

**ART, VISUAL CULTURE & HIV/AIDS:
LOCAL, REGIONAL AND TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES**

University of York

12-13 June 2025

SPEAKER ABSTRACTS AND BIOGRAPHIES

THURSDAY 12 JUNE

13.00-14.30: SESSION ONE

**aliwen, 'Ricardo Rojas Toro (1955-2024): Tracing Art, Activism, and HIV/AIDS in
(Post)Dictatorship Chile'**

This paper examines the artistic and activist practices of Ricardo Rojas Toro, a lesser-known but deeply significant figure in the history of HIV/AIDS in Chile, situating his work within the broader context of post-dictatorship artistic responses to systemic violence, social stigma, and public health crises. Engaging with Rojas Toro's multi-media art and activism, including his early experiments in underground theatre and performance during the Chilean dictatorship, this study foregrounds the ways in which his practices bridged the personal and the collective, transforming artistic production into a mode of survival and resilience in the face of socio-political abandonment. Rojas Toro's work unfolds at the intersections of art, public health, and activism, drawing attention to the inadequacies of Chilean state responses to HIV/AIDS during the late 1980s and 90s and the pivotal role of grassroots organizations the likes of Vivo Positivo and other NGOs such as Fundación Savia in addressing these

gaps. His art, deeply informed by his lived experience as a seropositive individual, navigates the aesthetics of abstraction, religious symbolism, and popular crafts in order to critique structural inequities while fostering empathy and solidarity. Through an analysis of some of his key works—including collaborative art therapy projects—this paper highlights how his creative interventions challenged hegemonic narratives of HIV/AIDS that often privileged Euro-American contexts, offering instead an alternative cartography grounded in Latin America. Ultimately, this paper contributes to the decentering of hegemonic narratives in the study of art and HIV/AIDS by reexamining histories of resistance and creativity from the global south. It posits that practices like those of Rojas Toro not only serve as vital historical records, but also as living archives of hope, care, and survival, offering valuable insights for rethinking the dynamics between art, activism, and public health, in both decades past and in today's world.

Ricardo Henrique Ayres Alves & João Eduardo Peçanha de Freitas, 'The participation of Brazilian artists in exhibitions on HIV/AIDS in Europe'

This paper discusses the participation of Brazilian artists in exhibitions that addressed HIV/AIDS in Europe, analyzing both their curatorial proposals and their relationship with the Brazilian context. The following exhibitions and artists make up the body of analysis of this study: Tema: AIDS (Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Høvikodden, Norway, 1993), curated by Per Hovdenakk, Herlof Hatlebrekke, Kim Levin and Sven Christensen, with the participation of Edilson Viriato (1966-) and Márcio Neves (1966-); Les mondes du Sida: entre resignation et espoir (Contemporary Art Center of Geneva and Dialogai Association), Geneva, Switzerland, 1998), curated by Frank Wagner, with the participation of Edilson Viriato and Claudio Goulart (1954-2005); United by AIDS – An Exhibition about Loss, Remembrance, Activism and Art in Response to HIV/AIDS (Migros Museum, Zurich, Switzerland, 2019), curated by Raphael Gygax and with the participation of Rafael França (1957-1991) and Hudinilson Jr. (1957-2013); Every Moment Counts: AIDS and its Feelings (Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Høvikodden, Norway, 2022), curated by Ana María Bresciani and Tommaso Speretta and

with the participation of Rafael França, Edilson Viriato and Hudinilson Jr. To develop the research, the bibliography on the artists and the exhibitions was studied, seeking to understand how these occurrences were related, in view of the Brazilian historiographical debate on the subject. The debate on contemporary exhibition texts by Anna María Guasch, who understands them in analogy with the manifestos of modernism, and the differentiation between pre- and post-cocktail narratives discussed by Alexandre Nunes de Sousa, who contextualizes the different temporalities of art that addresses HIV/AIDS based on the development of its efficient treatment in the second half of the 1990s, were also taken into account. The analysis of the data allows us to identify the recurring presence of Brazilian artists in the European exhibitions studied, as well as the influence of Tema: Aids as an incentive for the pioneering exhibitions on HIV/AIDS in Brazil organized by Edilson Viriato and the incorporation of Hudinilson Jr. into the canon on the disease based on Every Moment Counts, an aspect frequently ignored in Brazilian art historiography and criticism.

