



Visual
AIDS

DAY WITH(OUT) ART 2017

VISUAL AIDS

ALTERNATE ENDINGS, RADICAL BEGINNINGS

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RADICAL BEGINNINGS

DAY WITH(OUT) ART 2017



**Mykki
Blanco**

**Cheryl
Dunye &
Ellen
Spiro**

**Reina
Gossett**

**Thomas
Allen
Harris**

**Kia
LaBeija**

**Tiona
Nekkia
McClodden**

**Brontez
Purnell**

who will keep their dreams alive



- Black people are 12% of the population but we are 29% of all AIDS cases
- 53% of all women with AIDS are black
- 26% of all men with AIDS are black
- Black children are 54% of all pediatric AIDS cases
- AIDS is the leading cause of death for black women between the ages of 24 and 36

if we don't wake up to reality?

For testing and treatment information call the National AIDS Hotline

1.800.342.2437

Glenn Ligon/A Visual AIDS Project. Copyright 1992. Funded in part by the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts and the Lannan Foundation

**Visual
AIDS**

Visual AIDS is proud to present *ALTERNATE ENDINGS, RADICAL BEGINNINGS*, the 28th iteration of our annual Day With(out) Art project for World AIDS Day in December 2017.

In 1989, in response to the worsening AIDS crisis and coinciding with the World Health Organization's second annual World AIDS Day on December 1, Visual AIDS organized the first Day Without Art. A Visual AIDS committee of curators, writers, and art professionals sent out a call for "mourning and action in response to the AIDS crisis." Over the nearly three decades of Day With(out) Art projects, thousands of art museums, galleries, universities and AIDS-service organizations internationally have participated by shrouding artworks and replacing them with information about HIV and safer sex, locking their doors or dimming their lights, and producing exhibitions, programs, readings, memorials, and performances at the intersections of art, AIDS and activism.

In 1998, for its 10th anniversary, Day Without Art became Day With(out) Art. Visual AIDS added the parentheses to highlight the ongoing inclusion of art projects focused on the AIDS pandemic, and to encourage programming of artists living with HIV. Our 2014 project, *ALTERNATE ENDINGS*, for the 25th anniversary of Day With(out) Art, commissioned seven artists to create short videos responding to personal stories and public memories of the ongoing crisis.

ALTERNATE ENDINGS, RADICAL BEGINNINGS continues this program by centering the effects of HIV/AIDS on Black communities, which remain underrepresented within broader understandings of the epidemic. It's alarming to note that in the 25 years that have passed since Glenn Ligon produced his 1992 broadside for Visual AIDS (reproduced on the left), effects of HIV/AIDS on the Black community have actually increased disproportionately. Given this context, it is increasingly urgent to feature a range of stories that consider and creatively explore the lives of those reflected within these statistics. For updated statistics in 2017, see the Further Context section at the back of this book.

Curated by Erin Christovale and Vivian Crockett for Visual AIDS, *ALTERNATE ENDINGS, RADICAL BEGINNINGS* prioritizes Black narratives within the ongoing AIDS epidemic, commissioning seven new and innovative videos from artists Mykki Blanco, Cheryl Dunye & Ellen Spiro, Reina Gossett, Thomas Allen Harris, Kia LaBeija, Tiona Nekkia McClodden and Brontez Purnell.

Visual AIDS would especially like to thank Vivian Crockett and Erin Christovale for their thoughtful and rigorous curation of Day With(out) Art 2017, and the incredible artists for the time and resources they have contributed to the project. Their dedication to developing new, ambitious works went far beyond what we ever imagined. We are also deeply grateful to the funders of Day With(out) Art 2017 – the Shelley and Donald Rubin Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts.

VIVIAN & ERIN CROCKETT CHRISTOVALE

CURATORIAL STATEMENT

ALTERNATE ENDINGS, RADICAL BEGINNINGS as a title came from a conversation we had around the idea of radicality and its roots in a black art tradition. The word 'radical' for us is tied to the Angela Davis quote: "Radical simply means 'grasping things at the root.'" The concept of roots speaks to enduring histories, in both negative and positive terms. Sometimes we use radical when we talk about things that are systemic, that we need to change or that are connected to histories of oppression. But radical also evokes a sense of resistance and forms of creation that have been around for a long time, and new possibilities that can sprout from the past and the present.

An ongoing project that Erin has been curating is Black Radical Imagination, a traveling film project that looks at experimental moving image by filmmakers and visual artists within the African diaspora. In Robin D.G. Kelley's book *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, he writes about black liberation movements around the world, particularly in America, and how these major movements wouldn't have been possible if someone didn't imagine a new future outside of an oppressive present. We've been thinking about what it means to practice radical imagination and what that does for those who are usually marginalized. That notion really speaks to all the filmmakers and visual artists that we commissioned for this program. The artists are radically thinking about the HIV/AIDS epidemic as Black people in this country, asserting themselves and their creative narratives amidst an ongoing discourse around who is invited into institutions.

Through her academic and museum work, Vivian thinks a lot about what gets historicized and what gets written into and out of artistic narratives. We were drawn to how powerful it could be to preserve a legacy that is usually fractured or not prioritized in a larger art historical canon. As an initial point, we were both coming off of working on a project together with Cheryl Dunye, celebrating the 20th anniversary of her groundbreaking film *The Watermelon Woman* (1996). A lot of our conversations around *The Watermelon Woman* were about the absences and the exclusions in archives and the (il)legibility of Black queerness in a historical sense. In trying to coordinate contemporary responses to the film 20 years later, it became about finding themes that resonate in a long-term capacity, inter-generationally, and the way history is transmitted by the relationships that we forward with people that have been in our communities.

In curating *ALTERNATE ENDINGS, RADICAL BEGINNINGS*, it was important for us to consider filmmakers and artists like Cheryl Dunye, Ellen Spiro and Thomas Allen Harris who were reflecting on the epidemic at the time when it came to the fore in the 1980s and 1990s. Thomas was actively producing work then about the HIV/AIDS epidemic for a television show called *The Eleventh Hour*. Cheryl was thinking about her personal narrative, as a Black queer woman, and how archives are honored and preserved. Ellen created a documentary called *DiAna's Hair Ego* (1991) about DiAna DiAna, a Black woman in the South who took it upon herself to teach safe sex in her salon at the onset of the epidemic. They were enmeshed in their communities in ways that felt foundational for this program. From there, it became about projecting into the future and thinking about artists and filmmakers who are also considering these narratives.

What's striking is that many of the projects by the younger generation of filmmakers are grappling with archive and legacy. Tiona Nekkia McClodden's broader *The Brad Johnson Project* comes out of her trilogy that looks at three Black gay male figures: Essex Hemphill, Julius Eastman and Brad Johnson. Tiona is considering how her position as a queer, Black woman relates to these histories and is in dialogue with how these figures have been remembered or have failed to be remembered. Simultaneously, she is thinking critically about her own legacy, negotiating her own presence within the art world in how she structures her projects in reflective, deeply spiritual and highly personal ways. Reina Gossett is a long-term activist and archivist and the way that she approaches filmmaking is very much part of impulses as an archivist, activist and artist. In particular, she is activating personal history in dialogue with longer sociopolitical histories of a place like New York City and the histories of trans people of color through these spaces. Kia LaBeija is also thinking through the way that she is remembered and how her artistic practice is interfacing with broader artistic discourses while also often in dialogue with her mother's history in long-term political organizing and activism.

