

Day

With(out)

Art



*Everyone I
know is sick*

DOLISSA MEDINA AND ANANIAS P. SORIA
VIEJITO/ENFERMITO/GRITO (OLD MAN/SICK MAN/SHOUT)



In *Viejito/Enfermito/Grito*, artist Ananias P. Soria and filmmaker Dolissa Medina use movement, pantomime, and voiceover to convey Soria's journey with HIV while connecting with his ancestors. The video begins with a rendition of *La Danza de los Viejitos* (The Dance of the Old Men), a traditional Mexican dance. In this comedic dance, often performed by children or young individuals, dancers mimic old age, using canes and masks resembling *viejitos* (old men), occasionally coughing and falling over.

The artists use the dance to symbolize the impact of HIV on Soria's body, emphasizing how the virus prematurely ages individuals. Now in his fifties, Soria has been dealing with digestive issues and other medical conditions that are considered geriatric (related to old age) since he was diagnosed with HIV in his twenties. Many of these complications are related to HIV medication itself. Soria pantomimes the ritual of taking pills and the side effects of nausea and vomiting, repeating the words *defectivo* (defective) and *efectivo* (effective).

The final sequence of the video suggests how dance helps Soria process internal struggle and serve as a channel for spiritual growth. Evoking the *grito* (shout) named in the video's title, he becomes animated by house music and moves with a grounded grace, transforming the use for his cane.

QUESTIONS

Ritual is depicted throughout the video in various forms, from cultural rituals like dance to the everyday ritual of medication. How did these rituals resonate with you, and did they evoke any personal reflections on your own experiences or rituals?

Viejito/Enfermito/Grito is rich in symbolism, featuring masks, pills, the Red Ribbon, U=U, and the rod of Asclepius (a snake wrapped around a cane, symbolizing medicine). Did you recognize or have curiosity about any of these symbols? How did these symbols contribute to the narrative, did they deepen your understanding of the artist's experience with HIV and connection with his cultural and medical context?

RESOURCES

La Danza de los Viejitos originates from Michoacán, Mexico. The music used in the video was provided by the López family of Jacuaro, Michoacán in Mexico, who were instrumental in disseminating the Dance of the Viejitos from their native P'urhépecha culture to the rest of Mexico and the world. Learn more about La Danza de los Viejitos in these [two videos](#).

Ananias wears a shirt embroidered with symbols, including the letters U=U (Undetectable = Untransmittable), referring to the fact that people living with HIV with an undetectable viral load cannot transmit the virus. [Learn more about U=U here](#).

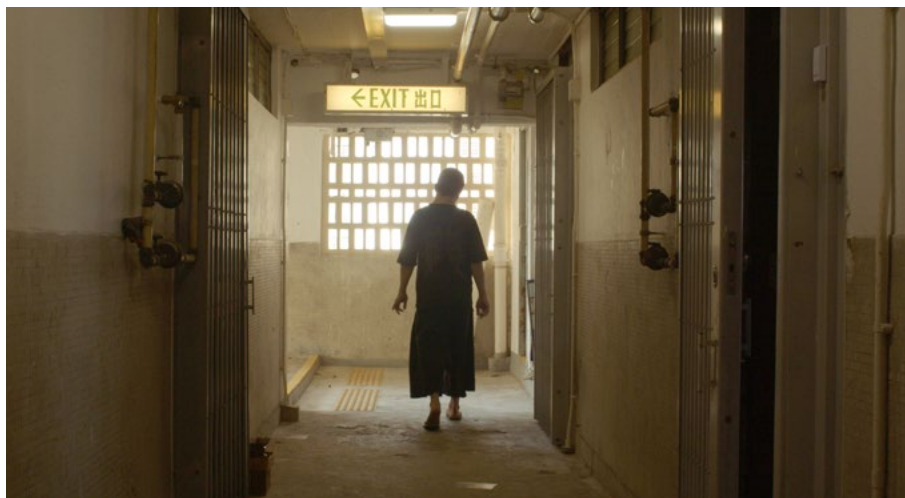
This video is just the first part of The Grito Viejito Project, an interdisciplinary artist collective using the Dance of the Old Men to stage dialogues around health, aging, and queer futures in Mexican-American communities. [Learn more and support here](#).

Related viewing: [Jhoel Zempoalteca and La Jerry, *Lxs dxs bichudas*, 2022](#), [Steed Taylor, *I Am... a Long-Term AIDS Survivor*, 2021](#), [David Weissman, *Song From An Angel*, 1988](#).

Dolissa Medina is a filmmaker, writer, and organizer from the borderlands of South Texas.