Elliot Gibbons, 'Ridgeway Bennett's Abject Abstraction'

In 1992, Ridgeway Bennett had an exhibition titled 'RAM' at City Racing, London. Ridgeway Bennett was a creative and romantic partnership formed in 1984 between Jeremy Ridgeway (d.1994) and David Bennett. They began their collaboration whilst living in London and exhibited frequently with the Brixton Artists Collective in the 1980s before moving to New York in 1988. The City Racing exhibition would mark their return to London after four years in the States. Ridgeway Bennett responded to HIV and AIDS through paintings with text that incorporated bodily fluids or industrial installations that equally eschewed figuration. At the height of the AIDS crisis, the artworld was gripped by theories of abjection. Drawing upon these theories, the paper considers how Ridgeway Bennett's work 'abjects' abstraction. The abject quality of their work, however, is not simply seen through their use of bodily fluids, but in their use of language and installations that seek to problematise the body's permeability or distinction between self and other. The paper considers Ridgeway Bennett's practice

transnationally through particular attention to how their work engages with the category of abstract art and its histories as well as the larger debates around visualising HIV and AIDS. However, the exploration therein contends that Ridgeway Bennett were 'abjected' from the contemporary British art world and this can be seen in how their critical reception locates them elsewhere, namely North America.

15.00-17.00: SESSION TWO

Samuel Perea-Díaz, 'Listening as Archival Practice: Mapping Sonic Artistic Responses to HIV/AIDS'

The paper examines the intersection of sound art and HIV/AIDS, exploring how sounding and listening practices archive the epidemic's socio-political impact and activism. Grounded in artistic research, it highlights sonic methodologies for locating, reenacting, and digitizing artworks from the late 1980s to mid-1990s—a period marked by significant cultural and activist responses. Many of these works, containing vital testimonies, have often been forgotten or deteriorated in archives. Through archival research, this study emphasizes listening as a performative act, reviving neglected histories and addressing the challenges of preserving works and testimonies stored on electromagnetic tapes. This presentation builds on the research, "Listening to an Epidemic: The impact of HIV/AIDS in the Sonic Arts" which investigates the epidemic's impact on sound-focused art. It examines the music practice of Diamanda Galás, which explores the direct answer to the rapid spread of stigma around the disease by amplifying her voice in the acoustics of different churches and venues. The paper analyses artworks such as Robert Farber's *Every Ten Minutes* (1992), a sound installation commissioned for AIDS Day by Visual AIDS in New York. Farber, an ACT UP activist, transformed AIDS mortality data into soundscapes that resonated in gallery spaces. The paper further highlights Kim Abeles's *Found Voices* (1989) and the collective *The Carrying Society's* "Como una

Antorcha" (1994-1995). These sound installations present testimonies of people living with HIV/AIDS; the latter notably focuses on incarcerated individuals in Spain, a population profoundly affected by the epidemic. The collective's later project, "Do You Know If...?" (1995), expanded these efforts by gathering public perspectives on HIV status through street interviews, fostering broader societal dialogue on the epidemic. This work underscores the potential of sound as an archival medium and examines why many sonic works have been overshadowed in the cultural history of HIV/AIDS. By situating these practices within the epidemic's context, it contributes to broader conversations about memory, artistic activism, and practices of care. It invites collective listening and reflection on how sound can rearticulate histories and reshape understandings of HIV/AIDS.

Sian Cook, 'Local and Ephemeral Graphic Traces'

It is important that graphic design is included in this discourse as a part of the HIV and AIDS visual culture legacy. Whilst artworks may be preserved in collections and catalogues, and mass media campaigns discussed in cultural studies, it is the small, local, and ephemeral visual traces that are in danger of being left out of the story of HIV and AIDS.

Drawing upon imagery produced or adapted for small local campaigns – flyers, fundraising leaflets, condom packaging and other forms of graphic ephemera from the UK, AIDS is revealed to be a different epidemic for different communities. Through finding, often by happenstance, personal testimonies and recollections connected to images and items that have never been widely published, alternative interpretations and insights emerge. The process and experience of creating interventions also had strong individual impact.

Anecdotal evidence in combination with the ephemera adds value to an archive, and the gathering of oral histories can often be enriched when inspired by a visual trigger. There are intriguing items from the 80s and 90s where provenance has already been lost, but these can still have a useful speculative and discursive role. The recently published Documenting the HIV and AIDS epidemic: a survey of HIV and AIDS archives in the United Kingdom report offers a timely opportunity to consider how to make the contributions from those with

lived experience available. It is significant that, alongside the gathering of information about archival material held in recognised institutions and libraries, the project had a high response rate regarding private and personal collections, many of which contain unique items of graphic ephemera. How can these 'minor transient documents of everyday life' be made use of and disseminated in order to enrich the HIV and AIDS legacy with an impact that belies the size, cost or original reach of the objects themselves?