A point of intersection for Brontez Purnell and Mykki Blanco is that they are both grappling with their intimate relationships and what has come up for them in trying to love and fuck as young HIV+ people today. Brontez has taken on so many different points of creativity in a way that is very bold, not only as a filmmaker, but also as a writer and a musician coming from

the DIY punk scene in the Bay Area. As a highly public music persona, Mykki has really used that platform to have conversations about living with HIV more frequently in the public eye, and Mykki's video utilizes endurance and performativity to highlight strength and resilience.

Centering the intersections of blackness, HIV/AIDS and cultural production opens up to a lot of plurality. There is something really powerful about taking up space in this explicit way and having that space to tell multiple stories at once. The myriad of ways in which the artists are creating their films is vastly different and not necessarily from the foundation of shared identity. It considers this idea of diaspora as always evolving. The films assert how expansive diaspora and queerness are.

Day With(out) Art 2017's premiere at The Whitney Museum of American Art is significant in thinking about the Meatpacking District and its connections to trans and queer of color histories and various forms of survival, in spite of capitalism, homophobia, transphobia, anti-blackness, criminalization and many other forces that have impacted the presence of communities in this area. We have been having explicit conversations around the spaces where our projects as curators and artists are shown, in an open dialogue that's not about condemning or demonizing a space but about speaking to the complex realities with which we are interfacing when we are in these spaces. It's about continuing to open up and assert space, specifically for Black queer folks.

Black folks are 44% of those newly diagnosed with HIV in this nation, yet there is little discourse and conversation around the urgency of this matter. We witnessed the critiques of whitewashing that were happening around the exhibition *Art AIDS America*. As curators of a program like this, it's absolutely our responsibility to intervene in that conversation, which remains very much dominated by white men. Our varied histories are not being sufficiently honored, historicized and remembered. In spite of these exclusions and the fact that this program somewhat responds to that reality, it is very much centered on telling our stories without needing affirmation from mainstream, normative systems and structures. We are asserting that these artists have been doing this work and that these histories have existed, whether or not they are recognized. *ALTERNATE ENDINGS*, *RADICAL BEGINNINGS* is a reclamation and affirmation of what has always been here.

~As told to Alex Fialho

Mykki Blanco





Mykki Blanco
STONES & WATER WEIGHT, 2017
Stills courtesy of the artist

The video stems from a technique of how to deal with anxiety and stress: metaphorically picking up the heaviest object that you can hold, so all of your attention and focal points turn to the object, as a way to alleviate mental discomfort. I wanted to queer that idea, and apply it to an act of endurance. I'm lifting heavy rocks, wood and more, and also using lingerie and corsetry—the pieces that I am playing with come from my performance wardrobe as Mykki Blanco. It's a show, a ceremony, as a reaction to people's preconceived ideas of what the physical limits are of someone who is HIV+.

People throw a lot of their own projections onto me about being HIV+ and how that now defines every single aspect of my narrative. When people know that you're HIV+, it comes with this question or gut reaction that you're somehow ill or incapable. People have this tendency to come up to me and say things like, "Oh, you look really good!" I know that they think they're being nice or feel like they have to say something because now they know this very personal thing about me, but they had no context for my health before I went public about being HIV+. I know that unfortunately that is something that people will probably do to me for the rest of my career. It's very patronizing actually, to say to someone, "You look healthy." It's like, "Well so do you! You look healthy too I guess."

I shot *STONES & WATER WEIGHT* with my boyfriend in a quarry in Norway, where I was on an artist residency. You're watching struggle and tension build in my body, and it relates to Greek mythology, Sisyphus and Atlas. Sisyphus is always rolling the stone up to the top of the hill to have it come back, and then has to roll the stone again. Atlas is a figure that holds the world in place on his shoulders, if he ever let go, the world would fly out of orbit. I very much know what it's like to feel like you have all this great success happening, while also spinning out of axis at the same time.

So much of what's happened with my career and being in the public eye happened very quickly. I have only been making work since 2012. I was lucky in that people caught on to what I was doing at a time when it felt pioneering, subversive or transgressive, amidst broader gender queer and trans visibility. Yet there have been many times when I felt very overwhelmed. I felt blessed and fortunate for everything that was happening, but also that my career and my own life was very much out of my control. During the times before I came out as HIV+, the feelings of fear, depression and stagnation spun out. I did not have a very balanced or healthy routine in my life.

The video is a thought form. I always want to tie in actual states of consciousness I have really lived. I think about my body a lot, and phys-

ical work is very much a part of who I am and what I do. My physical body is how I make my money—a majority if not all of my actual income comes from performing. I physically have to be somewhere, in a location moving my body and that is how I have eaten for the last four and a half years. If something were to happen to my body or if I were to do things that would harm my body, that would then end, derail, delay or cause a friction to how I intrinsically survive.

Through social media now there's a lot of pressure with fitness culture to look healthy. When you're losing weight, working out, when you're physically active, water weight is the first weight that you lose, it's the easiest to shed. Water is also the ingredient of who we are, essential for our life. You release water when you sweat, and I sweat in this video. It's this release but also something that is intrinsic to our survival. I do believe that you can transmute your emotions and your mental activity positively. That may mean going to therapy, needing to run two miles in the morning and at night, having to participate in a ritual of some kind—whatever form that shedding of your mental or physical trauma takes, your water weight. For me, the idea of ritual, of having a focal point, has been something that I definitely needed in my life, and I thought I could reflect that.

I didn't want my narrative as an artist to stop with my HIV admission. I didn't have examples of anyone coming out as HIV+ and that being beneficial to their career, their practice, or their public image. The only examples that I ever had of anyone coming out as HIV+ were Magic Johnson and Eazy-E, which, generationally, I have never quite been able to connect with. I was extremely scared, because I did feel as if I was on a path to breaking more barriers, within hip-hop and performance work. When I did come out and there was support, it became very clear professionally and personally who would want to be associated with me and who would not. I realized this duty for my creativity to continue working, because there was a surge of new support and compassion.

I'm HIV+ in 2017. I don't need to be nostalgic or play into society's nostalgia about my condition. By sheer definition of living how I live, making the decisions that I make in my career as an artist, I'm going to redefine what you think that condition is in general, for me and for other people. I think that for a lot of people becoming HIV+ is the worst thing that's ever happened to them. But the buck doesn't just stop at me becoming or coming out as HIV+, fading away. I still have other ideas. I still have a platform. I'm going to keep working. And I have.

~As told to Alex Fialho

Cheryl Dunye & Ellen Spiro





Cheryl Dunye & Ellen Spiro
DiAna's Hair Ego REMIX, 2017

Previous page: Production image courtesy of the artists. Photo by Bailey Goff.