Ananias P. Soria is a multidisciplinary artist interested in transformative energetic expression through movement, music and dance.

DOROTHY CHEUNG
HEART MURMURS



“Where does care end and control begin?” Viewers of *Heart Murmurs* read this question, posed silently by filmmaker Dorothy Cheung, amid a poetic dialogue with Dean, the focus of her film. Dean is a young gay man in Hong Kong living with HIV and dystonia, a neurological disability. The question appears on screen as Dean shares his experiences in the early months of COVID-19, before he and his then-boyfriend broke up. Was it caring when the state turned his HIV clinic into a place for COVID-19 services? Was it controlling when Dean’s boyfriend wondered why it took so long for him to return home from the doctor’s office?

Cheung, a former non-profit AIDS worker, set out to interview people living with HIV in Hong Kong about their experience of the COVID pandemic. After meeting Dean through community, her project shifted to bear witness to Dean’s story and invite us to consider how living with HIV is just one of many social and medical identities one may live with. In the video, Dean discusses the remarks he gets about the visible signs of living with a neurological disability. While in his telling, his HIV status seems to be largely undetectable. Out of Cheung’s framework of care and control emerges a portrait of Dean leaning into his agency as a person living with illnesses, insights, and imagination.

QUESTIONS

As an HIV positive or HIV negative person, how much space does HIV take up in your life? What impact do your other identities play in regards to your relationship to HIV?

Dean shares how he has “come up with many solutions when it comes to [his] body” beyond the medical advice given to him by doctors. What kind of knowledge about your own body do you possess, and how has this helped you imagine or create your own solutions?

In the video we don't hear or see Cheung, but her words appear through text. What significance do you think is added to the film by Cheung choosing to insert her voice in this manner? Does it change the way that you think about Dean or the video as a whole?

RESOURCES

To learn more about how Covid disrupted HIV testing and treatment services in Hong Kong, check out [this paper](#), which highlights how quarantine restrictions exacerbated privacy concerns for people accessing services.

Dystonia is a neurological condition marked by involuntary muscle contractions, leading to slow and repetitive movements or atypical postures, occasionally accompanied by discomfort. [Read more about the condition here.](#)

Related viewing: [Iman Shervington, *I'm Still Me*, 2019](#), [Charan Singh, *They Called it Love, But Was it Love?*, 2020](#), [J Triangular and the Women's Video Support Project, *滴水希望 \(Hope Drops\)*, 2021.](#)

Dorothy Cheung (she/her) is a filmmaker and artist currently based in Hong Kong whose practice explores the notion of identities and home through the personal and the political, memory and forgetfulness.

BEAU GOMEZ ***THIS BED I MADE***



In this introspective and philosophical short film, Beau Gomez explores the bedroom as a transformative space for healing and personal evolution. Focused on two Filipino men, Sean in Manila, Philippines, and Nonoy in Toronto, Canada, the narrative unfolds within the intimate confines of their bedrooms, where they candidly recount their experiences living with HIV and navigating relationships.

Nonoy, through voiceover, reflects on the introvertedness he grappled with before seroconverting, emphasizing how this intensified post-diagnosis. He characterizes the bedroom not only as a sanctuary but as the locus where he nurtures his emotional and mental well-being while living with HIV.

For Sean, the bedroom is a haven for self-reflection and artistic expression, a return to creativity that had waned amidst life changes of relocating cities and seroconverting. From his solitary artistic pursuits, he rebuilds a profound connection with his body, affirming the constancy of certain aspects of his identity despite life-altering changes.

The film delves into the impact of HIV on personal relationships, with Nonoy disclosing his status to a partner in a newly formed relationship. His partner's unexpected compassion during this revelation contrasts with Sean's narrative, where a close friend admires Sean's strength yet grapples with envisioning a future as an individual living with HIV. Through these parallel narratives, Gomez captures the multifaceted aspects of life with HIV, ranging from fear and isolation to courage and optimism, creating an exploration of resilience and hope.

QUESTIONS

How is solitude understood in Gomez's film? What insights does the film provide into the intersection of creative expression, solitude, and emotional well-being, particularly for people living with HIV? In what ways does the film's exploration of the bedroom as a space for healing and personal growth resonate with you?

Gomez is a Filipino artist living with HIV based in Montreal. To create *This Bed I Made*, he traveled to the Philippines to film Sean, but also chose to connect closer to home with Nonoy in Toronto. How might Nonoy's experience living with HIV within diaspora hold similarities or differences to Sean's? How do their relationships to living with HIV and disclosure function differently in the video?