Pato Hebert & George Ayala, 'Unfolding *Corpus*: Radicality and Vulnerability in Times of Plague'

An illustrated presentation about *Corpus*, an HIV prevention art journal for queer communities of color that was published from 2003-2008 by the NGO AIDS Project Los Angeles (now APLA Health). Seven issues of the journal were developed with guest editors and distributed bi-annually for free across the United States in a circulation of 5,000. *Corpus* was a bilingual art and literary journal that invited readers to resist the ways that the AIDS industry and the state pathologized queer people's lives and bodies. *Corpus* was an invitation to gay, bi, trans, and queer people to tell stories about desire and pleasure as a strategy to make meaning of HIV and its disproportionate impact on Black and Brown queer people. Contributors didn't have to be accomplished researchers, epidemiologists, clinicians, or authors – although a few were. Our presentation will pay particular attention to the seventh and final issue of *Corpus*, which debuted at the 2008 International AIDS Conference in Mexico City. The issue was edited by Vancouver-born poet Andy Quan, a child of Cantonese parents who now makes his home in Sydney. It featured two photo series by Sunil Gupta (*Exiles* and *Mr. Malhotra's Party*) as well as Egyptian artist Youssef Nabil's hand-tinted photographs, creative projects from community-based collective Taller Documentación Visual in Mexico City, and HIV prevention campaign materials created by Indigenous communities in Australia. We are revisiting *Corpus* now because in the United States and elsewhere, we currently see increased assaults on bodily autonomy, extreme and increasing transphobia and homophobia, restrictions on sexual and reproductive health, and

an erosion of support for much-needed HIV services. The core principles and praxis that drove our work over two decades ago are still sadly as vital as ever. Our presentation seeks to engender a lively discussion about the dangers of nostalgia on the one hand, and complacency on the other. We'll address the lessons of earlier HIV efforts and how these may also be brought to bear on newer pandemics such as M-Pox and COVID-19, which disproportionately impact queer and trans people. We will also talk about dynamic contemporary movements that are pushing the HIV community to evolve in its work, building on disability justice, mutual aid and communal care to think about illness and wellness in a broader context.

Tom Houlton, “It Will Take Up Space”: The London AIDS Memorial, Counter-Memory Practice, and Contemporary AIDS Memorial Networks’

In 2024 the AIDS Memory UK project (AMUK) announced the commission of a permanent AIDS memorial, to be designed by installation artist Anya Gallaccio, and located near the site of the first AIDS ward in the UK, at the former Middlesex Hospital in Fitzrovia, London. Gallaccio's design, of a felled tree trunk with a section removed and stood upright nearby, is playing with ideas of monumentality and porosity, and how to commemorate a global public health crisis that is far from over, and that is multifaceted in its impact across community identities. As Gallaccio details in an interview: ‘the open call welcomed ideas of ephemerality. But my reaction was the opposite: HIV/AIDS is really important, a big deal. I felt that it needed a significant moment, not like a little thing on the corner. My design is not confrontational in its imagery, but it will take up space’. This paper proposes to examine this question: how to engage with the legacy of the monumental, of ‘taking up space’ in social, spatial and political discourse, whilst also engaging with counter-monumental, or contra-hegemonic modes of remembrance? And how can that ‘taking up space’ be then used to create larger community networks (both locally and wider) that form their own ‘roots’ to resilience and resistance. Gallaccio, in her desire to combine the organic form of the tree with the deep time of stone, is following traditional materialities. These material traditions

speak to organic and inorganic temporalities that are seen to counter the more transitory and ephemeral approaches of other AIDS memorials (most notably the AIDS Memorial Quilt), or those such as the New York AIDS memorial that adopt the architectural language of 21st century corporate public space design. In doing so Gallaccio is posing a question framed by current queer ecocritics: the ephemeral does not necessarily equal queer, nor is deep time solely the province of the dominant ideology. By examining Gallaccio's proposal alongside queer ecological theorists such as Catriona Sandilands, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Donna Haraway, as well as Clare Colebrook's work on queer monumentality, this paper will consider the implications for the place of AIDS memorials in public discourse, and how approaches such as Gallaccio's, that seek to honour the counter-memory impulse of ephemerality with the necessary politics of longevity, can form potential points of engagement with other AIDS memorials and communities in other global centres.

17.30: PRESENTATION:

Simon Watney, 'Public Health, Public Art?'

The cultural response to HIV/AIDS in Britain was framed in relation to pre-existing institutions including art schools and photographic education, as well as the community-based art world and, most significantly, the world of public health. This in turn was divided between educational work within community-based NGO's such as the Terrence Higgins Trust, and large, state-funded institutions such as the Family Planning Association and the Health Education Authority, the latter was responsible for numerous national, targeted campaigns from the late 1980s onwards. In this talk I will describe something of my own experience of working across the boundaries between these different institutions over time, from the early 1980's up to the early twenty-first century. I will make a few international parallels but focus mainly on Safer Sex and other related campaigns in Britain, and the people responsible for them, including the question of their assessment and evaluation.