Above: Stills courtesy of the artists

Ellen Spiro: I met DiAna DiAna in 1988 at an ACT UP protest in

South Carolina. The protest was against quarantine laws against people who had HIV, who were being locked in their homes. DiAna had initiated safe sex education out of her beauty salon, DiAna's Hair Ego, in the mid-1980's when she noticed her clients were potentially at risk because they were married to closeted men. We activists in New York thought we were on the cutting edge of sex education and then we show up in South Carolina and meet this hairdresser who had been promoting safer sex in her hair salon for a few years.

I had been making experimental film before, but *DiAna's Hair Ego* was my first documentary, which I made in 1989. It was just one of those stories screaming to be told and two women's voices who needed to be amplified. DiAna DiAna, the hairdresser and salon owner of DiAna's Hair Ego and her PhD partner in crime, Bambi Gaddist. Bambi had all of the academic knowledge of HIV/AIDS while DiAna had the hands on personal knowledge of what she was hearing from her clients. She said, "I'm like the priest, people confess everything to me." She knew exactly what kind of sex people were having and she knew certain sex was not safe and that people could potentially die. DiAna and Bambi have become very important voices in the HIV/AIDS discourse and Bambi is now running one of the only free clinics in the South to survive during this presidential era.

DiAna's Hair Ego was one of the first films to address AIDS with humor. I think people needed to laugh, and you felt that in the first screenings. I needed to laugh, I was in my 20's and so many of my friends were dying. People needed to laugh and they needed to have sex, and that's what got us through those times.

Cheryl Dunye: Humor can be another political strategy, it is okay to laugh instead of cry.

It is interesting how my film *The Watermelon Woman* (1996) and Ellen's film *DiAna's Hair Ego* (1989) are now such hot topics because of that. My work is centered around women of color, particularly queer women who are dealing with issues around visibility and Ellen's film was dealing with these topics in a personal way that also let the community speak.

It's been a pleasure to collaborate on this project and to re-connect with Ellen, who now lives in the Bay Area. Being that we're in Oakland, one of the epicenters of Black Lives Matter, a question that I have is what does Black Lives Matter mean to those Black bodies who are impacted by this epidemic? That's the kind of question that I put on the table with Ellen and it just turned into this beautiful remix of the original film.

What has changed in the community of South Carolina is that people are still battling this epidemic but many of the safe sex initiatives that were set in place have been eradicated in this political climate, except for Bambi's clinic. A friend of mine, Linda Villarosa, wrote an article about the epidemic in the South for *The New York Times Magazine*, "America's Hidden HIV Epidemic." The number of people affected is greater than ever. One thing that popped out to me is that there's a complacency with some of the young people who are poor, of color or disenfranchised, who don't see any hope. DiAna's salon is a beacon that teaches people how to engage, be active and make choices, because young Black and Brown people are our future.

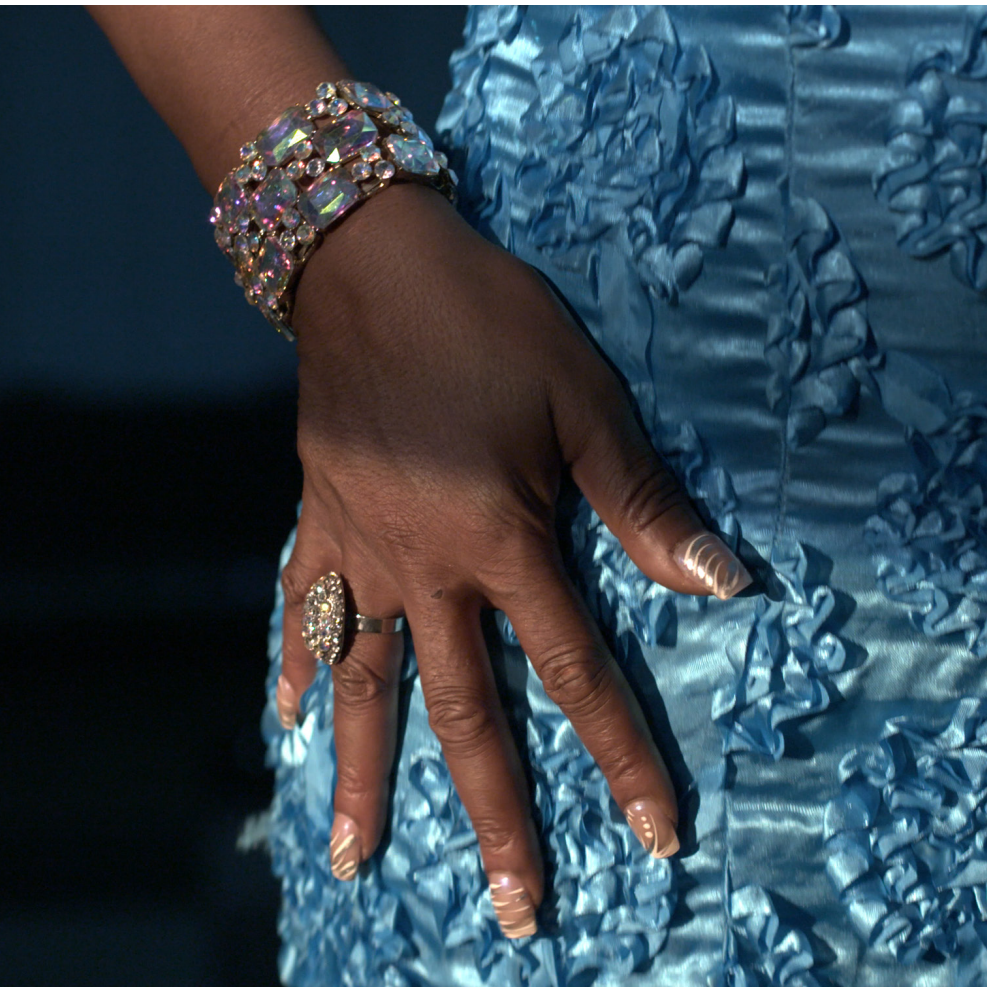
There's a whole new discourse in the gender identity spectrum now that is alive in the Deep South about being trans, and the fluidity of gender. We see the discourse vibrantly in the salon. A lot of the work is mainly occurring in Bambi's clinic, which goes into different communities and clears up incorrect notions around HIV/AIDS. Bambi took us through her clinic and was so proud, and DiAna has all of these women, men and friends who are doing the work. What I think is the most important thing is that it's okay to be sexually active, and to prepare yourself for whatever might come.

This is an 8-minute film we made and we hope it can be used as a catalyst, and will be short enough so people will watch it and it will be shared on social media. The omission of Black and Brown people from the initial articles that came out about HIV is what we're trying to deal with, because in the beginning it was labeled as the "white man's disease," and all of these people were unaccounted for. What can I do? What else can I use my visibility for? I stand together in all that I do and that's it. This is how we do it, just like the song.