RESOURCES

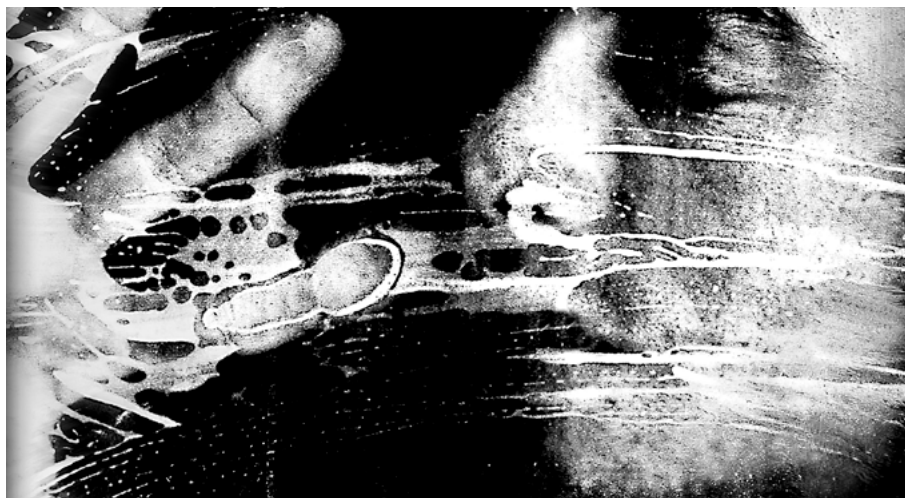
One of Gomez's inspirations was Anne Boyer's book *The Undying*, which shares the author's journey with breast cancer and the complexities of diagnosis.

Learn more about two artists who make work about HIV and the bed: [Hunter Reynolds](#) and [Felix Gonzalez-Torres](#).

Related viewing: [Nguyen Tan Hoang, *I Remember Dancing*, 2019](#), [Jaewon Kim, *Nuance*, 2022](#), [Richard Fung, *Fighting Chance*, 1990](#).

Beau Gomez (he/him) is a visual artist based in Montréal and Toronto. His work is grounded in image-making as a conduit between individual and collective experience, giving permission to shared means of learning, nurturing, and renewal.

KURT WESTON
LOSING THE LIGHT



Losing the Light is an experimental self-portrait of the artist's life as a long-term survivor who lost his vision to Cytomegalovirus (CMV) retinitis. CMV is an opportunistic infection and caused many people living with HIV to become blind before antiretroviral medication was available.

Through abstraction, narration, and eerie soundscapes, Weston shares how CMV robbed him of his career as a fashion photographer. The loss Weston portrays extends beyond vision; he pays homage to friends succumbing to AIDS, a shattered career, and a faith lost in religion and humanity. In the early nineties, when Kaposi's sarcoma marked him as a person living with AIDS, discrimination fueled by religion eroded his faith. Weston invokes a feeling of isolation, a common experience for people living with HIV, especially long term survivors.

Weston has spoken about the importance of support networks, particularly at the intersection of the AIDS and blind community. "The human body is very fragile and very frail...there's always the opportunity that something will eventually go wrong and we will have to rely on other human beings to befriend us, to help us, to support us with our disabilities."

In *Losing the Light*, we also witness Weston's artist's creativity and adaptability in using vision prosthesis and technology to continue his practice as an artist. The camera itself begins to take on the artist's physical being through blurred images and starry vision. The camera becomes not only a way to document Westons existence and experience as a long term survivor, but a way to experience it from his point of view.

QUESTIONS

Weston invites us into his experience by repeatedly asking us to imagine, ending with the call: "Imagine having your world fade to blur and black. Imagine the fear of losing the light." Reflect on the power and limitations of imagination in fostering empathy and understanding.

A person's experience with HIV is context-specific, shaped by the era in which they are diagnosed. Consider the influence of generation, time, context, and individual experience on one's journey with HIV. How do these factors impact perceptions, challenges, and strategies for resilience across different contexts? How has your own perspective on HIV, health, and illness been shaped by your generational experience?

RESOURCES

CMV is a common virus that rarely causes symptoms, except for people with weakened immune systems. Cases of CMV retinitis in people living with HIV largely decreased after antiretroviral treatment was developed in 1996. However, as recently as 2013, people living with HIV are three to four times more likely to have some form of vision loss. Read more about [HIV and the eye here](#).

Explore related work from artists who lost their vision due to HIV/AIDS-related illness, including Derek Jarman's [Blue](#) (1993) and [John Dugdale's](#) photography.

In 2003, Visual AIDS organized the exhibition [Share Your Vision](#) to raise awareness about the impact of CMV retinitis on the lives of people living with HIV, showing work by Kurt Weston, [Amos Beaida](#), [Elliott Linwood](#), [Thomas Somerville](#), [Becky Trotter](#), and many others.