FRIDAY 13 JUNE

10.00-11.30: SESSION THREE

Jorge Bordello, 'LOKOPHONIA, the work of Sergio Hernandez amidst HIV crisis and oblivion'

Visual AIDS Research Fellow Jorge Bordello presents the work of Mexican artist Sergio Hernández Francés (1964-1995), who worked across multimedia theater, performance and video. Connecting his early work as an actor and his collaborations with the rock band Santa Sabina to his later experimental video work, Bordello illuminates Sergio's wide-ranging influence on Mexican cultural history—from the 'rock en tu idioma' movement, Mexican video art, and literature. Specifically, conference attendees will see "LOKOPHONIA" (1992). In it, HIV appears in one of the few pieces produced in first person and in real time during and about the early years of the AIDS crisis in Mexico. This surreal work functions as a metaphor for both AIDS panic and survivor's guilt, reclaiming a surreal agency to the HIV-positive experience. Thirty years after Sergio's death, it is worth to present a piece of great historiographic importance to our community. Analyze it as a pioneering step into digital intervention, the use of chroma as a fictional resource, the participation of other HIV+ artists and the introduction of performative elements in a fully audiovisual language.

Louis Shankar, 'Smalltown Boys: HIV/AIDS in the Midwest, 1985 to 2025'

In 2024, the Midwest Center for AIDS Research was announced to help end the regional HIV epidemic. This paper assembles a constellation of moments within the HIV epidemic in the Midwestern United States in order to think about the narratives surrounding HIV/AIDS more generally: between urban and rural areas and, within the US specifically, between the

coasts and the central United States. I focus on two specific moments, both with art historical significance. First, *Tongues of Flame*, the David Wojnarowicz retrospective held at the University Galleries, Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois, January 23 to March 4 1990. It was the first retrospective of the artist's work and the only large-scale exhibition of his work during his lifetime; the exhibition later toured to Santa Monica, New York City, and Philadelphia. It was a major artistic intervention within the American epidemic more broadly; Wojnarowicz delivered a number of talks and events within the university community over the course of the show. Second, Ron Athey's infamous 1994 performance, *Four Scenes in a Harsh Life*, at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Media responses spread misinformation that embroiled Athey in the ongoing anti-art culture wars fuelled by the likes of Senator Jesse Helms; Athey was effectively blacklisted and barely performed in the US for almost two decades afterwards. How does the locality of this performance, within the Walker's broader programming, affect its history and impact? I will also consider the historic HIV outbreak in Indiana in 2015, when former Vice President Mike Pence was governor. In 2020, President Donald Trump appointed Pence to lead the national response to covid-19, touting his experience with the outbreak in 2015, despite his ineffectual and ideologically driven interventions. Taken together, these moments offer a unique perspective on regional responses to HIV — both within the height of the epidemic and within the longer, ongoing crisis. I also attend to the links between HIV and covid-19 within America. How do these Midwestern stories relate to broader American narratives, particularly those of New York City — and Washington, D.C. and Chicago, IL? How does focussing on the central United States help destabilise current scholarly narratives and reconfigure epidemiological geographies?

Benedict Welch, 'Whirl Like a Dervish: Transnational Influences on AIDS Performance Art'

This paper considers the influence of Sufism (Islamic mysticism) in works by David Wojnarowicz and Hunter Reynolds. It discovers that both artists were influenced by whirling dervishes, Sufi mendicants who practise a spinning prayer ritual in order to access a higher,

spiritual plane of awareness. It provides an account of this influence at work in both artists, paying particularly attention to Wojnarowicz's performance work *In the Shadow of Forward Motion* (1989) and Reynolds' performances as drag alter ego Patina du Prey in the *Memorial Dress* (1993-7) series. Influenced by accounts of queer formalism and infrastructuralism, the paper considers the whirl's affordances for these artists, wonders how we might conceptualise it theoretically and considers what it reveals about the uptake of choreographic tropes in AIDS cultural production.

12.00-13.00: SESSION FOUR

Landriel Oviedo, 'Positive Activism: Challenging Stigma and Addressing the Intersections of HIV and Climate Justice in the Global South'

Positive activism emerges as a transformative strategy to address the stigma and discrimination faced by people living with HIV, incorporating intersections between health, social justice, and climate change, particularly within the Global South. Grounded in the paradigm of reducing the footprint of stigma, this approach merges art and activism to challenge social narratives, recognizing how the climate crisis exacerbates inequalities that disproportionately impact people living with HIV, especially in marginalized communities across Latin America and other regions of the Global South. In this context, art functions as both a healing process for the creator, who translates lived experiences into messages of resilience, and an empowering experience for the viewer, who is invited to dismantle prejudice and embrace solidarity. Positive activism moves beyond historical discourses centered on physical death during the AIDS crisis, highlighting current realities of survival and agency enabled by antiretroviral therapies. It emphasizes how climate change amplifies issues such as poverty, food insecurity, and unequal access to healthcare, demanding integrated responses that address these interconnected crises. By weaving artistic, emotional, political, and ecological dimensions, positive activism creates spaces of advocacy

that reduce stigma, amplify local voices, and promote inclusive and sustainable communities. This approach challenges hegemonic narratives, linking the experiences of people living with HIV to broader struggles for climate justice and showcasing how these intersections require new cultural and policy responses to ensure global equity.