~As told to Erin Christovale

Reina Gossett





Reina Gossett
***Atlantic is a Sea of Bones*, 2017**
Stills courtesy of the artist

The thread of my filmmaking is about how everyday people do everyday acts that have a tremendous impact on the world. Whether it's Marsha P.

Johnson throwing the first shot glass at Stonewall (*Happy Birthday, Marsha!*), Miss Major changing all of her IDs back to male (*The Personal Things*), or Egyptt LaBeija confronting feelings of loss through the AIDS epidemic and anti-black policing (*Atlantic is a Sea of Bones*), each film follows characters doing small things that are actually incredibly large. I have a deep desire to show how things that we are taking for granted as mundane are deeply beautiful. Everyday beauty is what feels really compelling, especially meeting people whose stories and lives have often been pushed to the background.

The idea for the Day With(out) Art video came about when I was working at the Sylvia Rivera Law Project and as part of Audre Lorde Project's TransJustice. At the time we were doing this organizing campaign around transgender and gender nonconforming people of color, low-income people and their access to welfare, because in this moment access to welfare is a survival issue. A lot of folks in our community are getting harassed at the welfare and HIV/AIDS Service Administration offices, being told, "No, we're not going to give you your benefits. Come back when you look like a man, or a woman." Egyptt LaBeija was the coordinator of TransJustice and we did a lot of "study," meaning imagining strategies about how to make things better. One day, she came in with this coffee table book that featured her and others in the '90s in the West Village. She was talking about how every single person in the book other than her was dead, and how no one who made the book asked for her permission to be photographed. We were talking a lot about the extraction of Black life, Black trans life, Black poor life that happens by artists who get public recognition and the feelings that surround that. We were also talking about loss, what it means to lose so much, and how that can haunt a place. Loss has happened through gentrification and HIV criminalization and really intense "quality of life" policing on Christopher Street, in the Meatpacking District, in Chelsea, and in the West Village. Egyptt is an incredible performer and an icon and I said, "I really want to work with you to figure out how we can share that story."

While that was happening, I was also listening to Alexis Pauline Gumbs reciting "Atlantic is a Sea of Bones," a Lucille Clifton poem. The poem called out to me about the possibility of transformation offered by listening to the violence that is haunting a landscape from historical traumas that happened hundreds of years ago. I have also been thinking about sci-fi fantasy narratives surrounding the Middle Passage for a long time. More recently, I became interested in this electronic music group Drexciya, out of Detroit, and their mythology of people who jumped and were thrown overboard in The Middle Passage starting underwater colonies and cities. I wanted to make a film about the lingering energetics and violences that shape a person's life and social space, from the transatlantic slave trade to HIV criminalization, which are all deeply, inextricably linked and bound up with each other, and not separate at all from Egyptt's story of being extracted from by these artists.

I wrote a script with this character Egyptt—who is based off of, but not actually Egyptt—working towards self-actualization, supported by Jamal, a Plutonian, Scorpio ghost figure whose self-actualization Egyptt also supports. There's an

intentional, radical reciprocity. A lot of times in these stories you get the one character that is a magical figure who is just there for the main character. I really wanted to invert that narrative of care being one-directional.

Doing the bathtub scene was remarkably hard and amazing. The water kept pouring out of the tub. I thought that was a powerful form of spirit speaking. The message was that everything is overflowing; this is not something that can be contained. And I said, "Thank you for the reminder." This feeling was beautiful, haunting and lyrical, and water became a character incorporated into the film. We also shot on top of the The Whitney Museum of American Art. Because of its new location, it is one of the places implicated in what feels so fundamentally part of a very violent cleansing. The Meatpacking District and the Piers were spaces for HIV+ people, for Black and trans life, and these spaces still exist; they are not completely gone. Connecting that to Egyptt's story and to that broader life that happened alongside the water felt really important.

My community-organizing work was a way of building a sense of power that the people who are most affected by an issue are capable of transforming the world, and don't need some other person—who has maybe more access to resources or are in a different relationship to power—to swoop in and solve the situation. We are figuring it out. We're dreaming, we're speculating, and we're making it happen. For me that was a profound journey over a decade of doing that kind of work and learning. When I was doing it, I couldn't imagine doing anything else. Towards the end, I started realizing that art and story are so important to me. Everywhere I went, I wanted to talk about Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson and Bambi L'Amour and Andorra Marks and S.T.A.R. (Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries). I was learning more and more through their friends, and the traces and imprints they left all over New York City, whether in the archives or in someone's bedroom. I felt more in a creative power that I didn't necessarily feel in my organizing work. Working on organizing campaigns was both really invigorating and also, as a disabled person, I had no spoons left after that. My capacity was totally gone, and a lot of my friends were dying. It was this moment where I realized I couldn't keep working in the way that I was because I needed to be fed in a different way. I found that the connection was sharing these stories that were so impactful to me, like Marsha's.

I had no idea what making a movie would entail, but I was very determined. I started working with Sasha Wortzel on *Happy Birthday, Marsha!*, and Arthur Jafa became our cinematographer. It was really beautiful to learn from him. I was in front of the monitor on the first night and I had this profound realization that directing is the only job that I ever wanted to do. Life has left and continues to leave a wonderful immaterial imprint throughout the city. There is something so beautiful to be able to make lives like Marsha's and Sylvia's material again, unfolding in front of me. I feel called to keep following that.

~As told to Vivian Crockett

Thomas Allen Harris





Thomas Allen Harris
About Face: The Evolution of a Black Producer, 2017
Stills courtesy of the artist

It's really important to think about the narrating of our history as a tool of empowerment. That is what I am trying to do by returning to the public television programs I produced for *The Eleventh Hour* and *Thirteen Live* public affairs shows as well as the essay I wrote entitled "About Face: The Evolution of a Black Producer." Revisiting this material with the perspective of almost 30 years, a generation, I am thinking about what it means in light of where we are today. This video has allowed me to come full circle, to access my archive in two ways: First, I'm using public television segments that I saved of my work at WNET/Thirteen from 1987–91. Second, I'm drawing from an essay written very close to that time about the work I had been doing there, a kind of metanarrative I am able to understand as a document. This Visual AIDS project brings together the present and the past, the archive and my current work—which focuses on looking at people's history, allowing people to narrate their own stories and write themselves into history.

The traditional way people think about the fight against AIDS, or the AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power, is almost exclusively through the narratives of white men. But people of color and LGBT+ folks working across gender were right there and were changing the entire landscape, and those stories rarely get the visibility. It was also a time of young, LGBT+ media-makers of color who were pushing for visibility through their work. The vanguard in the '90s, including Marlon Riggs, Cheryl Dunye, Yvonne Welton, Raul Ferrera-Balanquet, Shari Frilot, myself and others, were breaking open festivals and making space and resources available, laying the foundation for the acknowledgement of those narratives. If we had not written our own history then it would be even more of a white movement. I'm really happy that we were able to come together and produce a document: *Narrating Our History: A Dialogue Among Queer Media Artists From the African Diaspora*. This piece will receive its first publication in the United States in Yvonne Welton's forthcoming book, *Sisters in the Life: A History of Out African American Lesbian Media-Making*, as the oldest document of queer female and male filmmakers of color in dialogue with one another.

