesy the artist

**Mychaylo Vertuozow**  
*Incognito* 2001 metal & blown glass on pedestal 25 x 25 x 10 cm private collection

**David Wojnarowicz**  
*Untitled* 1983 map collaged on map 105.5 x 106.5 cm courtesy Estate of David Wojnarowicz & PPOW, New York

*Sex Series (for Marion Scemama)* 1988-89 series of 8 gelatin silver prints 46 x 55 cm each courtesy Estate of David Wojnarowicz & PPOW, New York

*Untitled (ink paintings of 3rd Ave Movie Houses before Health Dept. closures)* 1988-89 sketchbook of 11 ink paintings 29 x 23 cm courtesy Estate of David Wojnarowicz & PPOW, New York

*Subspecies Helms Senatorius* 1990 colour photograph 48 x 61.5 cm courtesy Estate of David Wojnarowicz & PPOW, New York

**Laurence Young**  
*Icon* 1995 collage 144.5 x 61 cm courtesy the artist

*Our Son* 1995 collage 71.5 x 66 cm courtesy the artist



Laurence Young *Our Son* 1995



Barton Lidice Benes *Palette* 1998



David McDiarmid *safe love, safe lust* 1992 photo: Kent Gryphon

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## with and without you: re-visitations of art in the age of AIDS

3 October – 9 November 2002

Curator: Royce W. Smith

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Royce W. Smith

[cover image] Benjamin Trimmer *Sepia Dreams (and False Alarms)* 1994

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## with and without you: re-visitations of art in the age of AIDS

Sex, wrote Michel Foucault, posed the greatest danger to the normalised nation state. Excessive and uncontrollable, sex was deemed incompatible with the intensive work imperative and the Darwinist drive to populate or perish. It needed to be monitored by the State and managed by the conjugal family for the greater good of all. Once sexual normalcy was confined to the monogamous reproductive couple, all other sexualities became forbidden fruit. Sexual activity beyond legitimate procreation became illicit and pathological. It qualified in new nologies as 'excessive', 'unnatural', 'inverted', 'deviant', 'perverse', 'impure' and 'dangerous'. As the prostitute, the lesbian and the homosexual man – morbidified as an 'invert' – were represented as transgressing the boundaries between moderation and excess, nature and unnature, normality and perversion, they constituted the *sexed body*. As this trope extended to transgressing the perilous divisions between purity and impurity, cleanliness and abjection, hygiene and putrefaction, the *sexed body* manifested the threat of pollution. Through the polluting power of its fluids, it invoked the danger of 'the venereal peril'.

When syphilis was mythologised as the essential disease which, more than any other, disturbed nature, not surprisingly 'the sexed body' was identified as its source. At a time when the church was losing its hold upon the faithful and fear of sin was dissipating, syphilis was nature's punishment. Within punitive models of sexual transgression, syphilitic heredity incarnated original sin against nature with no hope of redemption.

Once syphilographers took over pathology, transmuting paranoia into scientific fact, syphilis subsumed the anxiety aroused by morbid, alcoholic or neuropathic heredity. Epilepsy, meningitis, multiple sclerosis, rickets, screwdriver teeth, deaf-and-dumbness, stammering, migraines and even pins-and-needles were all deemed syphilitic in origin. Such purportedly immoral conditions as alcoholism and morphine addiction were traced to syphilis. Within the circular arguments of syphilophobia, such so-called sexual perversions as cunnilingus, vulvar pruritus, fanatical onanism and anal intercourse were not just located as the source of hereditary syphilis, but as manifestations of morbid heredity. Hereditary syphilis seemed to not just threaten the fetus and the individual, but the family and the race. "It was," Edmond Fournier surmised, "equivalent to leaving an executioner's sword threatening every head in this and many generations."<sup>1</sup> More menacing than any other contagion, syphilis assumed the whole raft of degeneration paranoia. It epitomised, in the words of Guéneau de Mussy, "the dunghill where every rottedness loves to vegetate."<sup>2</sup>

Just as Benedict Morel had maintained that degeneration was somatically inscribed on the surface of the body, so did the popes of syphilography, Albert and Edmond Fournier. By the International Congress of Medicine in 1906, it was claimed that Edmond Fournier had statistically proven that even fourth generation children would look like archetypal heredo-syphilitics, not far removed from his caricaturisation of the 'invert': "Feeble-minded, puny runts who from birth appeared shrivelled, stunted and wasted."<sup>3</sup> Instead of the polluting contamination of sexed bodies being perceived as a two-way process in which each affects or infiltrates the other, it was woman, specifically the heterosexual female prostitute, who was to blame. It was the female prostitute who was closest to abjection, culturally functioning, according to Parent-Duchatelet's analogy, as society's cesspool or sewer.