Beau Gomez, 'On Lyrical Humanism in HIV Storytelling'

On Lyrical Humanism in HIV Storytelling presents the artist's recent and ongoing projects that exercise image-making as a form of attentiveness, and in activating visual storytelling as an operative point of tension and affect. Between photographic, audiovisual and archive-based works, this presentation broaches singular and collaborative approaches that meditate on the complexities of cultural and social landscapes as the artist and his close circles inhabit them; and notably on the mechanics of disclosure, displacement and (un)belonging while navigating HIV. Through exploring the lyrical, evocative, and question-asking spirit of image-making, the artist reconsiders/reframes what it means to reconcile with an illness and epidemic checkered in its history and reality, further driven by a hopeful sense of inquiry, curiosity, and an openness to contradiction while simultaneously reimagining—if not asserting—a space for otherness.

14.00-15.00: PRESENTATION

Theodore (ted) Kerr, 'HIV Exceptionalism'

Primarily used within the public health field, (Bayer, 1991, Benton, 2016), I define HIV Exceptionalism, as it relates to culture, as a committed practice of retelling, connected to an established version of history, centered around the earliest decades of the HIV response that primarily focuses on in the suffering and activism of specifically impacted people (often white, but not only; often cis men, but not only; often within the LGBTQ

community, but not only, often in US or UK major cities, but not only). At its most powerful, HIV Exceptionalism is a form of memorialization, an acknowledgment that the crisis before the arrival of life saving medication is different from the crisis of HIV in the 21st century. HIV Exceptionalism is a faith in a specific difference that can be captured in the stories from “back then.” At its least helpful, HIV Exceptionalism negatively impacts the creation, circulation, and reception of art, culture and history outside of the narrow narrative already circulated. It reduces the space that HIV information from a diversity of places, people, and moments is shared. The negative aspects of HIV Exceptionalism primarily impact marginalized populations within the HIV response, including women, Black people, people of color, people with disabilities, people from various geographic locations not already associated with HIV, and others. I see HIV Exceptionalism as a major factor impacting the circulation of HIV related art and culture.

15.30-17.00: SESSION FIVE

James Boaden, ‘After *Blue*’

Derek Jarman’s final film *Blue* from 1993 has come to occupy a central role in the way in which the cultural response to the AIDS crisis in the UK has come to be remembered. The film was acquired, somewhat belatedly, by the national collection of British art at Tate in 2014 where it has been frequently displayed over the last decade. *Blue* is a profoundly complex and contradictory work that combines personal narrative with the sparest of abstraction, it incorporates the realism of the everyday alongside the most searing flights of metaphor. This paper will begin by suggesting some of the reasons why *Blue* has come to eclipse many of the other British moving image works that dealt with HIV/AIDS in the 1980s and 1990s. I will then discuss several responses to the film from the last decade which have reinscribed its centrality in – to my eyes - unusual ways. One of the ways that *Blue* functions is as a statement of witnessing – with all of the ethical weight which that term carries. To bear

witness is often a solitary act, it positions the speaker of testimony in particular ways that were being discussed within a wide range of discourses at the time the film was made. I would like to question what it might mean to position oneself within another's story, or at least adjacent to it, by looking at these recent artistic responses. Starting from a brief look at Richard Porter's edited anthology *Responses to Derek Jarman's Blue* (2022) and Neil Bartlett's staging of *Blue Now* (2023), I will concentrate on three quite different ways that *Blue* has been referenced in recent artists' moving image works. Moyra Davey's *Notes on Blue* (2015) was commissioned by the Walker in Minneapolis as a response to Jarman's film. Davey's video takes the form of a self-filmed monologue where the artist reflects on the space of her apartment and her failing sight in relation to her diagnosis of MS. Davey uses Jarman's method of self-analysis to look at her own situation. Secondly, I will look at *The Blue Description Project*, (2024) conceived by artists and writers Christopher Robert Jones, Liza Sylvestre, and Sarah Hayden. In this version creative captioning and audio description are edited into Jarman's film to 'challenge ableist hierarchies in art while focusing on the generative possibilities of difference and interdependence'. Finally, I will look at Luke Fowler's *Being Blue* (2024), an affective treatment of the material remains of Jarman's practice.