I started my professional career as a photographer, taking pictures of exiled and immigrant communities in Europe in the mid '80s. I came back to New York and was working very closely with an amazing out gay producer who was my mentor, Ellis Haizlip, who had a show in the '70s called *SOUL!* and was producing events with The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Opportunities through Ellis opened up for me to start working in television. First with Children's Television Workshop, and later I did a couple of projects that combined science and identity because I had studied biology at Harvard. I produced a show called *Who Is In Science?*, which explored the reasons why people of color and women were constantly ejected from the science fields. I had never produced a taped or live public affair show but WNET executive producers offered me a production role.

I come from an activist background. My parents were very much involved with the African National Congress and the global South Africa anti-apartheid movement, so that was something I had grown up with from a very young age. I was out from the time I entered college, and in my work—whether photography, writing, or, later, film and television—I was very much interested in bringing

voices that had been suppressed to the fore. At WNET, I embraced my role of activist and artist in addition to being a journalist, and in the process I began breaking stories and pushing the boundaries. There was a large response to HIV/AIDS among communities of color, so that was something I felt I really needed to focus on, as well as the ways HIV/AIDS awareness connected with artists, as there were a lot of artists who felt the urge to shift their practice in support of the AIDS activist movement. I was on a panel at the "Black Popular Culture" conference where I talked about the work I had been doing with WNET. That essay, "About Face: The Evolution of a Black Producer," was subsequently published in the seminal "Black Popular Culture" book and serves as the source of the inspiration for the Visual AIDS video.

It's amazing how much things have changed but also how much they have stayed the same or even regressed, especially in terms of the fights to give certain populations representation through media (which determines policy). A lot of my own shows on HIV/AIDS addressed structural healthcare inequity. Today we have the same underlying issues. HIV/AIDS is still being ignored in certain populations, particularly in the South and marginalized populations. In terms of care, it's important to fight to give platforms for these voices. HIV/AIDS in relationship to people's rights; the level of incarceration of African American and Latinx communities; scapegoating LGBT folks; funding being cut for awareness globally; people with HIV in Africa and certain parts of Europe or Asia; all of this is interconnected for me.

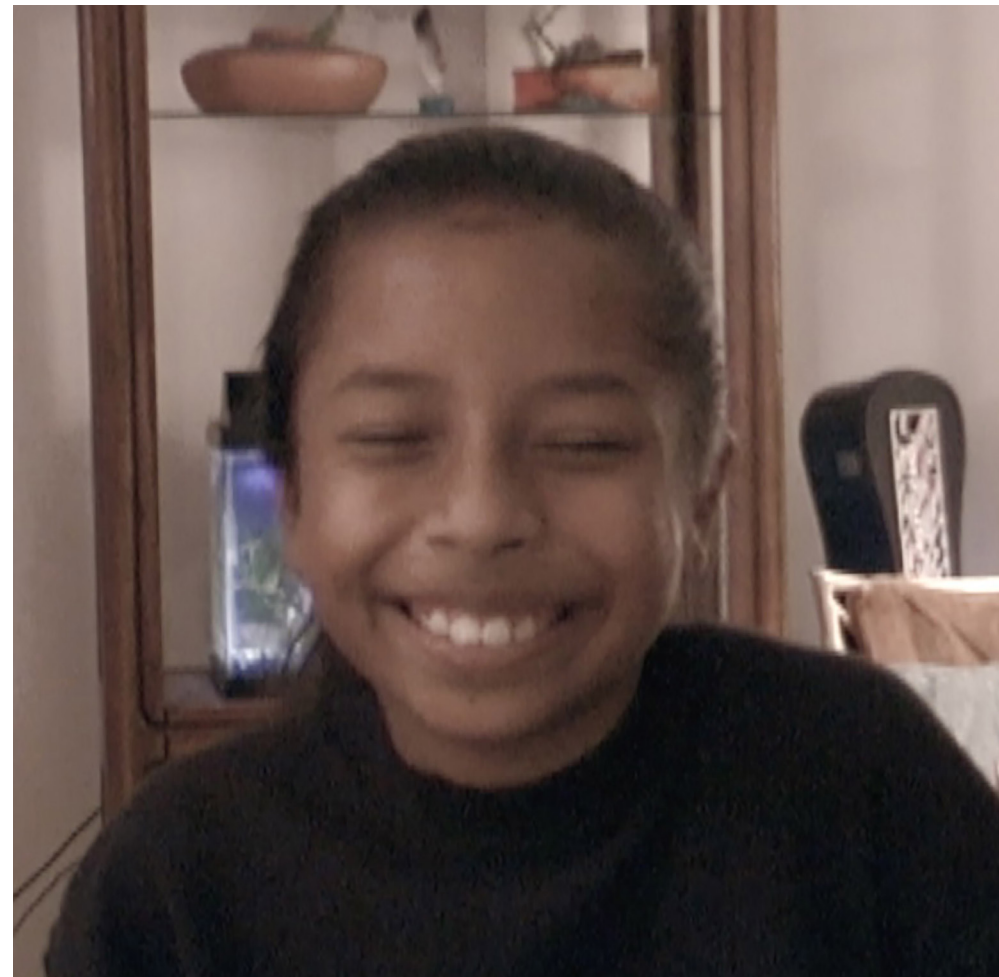
There's definitely a lot of work to do. While there is representation on the one hand—groundbreaking films like *Moonlight*—there is also tremendous marginalization of LGBT narratives, histories and realities. It seems like a retrenchment in terms of bullying and LGBT folks finding space where they can be affirmed after coming out within their families, where they don't have to remain hiding or in exile. One of the reasons that I like to teach is because I connect with young LGBT folks, people of color, HIV+ folks, artists. How can we be of better service to folks coming up? I wonder, in New York City, what's happened to the culture, post-gentrification, of certain neighborhoods? As queer people of color, what spaces do we occupy? Where are the spaces that reach back? What makes a community cohesive?

I come from an intersecting African and queer diasporic perspective. Methods of marginalization the mainstream uses against LGBT+ folks are replicated in the LGBT+ community, particularly towards trans and gender non-conforming people of color and indigent communities. It's important to talk about who gets to tell a story and who has the resources, while also looking at how certain narratives or movements get co-opted. Marlon Riggs' *Tongues Untied* or Yance Ford's *Strong Island* center personal perspectives and leadership within our community as essential to breaking silences. My artistic craft is a participatory one, often working with other people towards collective empowerment to tell stories publically and through photography, whether in the United States, Brazil, South Africa and beyond. I'm looking to open up spaces. Foregrounding first person testimonial is so important.

~As told to Erin Christovale

Kia LaBeija





Kia LaBeija
Goodnight, Kia, 2017
Stills courtesy of the artist

Even before I was practicing photography, I was shooting video. At thirteen or fourteen I got my first camera. I remember my mom saying how great it was. "I want you to tape me so I can tell you everything about my life," she said. But I never did it. I got the camera earlier that year, and by the fall she was gone. That stuck with me for a long time, a regret that kept me up at night for years.