As the artificially feminised and most visibilised receptacle of illicit sexuality, captured by William Hogarth in *A Harlot's Progress*, the female prostitute was singled out as the unmarked conduit or reservoir for 'rotten' births. However, in his six-part series of *A Harlot's Progress*, William Hogarth also reveals how the female prostitute was generally a hapless victim of unscrupulous pimps and bawds, who governed London under-society – all of which is evident in his engraved opening scene exhibited in *With and Without You*.<sup>4</sup> When the poor country girl, Moll Hackabout, arrives in Cheapside on the York stage-coach, she is greeted by a lady. As the pockmarks on her face belie the lady's Juonesque respectability, Hogarth hints that far from being a moral matriarch, she is the notorious *Mother Needham*, renown for soliciting innocent virgins for Colonel Charteris – the Don Juan leering behind with his right hand significantly plunged into his coin-cum-genitalia pocket. The crumbling plaster, together with the huge pile of pots and pans about to topple over, strike a note of impending doom. When Moll lurches from Drury Lane kept-woman to Covent Garden prostitute and Bridewell criminal, until her death at the age of twenty-three, the omen seems swiftly fulfilled. It is Moll, rather than her 'clients', or her child, who then succumbs to venereal disease.

That poor, naive girls were prey to sexual exploitation was empirically documented by the Victorian reformers, William Acton and Henry Mayhew. "Is it any wonder," Acton concluded a century after Hogarth, "that urged on by want and toil, encouraged by evil advisers and exposed to selfish tempters, a large proportion of these poor girls fall from the path of virtue?"<sup>5</sup> As the whole mythology of the conjugal family rested upon a vast underbelly of prostitution, both he and Mayhew conceded that it was Victorian sexual

hypocrisy, rather than misguided girls, which had produced a need for sexual sewerage that had in turn generated pollution. These aetiologies of the prostitute and *fin-de-siècle* syphilophobia were also confronted within the counter-culture of Modernism. While Picasso revealed how the scarified, colonised prostitutes in *Les Femmes d'Alger* were the victims of colonial *civilisation* as *syphilisation*, it is not the women, nor those pursuing 'inverted' sexual practices who are identified as the carriers of syphilis in Henrik Ibsen's play *Ghosts*, but the heterosexual man.<sup>6</sup> Within the dominant discourses of Neo-Darwinism, however, the female prostitute was still held responsible for Western nations' downward slide to physical degeneration and moral degradation. Despite the impact of penicillin upon syphilis and the dissolution of syphilophobia, the *sexed body* has become reinvested with notions of contagion and danger as a consequence of the AIDS crisis.

As with syphilis, HIV/AIDS is framed by a moral aetiology of disease. The illness has been read, as Simon Watney points out, "as the outward and visible sign of an imagined depravity of will."<sup>7</sup> Prior to and regardless of the presence of AIDS, oral and anal sex among men long constituted a site of danger and pollution. Yet as gay men appear the most widely affected group, this has made a lasting impact upon nosological theories of this human immunodeficiency virus. With the homosexualisation of AIDS, the gay male has become morbidified. Within a trope reminiscent of *fin-de-siècle* syphilophobia, the homosexual body has not just been pathologically construed as unnatural, uncivilised, deprived and feminised, but diseased and disease-producing in punishment for its transgression of the borders of heterosexual normalcy.

Just as the most unnaturally feminine of women was positioned as those most likely to submit to venereal disease, so has the supposedly unnatural man. Just as *fin-de-siècle* syphilographers constructed their understanding of venereal disease in terms of promiscuous femininity, so contemporary epidemiologists have constructed their understanding of AIDS in terms of promiscuous homosexuality. Just as excessive sexual desire, multiple sexual partners and such other forms of immorality as alcoholism and morphine addiction were linked by Victorian physicians to sexually transmitted diseases, so contemporary physicians have connected AIDS to excessive numbers of partners, the anonymity of homosexual contact and "fast-track lifestyles" entailing designer drugs. Just as syphilis was located within the politics of retribution, so is AIDS, having been denounced by the *Southern Medical Journal* as "punishment from God". Just as divine and natural nemesis was designed to dissipate clemency for Victorian syphilitics, so it is meant to deflect compassion from those who have or live with HIV and AIDS.