Richard Sawdon-Smith, 'Unpacking the HIV/AIDS Archive: A GATHERING in Norwich, UK'

This paper considers 'GATHERING' as a strategy to connect stories of art and HIV, as Ted Kerr suggested when he asked: 'What's an exhibition? I don't think there is a stable or single answer. But I do know, that for me, an exhibition is a GATHERING. It brings together ideas, objects, spaces, ways of witnessing, ghosts and people and more.' As an example of a gathering, we will take a tour through the exhibition 'A life lived through photography' at East Gallery, Norwich, a performative residency in which I unpacked my archive in public, rehanging work on a weekly basis and triggering interactions between artwork, assorted ephemera, people and other archives such as Queer Norfolk, Bishopsgate Institute and

Visual AIDS Organisation. The process created a dialogue with communities from the local to the global, highlighting connections over time and spaces. In gathering histories, the archive reveals interconnected stories, such as the work with Rotimi Fani-Kayode and Robert Taylor in the 1980s to plan a touring group exhibition. In the 1990s, studying with and photographing Ajamu X, his image used for a GMFA campaign. In the 2000s, curating an online gallery for Visual AIDS archive, with artist such as Luna Luis Ortiz, Derek Jackson, Rebecca Guberman-Bloom et al. Critically this emphasises that artwork isn't made in a silo or the endeavor of an individual but the collective contribution of a community, providing a lens through which to investigate the work for further research. The ghosts from the archive reveal the waning of interest in HIV/AIDS artwork in the UK. Records of interviews conducted in the late-2000s with UK-based artists, writers and AIDS activists, confirmed that, as Emmanuel Copper summarised, "HIV/AIDS had fallen off the agenda", and in Simon Watney's own words "On AIDS-related art in the UK I'm afraid I haven't a clue. Is there any?". Fast forward over a decade, and unpacking the archive allows one to look back at lives lived, lives loved, and lives lost, but also to ways forward. To review different perspectives, open new possibilities, make fresh connections, filling in the silence of the late 2000s and unfolding the potential of what it means to be working with a living ongoing archive.

Dominic Johnson, 'I Want to Speak of Fear: Hamad Butt and HIV/AIDS in the UK in the early 1990s'

Between 1990 and his AIDS-related death in 1994, aged 32, the British-Pakistani artist Hamad Butt made a series of pioneering sculptural installations: glass books that burn the retina if stared at unprotected; a cradle of glass capsules filled with chlorine gas; fragile tubes of liquid bromine bowed to resemble an Islamic arch; a ladder that releases toxic iodine vapours if climbed; and a cabinet of flies that feed on texts to bloom into cycles of birth and death. I draw on his research I conducted towards the first retrospective exhibition of Butt's work, which is currently on show at Whitechapel Gallery, London. I will narrate the

pleasures and challenges of encountering, curating and reading Butt's work in relation to AIDS as a determining context of production and reception. His work is impersonal and austere, yet riven with sadness, fear, desire, intimations of finitude, and flashes of humour. I theorise the problem of reinserting Butt into British stories of art and AIDS, while allowing him to claim what Édouard Glissant calls the dispossessed subject's 'right to opacity'.

17.30-18.30: PERFORMANCE LECTURE

Benny Nemer, 'Several Favourable Bodies: A Postcard to Hervé Guibert'

The chief material of my practice-driven postdoctoral research is the postcard collection of French artist and writer Hervé Guibert, which was not officially archived but instead dispersed among his friends after his 1991 death from AIDS. Whereas all of Guibert's photographs, manuscripts, books, and letters have been preserved in various state archives, the postcards—which are amply referenced in his writing and appear as props or protagonists in many of his photographs—were not deemed worthy of archival preservation by Guibert's heterosexual, cisgendered executor. The central gesture of my research is the material reconstitution of Guibert's collection with the assistance of my queer kin: friends, lovers, and colleagues. A kind of parallel archive of replica postcards from museums across Europe is slowly being assembled with their assistance, along with a range of promiscuous, slanted research methods. The process generates a community of participants and co-authors whose museum visits and epistolary writing make transhistorical contact with the ensemble of untraceable friends in whose stewardship Guibert's collection is now dispersed. Furthermore, the action's process and outcome are complicated by the many improvisations and elaborations carried out by participants, who often stray from, reinterpret, or otherwise queer my instructions, sending other materials alongside or in lieu of the requested postcards, augmenting the counter archival nature of the research.

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

ALIWEN is a Chilean non-binary artist and curator based in Tokyo. They are pursuing a DPhil in Cultural Studies at the Graduate School of International Culture and Communication Studies, Waseda University. They have received various grants including Visual AIDS (2022) and 10 x 10 Research Grant (2025-2026). They have curated exhibitions such as Art and Seropositive Body in Contemporary Chile, Museum of Chemistry and Pharmaceutics, University of Chile (October 2018) and Subversive Bodies: Art, Gender and Media, The 5th Floor Gallery, Tokyo (August 2022). They hosted a screening for Visual Aids 2021 Day Without Art “Enduring Care” in Tokyo.