My piece for Day With(out) Art is based on a recurring dream and the process of making sense of it. The dream takes place in the apartment I lived in with my mother before she passed away from AIDS-related complications. I guess I'm learning that the dream is about still being attached to a space that's no longer mine. It's about the things we leave behind and how trauma can sometimes leave us in limbo. As an act of defiance, I am re-imaging the dream on film, in order to process it. Sometimes having a tangible thing to sit with can open up the mind to its possibilities.

I lived in The Aurora on 57th Street for about eight years. Just mom and me. It was our safe space. It was her safe space. I never imagined being forced to leave it. The experience was so painful that over many years I've blocked most of it out. I only have one or two memories of that time. I can recall sitting in my empty loft looking at friends and family, their faces unsure of what would happen next, slowly and carefully putting things in boxes. Any other thoughts exist only in the spaces in my mind I've chosen to keep locked up.

While working on my undergraduate degree at The New School, I read *The Practice of Everyday Life* by Michel De Certeau. He talked about space and how places don't become spaces without experience, without bodies, without events that happen. It changed something within me. Maybe change is not the right word. It awakened something within me. The way that I create has always been based on where I am and how I'm feeling in a moment. What I've realized over the past few years about my self-portrait work is that most of it is about an experience and its relationship to a space. I've developed this technique to save these spaces and keep them with me.

About six months ago, my brother reminded me about all of this footage he had of my old apartment. I was excited and nervous to see it. To hear my mom's voice and to see us in our home again; it's not every day you get an opportunity like that. Once you haven't been around someone in so long, you can begin to lose them a little bit. It's been beautiful reviewing the tapes, tapping into the memories that have seemed long gone. I turned 27 this year, so I've just fallen into the black hole known as "Saturn Return." I've heard that this is the time when you look back at your life thus far. So I guess this is all right on time.

I think in relationship to HIV in particular, I'm in a very strange place. Sometimes I feel really embarrassed talking to people about what I do and the subject matter of my art. I'm proud of the work that I do, but at the same time it's difficult to really talk about it. When I was younger I didn't have the space to speak on my experiences. Now, I think I've said too much, that the parts of my story that are public have become who I am. I know I am so much more.

Some days I don't feel like my story is my own, like it doesn't belong to me. I love having the opportunity to explore these feelings by producing new work. The archival footage in this piece is especially important. Most people see me as an adult living with the virus but how often do they get to see a full life with HIV? I think seeing ourselves as children always contextualizes who we are. By allowing viewers to take a peek into intimate moments of my childhood, I am reclaiming who I am. I'm still that little girl, just a little bit bigger.

~As told to Vivian Crockett

Tiona Nekkia McClodden





Tiona Nekkia McClodden

The Labyrinth 1.0, 2017

Previous page: Still courtesy of the artist

Above: Still and production image courtesy of the artist

“The Labyrinth” is a poem that was written by Brad Johnson, published in 1995. The anthology called *Milking Black Bull* is one of the few publications where you can find Brad’s work. The book highlights Black, gay poets who were positioned as the new guard following the significant amount of poets who died from the AIDS epidemic in the late 80’s and early 90’s. “The Labyrinth” is a really sexually explicit, aggressive and transgressive poem. It’s one of my favorites of Brad’s. The piece deals with the labyrinth and the traditional form of the Minotaur, navigating the space of half man, half bull. The first line is “bull fucks with no smiles in the labyrinth / just teeth, wild and gnashing lust.” Brad refers to himself as the bull, which I find fascinating because it’s a confrontation or his way of reclaiming that title, which has been used as a racialized term in the history of Black America to describe Black enslaved men in regards to breeding. What does it mean for a Black gay man who’s not enslaved or interested in sex with women to call himself a bull, in regards to the way he navigates bathroom sex and non-traditional cruising spaces?

When people see this film, what they’re looking at is a poetic essay of sorts. I happen to be interested in tearoom porn, which is bathroom porn that usually centers around either surveillance or is actually shot in a way that’s very confined and is not always explicit. I wanted to source a surveillance porn, shot by police in a bathroom in the 1960’s, where they were basically filming men engaging in sexual acts and treating the bathroom as if it were a crime scene. I’m also using a tearoom porn that is shot-directed with music and beautiful men who are very aware that they are being filmed. I wanted to create this confrontation of both, a collage of sorts, highlighting these suggested sexual acts from different perspectives. Then there’s original footage of my actors Sara Elise and Jeremy Toussaint-Baptiste who are performing as Brad, both feminine and masculine. I think of them as my conscience, so they’re in this set space that is a more controlled environment, shot on a format that suggests Brad’s more productive time, the 80’s and early 90’s. Thematically and formally, I’m interested in using textures of those forms of media—original footage, 16mm—to trigger that memory, as well as low resolution because you’re already watching something you’re not supposed to be “seeing.”

I don’t want to tokenize Brad, which is why he’s situated in a larger trilogy. Essex Hemphill was first for me, then Julius Eastman and here’s Brad Johnson. I was interested in trying to look at three Black gay men who produced work during the AIDS epidemic or that we lost during the epidemic. What does that work look like? Essex died of complications from AIDS. With Julius, there’s not any kind of record of whether he was positive, so I don’t like to play with that. But he produced work during the height of the epidemic. And Brad Johnson acquired HIV that became AIDS in 1996, but died later, in 2011. He’s coming after, and it’s very important that we think about that range. There was a wave that hit, and then there’s these men who were friends, mentors, mentees, who lost all their peers, and were still making this work. How do you also acknowledge who they were in a sphere with? What was that space? In my work featured in *Speech/Acts* at ICA Philadelphia, Essex is in conversation with Brad because they were in conversation in real life. These were a community of people who published each other, were reading each other’s work, who knew each other, fucked each other, who were in love with each other. We have an entire community, massive bodies of work, not just these individual figures.

I’m presenting and wanting to situate this work to bring forth a new name that should be cared for under the umbrella of Visual AIDS. This is an opportunity to say, “Here is someone you don’t know about, how can we care for them?” The decision to really move with this came from being at the Visual AIDS Vanguard Awards in 2017, hearing everyone call out names of people lost to AIDS and hearing not one name that I grew up knowing. I didn’t hear Essex Hemphill’s name. I didn’t hear Marlon Riggs’ name. At one point I thought, “You should say their names.” But I wanted to be quiet because we were in a big room with the top people who said they care about these things, and I wanted to see if anybody was going to say these people’s names in this space, given what this community is about. When it didn’t happen I thought, “Okay, we’re going to deal with not only Brad but situate all these folks.” We have actually done the work to say, “Here’s the In The Life Archive at the Schomburg Center.” Steven Fullwood did that work. I’m very excited for the opportunity, as complicated as it can be, to show at The Whitney Museum of American Art, because they need to be in those spaces.