Related viewing: [Santiago Lemus and Camilo Acosta Hunter](#) [Texas, Los Amarillos, 2022](#), Steed Taylor, [I Am... a Long-Term AIDS Survivor, 2021](#).

Kurt Weston (he/him) is an artist working primarily with photography. His artwork reflects on this experience of visibility and disability, examining cultural stigmas surrounding HIV and AIDS, the disabled body, mortality, and loss.

LILI NASCIMENTO AND HIURA FERNANDES
AQUELA CRIANÇA COM AID\$ (THAT CHILD WITH AID\$)



That Child with AiD\$ chronicles Lili Nascimento's spiritual journey as an individual born with HIV. In collaboration with director Hiura Fernandes, the film explores Nascimento's bold defiance against the systems of neglect that have needlessly exposed them, their friends, and countless others to peril.

The video traverses vignettes set within the Brazilian landscape. Nascimento's joyous moments playing with a child by the ocean are juxtaposed with anger, stemming from the reality that nearly a million children have faced HIV exposure in the last two decades, despite government promises to eradicate vertical transmission. In another scene, Nascimento describes how the systemic lack of care they've known their whole life has seeped into their very bones and psyche. "Love is about action, and the actions of the world are always telling me I'm going to die, and probably tomorrow there will be thousands of tributes to my importance, but in this life no one cares if I eat or sleep." While reciting this quote from a friend, Nascimento performs a meditative dance on rugged mountains, drawing strength from nature to resist the potential exploitation of their body for medical data and as a site for others' anxieties.

The final act unfolds as a celebration of abundance and life. Nascimento, amidst a banquet of fruits and sweets, hears their brother express joy at their shared survival. *That Child with AiD\$* emerges as a reverse chronicle of life—born into a world shadowed by death, Nascimento forges a new existence propelled by inner strength and the dreams of their parents and ancestors.

QUESTIONS

That Child with AiD\$ is a visually rich video packed with symbolic scenes from Nascimento's meditative dance in the river to the banquet scene. How do these images stand apart from typical imagery associated with HIV? How did they compliment or complicate what was shared through voiceover?

The video references some of the spiritual traditions that sustain Nascimento. What role can spirituality play in connection to HIV and to illness more generally? What does spirituality offer that biomedicine cannot, and vice versa?

RESOURCES

The video is dedicated "to the *travestis* who *matrigested* the resistance to AiD\$ and to the children who were born and are born despite AiD\$." Neither of these words can be translated simply into English. *Travesti* is a gender term used in Latin American countries. It generally refers to femme gender expression, but encompasses a broader range of experiences and identities than the English word "transgender." *Matrigest* refers to an African philosophy that thinks about the feminine (*matri*) power of creation (*gestation*), in counterpoint to colonization, racism, and patriarchy.

Nascimento's surname means birth, further deepening their relationship to being born with HIV. Vertical transmission is when HIV is passed from a birthing parent to child during pregnancy, childbirth, or breastfeeding. When proper preventative care is provided, parent to child transmission reduces to basically 0%. [Read more here.](#)

Related viewing: [Camila Arce, Memoria Vertical, 2022,](#)
[Kia LaBeija, Goodnight, Kia, 2017.](#)

Hiura Fernandes (she/her) is a multidisciplinary artist, cultural producer, and product designer living in João Pessoa, Brazil.

Lili Nascimento (he/them) is a transpersonal psychologist, columnist, and artist who studies and works with children living with HIV and AIDS in Brazil.

Underlined phrases in this guide indicate links to more information that are available in the digital version. Scan the QR code to access this guide on your phone.



DAY WITH(OUT) ART

In 1989, Visual AIDS presented the first Day Without Art, organizing museums nationwide to cover up their artwork, darken their galleries, or even close their doors as part of a day of action and mourning against the AIDS crisis. Since 2014, Visual AIDS has commissioned artists and filmmakers to create new short videos responding to the ongoing crisis. The 50+ videos that we have commissioned are available to view at video.VisualAIDS.org.

VISUAL AIDS

Visual AIDS utilizes art to fight AIDS by provoking dialogue, supporting HIV+ artists, and preserving a legacy, because AIDS is not over. VisualAIDS.org



Visual

AIDS

Text: Kyle Croft, Elena Guzman,
Theodore Kerr, Blake Paskal
Design: Aaron Fowler
Graphics: Rush Jackson

SPECIAL THANKS

We thank the students of Theodore Kerr's Fall 2023 class "Life During Memorialization: History and the Ongoing Epidemic of HIV/AIDS in the USA" at the New School for providing valuable input that shaped this guide.