As *With and Without You* so poignantly illustrates, once again artists and activists have drawn attention to this aporia. They have revealed how it is still the sexuality of marginalised groups – gaymen, intravenous drug users, prostitutes – that is increasingly administered and targeted by public health policy in the era of AIDS, while the sexuality of the reproductive couple remains relatively unscrutinised. They have endeavoured to expose the bitter realities concealed by misrepresentation of AIDS, the psychological and visceral ravages it has wrought on those who live with the illness, together with the weight of grief for personal and collective loss amongst diverse communities, parents and children. In so doing, they have revealed that the great danger lies not within the *sexed body*, but rather in those cultures that persist in projecting their phobia of pollution upon it.

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<sup>1</sup> Edmond Fournier, *Recherche et diagnostic de l'Hérédo-Syphilis tardive*, Masson et Cie, éditeurs, Paris, 1907, p. 78.  
<sup>2</sup> Guéneau de Mussy, quoted by Albert Fournier, *L'Hérité syphilitic*, Paris, 1891, p. 23.  
<sup>3</sup> Edmond Fournier, *Stigmata dystrophiques des l'Hérédo-Syphilis*, Rueff et Cie, éditeurs, Paris, 1898, p. 16.  
<sup>4</sup> Between 1731 and 1732, Hogarth painted *A Harlot's Progress* as a 'modern moral subject'. Determined to circulate this didactic subject amongst a public wider than the narrow upper middle class, he had the series engraved. Twelve hundred people immediately subscribed. Engraved prints could be purchased for one shilling each. Today, only the engravings survive.  
<sup>5</sup> William Acton, *Prostitution considered in its Moral, Social and Sanitary Aspects*, London, 1870, p. 124.  
<sup>6</sup> When Ibsen's *Ghosts* opened in London in 1891, it closed one day later. However, nearly 500 reviews followed. The philanthropist Captain Alving and his innocent son Oswald are the syphilitics in this play.  
<sup>7</sup> Simon Watney, *Policing Desire: AIDS, Pornography and the Media*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1988.





Joseph Stabillio *Untitled* 1998

In all its variant forms the spectacle of AIDS is carefully and elaborately stage-managed as a sensational didactic pageant, furnishing 'us', the 'general public', with further dramatic evidence of what 'we' already 'know' concerning the enormity of the dangers that surround us on all sides and at all times... The spectacle of AIDS thus promises a stainless world in which we will only be recalled, in textbooks and carefully edited documentary 'evidence', as signs of plagues and contagions averted...'

Simon Watney's observations about the 'framing' of AIDS in public discourse reference a twenty-two year social and medical interaction with a still-enigmatic, still-taboo virus. Watney's 'spectacle' also points to the ways in which AIDS has been visualised as a disease of the Other, a performance where the 'sick' participants may be easily differentiated from the 'pure', 'uninfected' spectators. Watching this 'show' has allowed the public 'safe', incomplete, visual access to what has been politically and morally constructed as a private, deadly illness: from films, such as *Philadelphia*, where Kaposi's sarcoma lesions serve as the basis for moral panic and the visual signposting of HIV infection, to photographic exhibitions that fashion HIV/AIDS as a contained still-life where dead or dying bodies are quarantined by hospital curtains and by the edges of the photograph itself. Art galleries, along with their exhibition programmes, have not been immune to the promulgation of such spectacles; in many ways, the physical spaces where HIV-related art is displayed are zones of visible reassurance in which the 'seen' threat of AIDS can always be quelled by one's ability to leave the gallery, to take one's eyes elsewhere. *With and Without You* is an exhibition that attempts to remove those physical and perceptual boundaries between viewer and viewed. Almost all of the works in this exhibition do not attempt to construct AIDS as a visible totality, but as a