JOÃO FREITAS is a Brazilian researcher, filmmaker, and curator specializing in queer memory, speculative historiography, and film. With a background in law and a master’s degree in Liberal Studies from The New School, João explores the intersections of film, memory, and marginalized narratives. His work spans short films showcased at international festivals and curatorial projects focusing on LGBTQIA+ histories and HIV/AIDS cultural responses in Brazil. João’s approach blends academic inquiry with creative storytelling, aiming to challenge dominant narratives and amplify overlooked voices. He is currently developing both film and curatorial projects.

RICARDO AYRES is an art historian and visual artist, and Professor at Federal University of Pelotas (UFPel, Brazil). He has a Doctorate and Master in Visual Arts (UFRGS, Brasil), with an area of concentration in History, Theory and Art Criticism. He is coordinator of the project ‘Histories of art and histories of AIDS from Brazil: discourses on the body and illness in Contemporary Art’, and a member of the Brazilian Art History Committee (CBHA). He is author of the book *Miasmas and AIDS metaphors in the visual arts* (2021). His research interests revolve around contemporary art and its history based on intersections with the body, HIV/AIDS and sexuality.

ELLIOT GIBBONS is currently a Doctoral Candidate at UCL and Tate funded by the AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Partnership scheme. His doctoral project examines art and activism produced in relation to the HIV and AIDS epidemic in Britain from 1987 to 1996.

SAMUEL PEREA-DIAZ is a Berlin-based artist and research fellow specializing in sound art and curation. With a background in Architecture and an MA in Sound Studies, Perea-Díaz's work delves into listening workshops, audiovisual art installations, and research on sound in archives. He is currently a Ph.D. candidate in the Faculty of Fine Arts at the Complutense University of Madrid, where his research investigates sound-focused artistic responses to HIV/AIDS. Perea-Díaz has given artist talks at exhibitions such as "General Idea" (Gropius Bau, 2023) and "Red Remind Solitude" (WeAreVillage, 2024). His upcoming projects include co-curation of the exhibition "Viral Intimacies" at nGbK in Berlin.

SIAN COOK is a graphic designer and Senior Lecturer in Graphic and Media Design at London College of Communication. She has been involved with UK HIV and AIDS organisations for over 30 years and has volunteered and designed for Terrence Higgins Trust, Red Hot AIDS, Sigma Research, ReShape, National AIDS Trust, the National HIV Story Trust and Positively UK. She helped create numerous campaigns for GMFA (the gay men's health charity) throughout the 2000s and 2010s and was on their Board of Directors.

GEORGE AYALA is a clinical and community psychologist by training, with more than 30 years of experience working in various non-profit organizations and government settings. Dr. Ayala is Deputy Director of the Alameda County Public Health Department in California. He is a systems thinker who understands public health's potential as a platform for advancing social justice. Dr. Ayala is co-author of *Breaking Barriers: Sexual and Gender Minority-led Advocacy to End AIDS in Africa and the Caribbean*.

PATO HEBERT is an artist and teacher. His work probes the challenges and possibilities of interconnectedness. His creative projects have been presented at the Centro de Arte Contemporáneo in Quito, Alserkal Arts Foundation in Dubai, the Songzhuang International Photo Biennale and IHLIA LGBT Heritage in Amsterdam. Hebert has worked on HIV initiatives with queer communities of color since 1994, collaboratively developing innovative approaches to mobilization, creativity, programs, advocacy and justice. He has been living with Long COVID and organizing around the COVID-19 pandemic since the spring of 2020. Hebert serves as Chair and teaches in the Department of Art & Public Policy at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts.

TOM HOULTON is a lecturer in Film & Literature in the Department of English & Related Literature at University of York, where he teaches on AIDS in the '80s and '90s, queer global cinema, Golden Age Hollywood and queer theory. He is the author of *Monuments as Cultural and Critical Objects* (Routledge, 2021), and has published articles on film, contemporary art, and critical theory. His latest publications are a catalogue contribution for Ali Cherri's 'I Am Monument' at Vienna Secession/Baltic (2024/5), and 'The Epistemological Indeterminacy of Ted Kotcheff's *Wake in Fright*' for Palgrave's edited collection *Animality and Horror Cinema* (2025). Tom previously taught at the University of Sussex, where he worked at the Centre for the Study of Sexual Dissidence, and as editor of *Excursions* journal. He is currently working on a publication on queer monuments in the 21st century.

SIMON WATNEY was the founding chair of the Gay Men's Health Education Group at The Terrence Higgins Trust from 1986 until the early 1990s. He was also a founder-trustee of Gay Men Fighting AIDS (GMFA) and the National AIDS Manual Ltd. (NAM), and also a trustee of CRUSAID and The Charleston Trust, and a member of the Council of the ICA in London. A leading figure in photographic education in Britain he taught for many years at The School of Communication of the Polytechnic of Central London, his career straddles the arc of sexual politics in Britain from GLF to the present day. He is a gay man living with HIV.