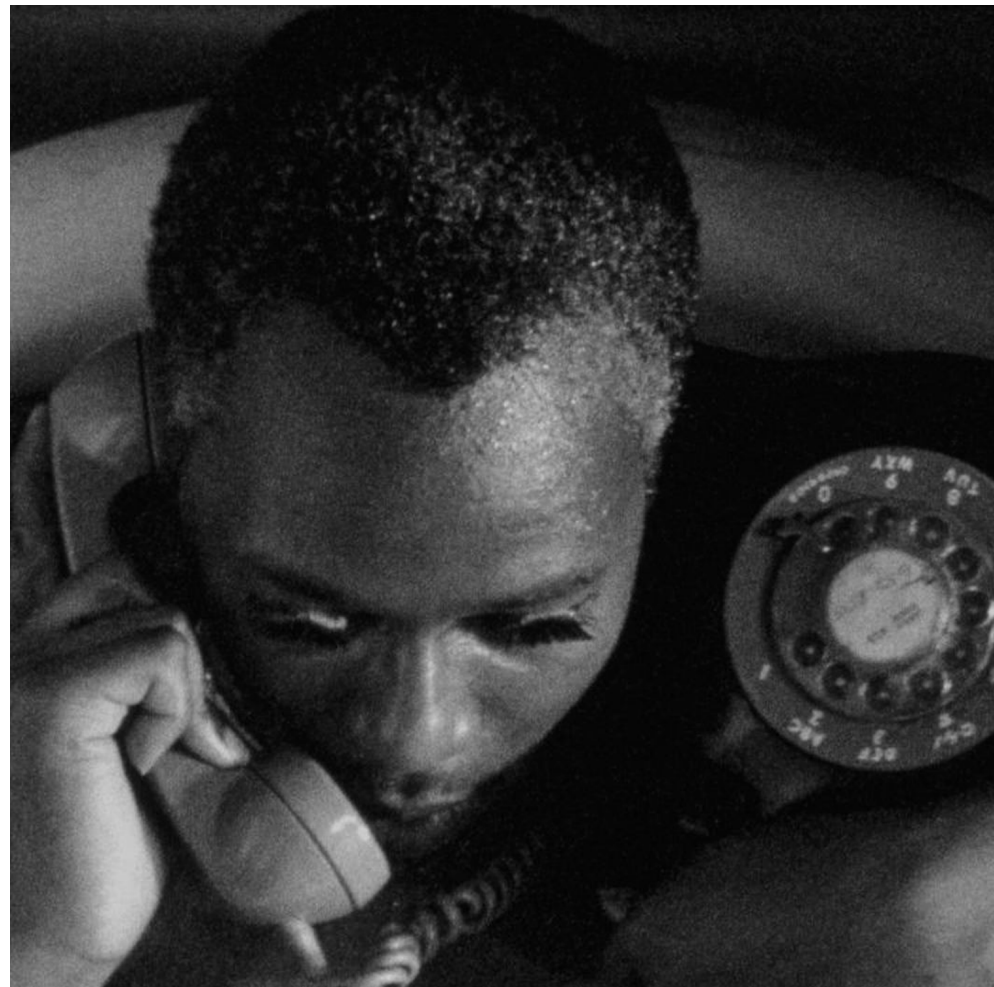
For me as a Black queer woman, in the continuation of the legacy of Black lesbians and queer women who took care of men throughout the HIV/AIDS crisis, I’ve always been invested and interested in considering in my own practice: “Where is my place in this?” *Bumming Cigarettes* is a previous film of mine that focuses on HIV/AIDS. But now I’m also considering: “How do I make sure that I show my hand?” My work on Brad was particular because I’m reading someone who’s engaged with the things I have done, that I’m into, and who has given language that’s been beneficial to me outside of my historical interest in genealogies. He was based in Philly like I am. I wanted to put myself through something that brings this man and me together, which is our interest in kink and a certain kind of language and s/m. It was about embodying the work and really going there. People talk about haptics; this is not some theoretical shit. Just like my spiritual practice, when you read or when you sing prayers to the Orisha, you dance, you feel physical fatigue; there’s a certain kind of physical embodiment that has to occur. I call it a haptic note-taking process.

Brad was very aware of the fact that he could be erased. He wrote a letter asking that his things be taken because he would be erased. But what is the exchange that one gives when they receive such a gift? What I admire about the poets that I like is that poetry leaves space for you. It can become very intimate; it really stimulates you in a way. When I went to Brad’s archives on Valentine’s Day, I was on a date. I felt reactions, physically, whether it was sadness, pain or discomfort. When I’m making these objects, I’m making something from the idea of the feeling, the language of the work that will never go away.

~As told to Vivian Crockett

Brontez Purnell





Brontez Purnell
***100 Boyfriends Mixtape (The Demo)*, 2017**
Stills courtesy of the artist

I think what gave me agency was DIY and coming from a Punk scene. Anyone who sees the work through, that's the person who's "allowed" to do it. When I look at writing or dance or making movies, some of these practices have been going on double decades for me at this point. I probably was more of a writer first, just in terms of what I had access to, but not by much because I think the first real writing that I did as a practice were zines like *Fag School*, which I started right around the time I started studying dance. Both are so close to me. Movement is like language, right? I don't really separate them that much in my head. And I'm old and I've been playing in a rock band since I was fifteen. I see them as connected, they all kind of fall in the same family. Each medium still has limits. There's this need to try and always get something out but in as many facets as possible.

The Day With(out) Art piece I'm doing is this monologue that I wrote for a dance piece I did at Counterpulse called *The Episodes* in 2013. I liked the monologue so much that I kept developing it. I recently did a short film called *100 Boyfriends Mixtape* and I am currently in the process of doing a full length *100 Boyfriends Mixtape*. I wanted to preview a scene from it, so that's why the piece for Day With(out) Art is called *100 Boyfriends Mixtape (The Demo)*. I'm working with Gary Gregerson, who is this amazing fucking queer. He did the 8mm for *Free Jazz*, the film by the Brontez Purnell Dance Company. And he shot a lot of my band's videos.

I've always been obsessed with film aesthetic. There were Indie Rock heroes I had as a teenager—Gary Gregerson, The Frumpies, The Peechees, Sadie Shaw—and their videos were always on 8mm. Even by the 90s, it was kind of outdated, or really hard to access. The reason I like 8mm film is texture and imprint. The look just has a whole different feel. Like typewriters, when you see something that is typewritten, you can see where someone was maybe writing something really angrily, and certain letters that are darker than others. On film, you get those stresses. I love the idea of a typewriter as a percussion machine too. It's just a different way of copying. And I think with all the filters they have these days you still can't get that effect. Digital is flawless, because it's calculated to be flawless.

I've been in The Bay fifteen years. When I first came here, I felt like we were kind of like these underground Punk kids, for lack of a better word, and we carried that aesthetic. But that aesthetic is not so prevalent. There have been a lot of facets affecting that, the changes of who lives here and how the money flow looks now. When I first moved here a lot of the queer community was based in protest. I remember we did that a lot, and I don't really see unity around that anymore. I noticed that

the younger queer kids like to do other things. I feel like they hang out at raves more. It's definitely really different, but people are continuing to make work as they always have. I'm heartbroken a little bit about how glum it seems right now. But then also I know it's not just The Bay, it's not just happening here. Every friend I know in every city—my friends in New Orleans, Portland, New York, Atlanta—are basically saying, "Prices are going up everywhere." It's a global wave and we're going to have to see what this means.