Zoë Leonard *Tree and Fence* 2000



William Hogarth *A Harlot's Progress: The Arrival of the Harlot in London* 1732



Edward Lightner *You Smell My Virus* 2001



Max Greenberg *Killing the Enemy* 1998



Andres Serrano *The Morgue: AIDS-Related Death* 1992



Scott Redford *Above the elbow on the guy's arm at the Wickham / fourth version (for Roy L.)* 1997 photo: Jon Linkins

compilation of visual revelation and invisibility, presence and absence, life and death. Incomplete bodies reside here – hands, arms, legs, skulls, torsos: an incompleteness reflecting the ways in which these bodies have been socially rendered and summarily fragmented, accepted or dismissed. Written histories often accompany these visible objects so that viewers play an essential role in contextualising the work and its connection to their own spectrum of experiences. Viewers must pause, read, excavate, bend and stretch (often uncomfortably) to develop an understanding of the works – works striving to negotiate narratives, rather than being invested with 'predictable' signs and symptoms.

These visible signs are rarely present in the pieces comprising *With and Without You*, due largely to these artworks' resistance to the essentialising of AIDS. For instance, Peter Cherone's *Maybe* presents a young man who is superimposed upon a textual background of 'maybe's'. His over-the-shoulder glance toward the viewer participates in the vague, near-indiscernible nature of the piece. The viewer, not the work, must then initiate the process of decoding the gaze, of establishing what those 'maybes' reference. *Maybe* I'm infected? *Maybe* I will die? *Maybe* I am gay? *Maybe* I don't know if I am HIV-positive? Cherone indicates that the inspiration for the piece was the multiple uncertainties surrounding HIV infection – deciding if one should get tested, contemplating what to do when one discovers his/her serostatus, choosing those who can be trusted with knowledge of one's seropositivity.

These questionings and worries resurface in other works, such as Frank Holliday's *Garden of the Night*, where two pairs of eyes – canvassed against swirls of colour – rip through an otherwise blackened background and stare at us from the depths of heavily rendered impasto. As Holliday observes, the eyes eerily reminded him of previous lovers and dead friends who hauntingly peered at him from beyond the grave. His own survival with HIV surfaces in this work as an ongoing negotiation between the past and the present, the living and the dead. The black veil that covers the majority of the canvas makes us question who has placed it there, who is implicated in the (mis)understandings of HIV/AIDS – the gaze of those eyes always directing the immensity of loss back upon and around the viewer. If, as Thomas Yingling asserts, "myths of identity have framed the interpretation of AIDS,"<sup>22</sup> Holliday's work dismantles these frames so that memory resurrects a knowledge and legitimacy of many identities and allows an intimate, pervasive sorrow to seep beyond the physical parameters of the work.

The issue of framing within this exhibition is raised by many artists, simply because 'the frame' presents a physical and ideological boundary – the place where a work's signification supposedly stops and the 'reality' of the gallery is redeployed, a means to which works must conform and by which they are conceptually regulated. Barton Lidice Benes' *AIDS Reliquarium* is the archetypal museum-within-a-museum – a collection of objects whose display is determined by the artist. While each object in and of itself might not express an aesthetic totality, collectively they constitute multiple interactions with HIV/AIDS over a twenty-two year period: some objects serving as an intensely personal retrospective, others as a cherishing of the undervalued and the everyday. Benes has chosen what will be displayed, and if the gallery is at odds with even one object within the display, the entire piece is affected. Benes' artistic choices not only allow him to catalogue HIV/AIDS as he has experienced it, but also to resist the traditional gallery practice of curatorially constructing its own uncompromising sense of history. Ultimately, these choices somewhat disempower the gallery and any institutionalised dissemination of 'meaning'. The frames used in *AIDS Reliquarium* do not isolate works but unite these obvious, subversive, political and subtle pieces of memorabilia on the artist's own expressive terms.

Edward Lightner's piece, *Triple Word Score*, creatively plays with the linearity and boundedness of a traditional Scrabble game and uses tiles to convey multiple, ever-changing interactions with language, illness, desire, and prohibition over time. Each grouping

of tiles represents the artist's differing concerns, observations, hopes, and fears on a particular day; nevertheless, our 'readings' of these multiple texts require us to remember what we have read and seen before, to stretch our field of vision beyond the isolatedness of a single object, to bend down below the comfort of eye level to view the works as linkages between seemingly disparate areas of experience. Such a display challenges the very tenets of museumification in that any breaches of understanding in the work are caused by the viewer's own unwillingness or incapability of moving beyond those 'zones of spatial comfort' in which 'art' is traditionally viewed.