JORGE BORDELLO is a visual artist living with HIV. His research focuses on the wrinkles between document and fiction, the domestic archive and national narratives. He was winner of the Jury Prize at DOCSMX Festival and the State's Prize for Visual Arts. His work has been exhibited at venues such as the New Museum, LACMA, MACBA, the Museum of Modern Art of Rio, and the Jumex Museum. His projects on the local expressions of identity have been selected for the 19th Rufino Tamayo National Painting Biennial and the 15th FEMSA Biennial. He is a founding member of CEPA, a support and artistic network for people living with HIV in Tlaxcala.

LOUIS SHANKAR is, at present, an independent researcher and editor based in London. They completed a PhD in 2024 about the late art of David Wojnarowicz, supervised by Prof Bob Mills and Prof Mignon Nixon at UCL. Their research practise sits at the overlap of art history, psychoanalysis, and queer theory, focussed primarily on artistic responses to HIV/AIDS and contemporary trans* and non-binary artistic practice.

BENEDICT WELCH is a doctoral researcher at the University of Sussex, UK. His research investigates the choreographic imaginaries of artists, writers and filmmakers in literary and visual cultures during the AIDS crisis. His doctoral project is funded by CHASE (Consortium of Arts and Humanities South-east England). His work has been published by *ASAP/J* and *Film-Philosophy*.

LANDRIEL OVIEDO is a social communicator, researcher, and positive activist from Latin America, specializing in the intersections of art, health, human rights, and climate justice. Their work addresses systemic inequalities experienced by people living with HIV, exploring how the climate crisis intensifies social and healthcare challenges in the Global South. Through performances, installations, and audiovisual projects, Landriel employs art to amplify marginalized voices, raise awareness, and foster community resilience. As someone

living with HIV, Landriel transforms personal experiences into art that heals, empowers, and inspires, re-symbolizing the diagnostic transition and emphasizing the agency of affected communities. Their work underscores the climate crisis's impact on healthcare access and the lives of vulnerable populations, highlighting the urgent need for inclusive and sustainable responses.

BEAU GOMEZ is a visual artist whose practice is informed by ideas, challenges and conversations around cross-cultural narratives as they relate to positions of community and otherness. His work is grounded in image-making as a conduit between individual and collective histories, giving permission to shared means of learning, nurturing and renewal. He has exhibited in Canada and internationally, including Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Photography, Centre de la photographie Genève, Trinity Square Video, Toronto International Film Festival, Princeton University Art Museum and The Visual AIDS Foundation. He lives and works between Montréal and Toronto.

THEODORE (ted) KERR is a Canadian born, Brooklyn based writer and organizer. He is the author of *We Are Having This Conversation Now: The Times of AIDS Cultural Production* (Duke University Press, 2022) with Dr. Alexandra Juhasz. He is a founding member of What Would an HIV Doula Do?.

JAMES BOADEN is senior lecturer in modern and contemporary art at the University of York. His research and publications look at art from the 1940s to the present largely in the North American context with a focus on artists' moving image. He has curated screenings for BFI, Tate Modern, and Nottingham Contemporary.

RICHARD SAWDON SMITH is Professor of Fine Art and Director of Fine Art and Photography at Norwich University of the Arts. Recognised as an internationally established Queer artist for his work with AIDS cultures, his photographic practice has been published,

exhibited and screened extensively around the world. He is a Patron of Norwich Film Festival, Co-Chair of Norwich Pride Trustees, Advisor to Queerfest Norwich, on the Editorial Advisory Panel of the Journal of Photography & Culture. A winner of the National Portrait Gallery Photographic Portrait Award, he is co-author of Langford's Basic Photography and *The Book is Alive!*

DOMINIC JOHNSON is Professor of Performance and Visual Culture in the School of Arts at Queen Mary University of London. He is the author of four books including *Unlimited Action: The Performance of Extremity in the 1970s* (2019). He is the editor of six books, including *Pleading in the Blood: The Art and Performances of Ron Athey* (2013). His research has been funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, Fulbright US-UK Commission, Leverhulme Trust, Terra Foundation for American Art, and Paul Mellon Centre for the Study of British Art. He curated the touring exhibition *Hamad Butt: Apprehensions*, which opened at Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin in 2024 and is currently on show at Whitechapel Gallery, London until September 2025.

BENNY NEMER is a Montreal-born artist, diarist, and researcher based in Paris. His multidisciplinary practice often traces the affective contours of love and longing while facilitating bonds of kinship between his audience, figures from history, and himself, taking form through audio work, performance, participatory actions, epistolary writing, and flower arranging. Benny is currently a postdoctoral researcher at KASK & Conservatorium in Ghent, where he is pursuing research into queer kinship, postcards as an artistic medium, and the archive of French author and photographer Hervé Guibert.