Scott Redford also challenges the ways in which HIV/AIDS is museumified in *Everything that happens in culture happens because it is needed*. The installation itself appears to be a typical gallery wall supplemented by two buckets of paint. However, the artist's own text indicates the presence of 'foreign' materials within the substance of the paint: speed, Prozac, AZT, and soluble aspirin. In a day where strong medicines treat external symptoms (lesions, fungal infections, wasting), Redford's piece points to the dangers of overt reliance on these visible signs or manifestations of illness. Where does Redford's 'infected' paint stop and the gallery's 'normal' paint begin? Just how much AZT is in the mix? This work marks an important point in the history of AIDS-related art: where the *presence* of illness can only be documented artistically in terms of an *absence* of symptoms, an unwillingness to be bound by the norms of gallery exhibition, and use of an artist's own chosen texts to illuminate those conditions that would have otherwise passed unseen, unacknowledged.

Such challenges and resistances to the commercialisation of art and its 'preciousness' are reflected in works by Rebecca Guberman. In *5 months of change* and *Like a Dog* are multiple exposures of fragility and vulnerability, all held together with small amounts of glue and sticky tape, all on the verge of falling apart. Yet this alleged 'weakness' is fortified by striking and rebellious images (bodies framed, bodies in pain): these images, along with Guberman's own superimposed written texts, engage HIV/AIDS in a range of ways: from the macroscopic 'big picture' to the microscopic views of her own 'infected' and 'infecting' blood.

It is such fixation on single aspects of the AIDS pandemic that has troubled so many artists, such as Andres Serrano. In *The Morgue: AIDS-Related Death*, Serrano reveals a pair of crossed hands, striking in their similarity and overwhelming in their sheer size. The hands do not carry 'signs' of AIDS infection, nor do they reveal any meaningful characteristics of the individual's identity. Yet, this confrontational close-up forces the viewer to ask, "Who was this person?" What lies beyond the frame of visibility that Serrano's photography imposes, that our own limiting-yet-limited gaze of prejudice imposes? Here, the fragmentation of the visible body causes death to transform from an isolated consequence of 'deviance' or otherness into a *universal* possibility. Could these be *my* hands?

Similarly, Zoë Leonard's cathartic *Tree and Fence* series attempts to change the manner in which marginalised bodies are seen or represented. In the selected works, trees lining side streets are 'framed' by fences that attempt to segregate them and to control their growth and development, yet Leonard's photography captures a moment of natural resistance to containment: the tree bark actually integrating, 'swallowing' razor wire or chain-link fencing into the trees' very being. The works metaphorically allude to the repressive Reagan/Bush years in the United States, where the government's phobic anti-AIDS discourses had to be incorporated into activists' strategies. They also reflect how such obstacles (the razor wire starkly suggestive of imprisonment and denial) could ultimately make communities and individuals more unified.

David Wojnarowicz's works invariably implicate those 'clean hands' of the 1980s by constructing HIV/AIDS as a global trauma. His *Sex Series*, sometimes referred to as photographic 'woundscapes', are a collection of prints punctured by seemingly unrelated thematic



Peter Cherone *Maybe (Anonymous portraits series)* 1999



David Wojnarowicz *Untitled* 1983



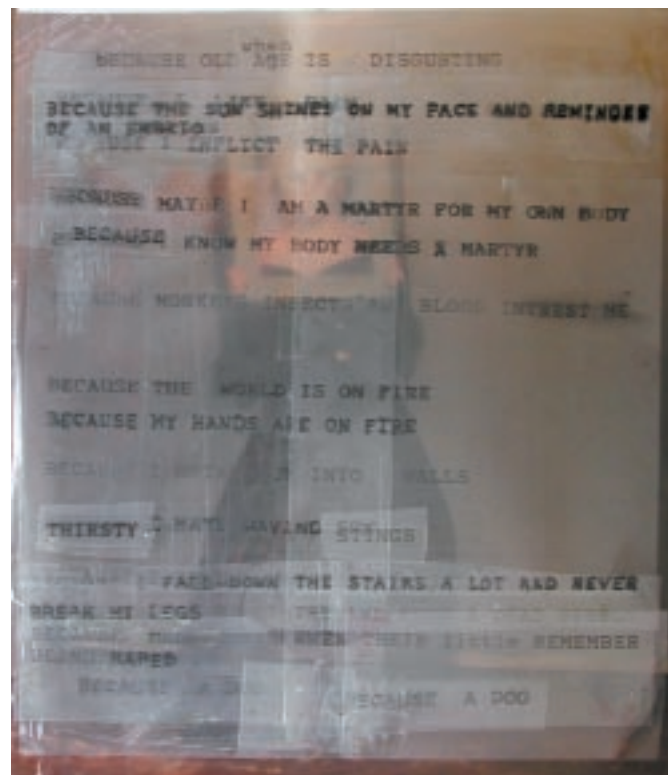
Boy Dominguez *Kakayahan* 1997



Frank Holliday *Garden of the Night* 1999



Ludmila Maliarenko *AIDS is not a Bird (If You Let It Go, You'll Never Catch It Again)* 2000



Rebecca Guberman *Like a Dog* 1996

'holes' presented in negative: holes 'containing' red blood cells, close-ups of U.S. currency, steamy views of blow jobs. The works are littered with abrasive ironies: the 'American dream' interrupted by the AIDS crisis, a 'natural' disaster (the tornado) contrasted with the 'unnatural' presence of homosexuality. These ironies and contrasts surface again in *Subspecies Helms Senatorius*, where an artificially green, leafy scene is threatened by the danger of a red-back spider – a picture of Jesse Helms (a conservative and homophobic senator from the United States) serving as its head. Wojnarowicz continues his critique in *Untitled* where two distinct communities blamed for the spread of AIDS (gay men and Africans) are brought into conversation with each other. While the piece bitterly critiques the 1980s obsession with mapping an 'origin' of HIV, the work also suggests the incommensurability of AIDS discourses, how HIV-positive individuals are often piecemealed according to their 'risk groups', rather than identified by their uniqueness as human beings. Wojnarowicz's use of different maps for the construction of the outlined couple alludes to society's discomfort with fluidity – to its desire to contain catastrophes within, and assign blame to, specific cultures, specific communities, specific continents.

Given the global relevance of HIV/AIDS to all individuals, this exhibition also attempts to engage under-represented or marginalised art that has responded to the AIDS pandemic. With a recent explosion of HIV transmission in the Ukraine, many artists have had difficulty thinking about a modern, looming medical catastrophe in terms of traditional visual language and folklore. Ludmila Maliarenko's *AIDS is not a Bird*, poignantly references a Ukrainian proverb, 'If you let a bird go, you will never catch it again'. Sinking into the flesh of an 'anonymous' torso, a wire cage holds a bird upon and within the skin, reflecting the permanence of HIV infection and its incorporation into the physical and social body. Similarly, works by Southeast Asian artists have drawn upon local proverbs and beliefs to represent HIV/AIDS in artistic contexts. Boy Dominguez's works reference the close ties he maintains with his Filipino community, a unity that can either isolate or dispel threats. He depicts HIV not as a virus contained within the body, but as a social construct that contains the individual. From the rural areas of Mindanao to the urban sprawl of Manila, Dominguez's vibrant colours demonstrate life and the beauty of collectivity. Dominguez's representations forge clear linkages between society's understandings of illness, urban and rural communities, and the ways in which the AIDS pandemic has joined these diverse areas through preventive health education.

While any attempt to address HIV/AIDS within the gallery can only be selective and fragmented at best, I believe that this exhibition serves as a necessary and timely engagement with recent, historic and aesthetic explorations of AIDS. Contrary to popular opinion, which has frequently relegated HIV/AIDS to the stockpile of 'has-been' or irrelevant issues, I believe the artists in this exhibition have produced works that direct the burden of socio-cultural responsibility and the task of cooperative understanding back to us. No single 'meaning' of HIV/AIDS can be extracted from this exhibition, as the significances and purposes of these works are quite different: mourning the dead, affirming one's own life and the lives of others, memorialising friends, educating communities, protesting a government's health policies, creating a testament to a history fraught with living and loss. Museum visitors exist within the flux of these works: thus, as distinguishable and forthrightly 'other' as many might want or fantasise HIV/AIDS to be, our viewings of these works suggest how interconnected, how implicated we all are in an age where AIDS still has no cure.

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<sup>1</sup> Simon Watney, *Practices of Freedom: Selected Writings on HIV/AIDS*, Rivers Oram Press, London, 1994, p. 57, 61.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas E Yingling, *AIDS and the National Body*, Duke University Press, Raleigh, 1997, p. 49.