I think about the queer Black legacy of Rock and Punk often. I sometimes wonder about the effectiveness of Rock & Roll, but I definitely still play it out of family tradition. I'm like the last person in my family that plays it. My great grandfather was a Blues musician down South in Hard Rock Charlie and when I became of age my uncle taught me all the time. My grandmother's brother was also a Blues musician and he actually started this Blues club that's literally four blocks down the street from my house in Oakland called Eli's Mile High. Even though I get a little fatigued by the dominant whiteness of Rock & Roll, I still have lots of fun. My Black Rock & Roll experience was housed within my family and my own lineage, my blood lineage particularly, and that colors my experience. It's pretty cool and unique.

As far as living artists I love in dance, there are influences like Amara Tabor-Smith and Keith Hennessey. My peers like Sophia Wang, Larry Arrington, Jessie Hewitt—I feel a kinship with those people. As far as lineage, there are so many people. Ed Mock, who was Amara's dance father—I just did a documentary about him. Eartha Kitt, Nina Simone, Sylvia Plath, Zora Neale Hurston, Kathleen Hanna, Marlon Brando, Kurt Cobain, Amy Winehouse, Isadora Duncan, Martha Graham, Alvin Ailey. I could literally do this all day.

I was thinking about how now I'm older than I ever pictured myself being, which is not saying much, or it's sad, seeing as I'm only 35. But I think it was more that I didn't have a reference of what a queer life would look like. It's hard for me to say—I feel like I don't always know what I'm building. I have a valid idea, but I don't really know. Sometimes it is really hard to know what your present is, or how something will look years later. I just want to be known as someone that used their time and their space well. This was rad. I'm going to head over to Folsom now.

~As told to Erin Christovale

TACOMA ACTION COLLECTIVE

The Day With(out) Art curators and Visual AIDS invited the Tacoma Action Collective to provide a statement on their intervention in the exhibition Art AIDS America.



Tacoma Action Collective die-in protest at the exhibition *Art AIDS America*, Tacoma Art Museum, WA, December 17, 2015. Photo: Saiyare Rafael

#StopErasingBlackPeople - Historical Lands

Leveraging the information age to decolonize the past

Our historical lands are not recognized.

When we, the Tacoma Action Collective, saw a national art exhibit claiming to represent 30 years in HIV/AIDS history included only 5 Black artists, out of 107 participants, we knew it had to be stopped. This was not an issue of diversifying an art canon. This was a matter of life and death.

This whitewashed exhibition, titled *Art AIDS America*, was migrating from Tacoma to Atlanta, New York City, and Chicago—three cities where the disproportionate impact of HIV/AIDS on Black communities continues to unfold. Currently, Black Americans are 40% of all U.S. HIV

related deaths and 44% of new HIV diagnoses. However, by orbiting fundamentally around white-male voices, *Art AIDS America* was not only insinuating the U.S. HIV/AIDS crisis was primarily in the past, but also propagating the illusion that nearly half of the crisis had never taken place.

In requesting these dangerous omissions be addressed, we were told by the curator: “You’ll have to wait for the next one.” Meanwhile, in a time where we are historicizing the AIDS crisis, and where new developments like Truvada are being heralded as the end times of HIV, much of Black America can’t access or afford these treatments, and the silent crisis of HIV/AIDS in our communities persists outside of public view.

We would not have the HIV/AIDS treatments we have today without having demanded visibility with grassroots activism and protest art. We cannot and will not wait. And because we will not wait, the Tacoma Action Collective intervened with a die-in protest at the Tacoma Art Museum to acknowledge the over 270,000 Black lives lost to AIDS who were being erased from the story.¹ Black people in the U.S. and world-wide continue to die from AIDS in a time where AIDS is preventable and treatable. We demanded:

- The *Art AIDS America* exhibition roster be changed to include the Black community, centering Black HIV+ artists.
- Undoing Institutional Racism (UIR) training at all levels of leadership among Tacoma Art Museum personnel.
- Black representation at all levels of Tacoma Art Museum leadership.

Six months later, in our presentation at the 2016 International AIDS Conference in South Africa, we listened to the stories of delegates from Kampala, Lagos, Durban, and across the African Diaspora about how the conference itself was erasing the organizing and leadership of Black frontline communities. Furthermore, how the global HIV/AIDS treatment industry continues to leverage their crisis and labor for resources while systematically excluding African folks from positions of power in the HIV/AIDS response. Our collaborative Twitter storm that day made #StopErasingBlackPeople the #2 trending topic in Durban.

In an interview that week these stories were echoed by Kenyon Farrow (the U.S. and Global Health Policy Director for Treatment Action Group)

who thoroughly detailed how in a typical U.S. HIV/AIDS non-profit, Black staff will only be employed at entry-level community outreach positions, and almost never at higher levels of leadership. Despite being on the front lines across the planet, we are customarily excluded from power and agency in the healing of our own communities.

There are white artists representing the impact of AIDS on culture at a museum in The Bronx. And European vacationers serving as spokespeople on AIDS care and prevention at a conference in South Africa.



Our historical lands are under siege.

In the history of HIV/AIDS there's a correlation between the systemic dissolution of Black & Latinx communities through planned shrinkage in "the burning of the Bronx," and the relocation of indigenous Africans to mining labor camps under the Apartheid regime. "Contagious housing destruction" is defined in the pivotal study, *A Synergism of Plagues*, as the process of ongoing disruption of communities through severe housing instability as a result of governmental divestment.² This housing destruction is also one of the key structural contributors to an ongoing AIDS crisis. The forces of mass displacement make it virtually impossible to prevent the spread of HIV. In fact, this fracturing of communities rapidly accelerates the epidemic by disconnecting people from their basic social and economic supports. How can we end the HIV/AIDS crisis while our communities experience redlining and economic colonization?

From Tacoma to Durban, from The Bronx to Johannesburg, present-day struggles against gentrification are paralleled by the ongoing struggle for land rights of indigenous South Africans and Africans across their own continent—two sides of a single coin within the economics of legislated anti-blackness and erasure. "Continuous housing destruction" is our reality.

Our territory is stolen
Our people are removed
Our homes are dismantled
Our stories are colonized
Our activism is gentrified

Our historical lands are occupied.

Benevolent white-supremacy seems to be most effective at equilibrium. It is okay with us existing—but never in community, never on our own land, and definitely never in sovereignty. It is occasionally interested in our stories being told—but never by us, never to us, and absolutely never on our terms.

Curator Rock Hushka illustrates this equilibrium through his and Jonathan David Katz' white-centric curatorial strategy for *Art AIDS America*. As Hushka explains: "All of these artists took whatever tools were around them and they appropriated, which is a fancy word for stole, techniques from Feminist artists, Chicano artists, and African American artists for their work."

When asked to clarify artists of color being represented by proxy, Hushka continued: "It's the idea of inherent racism, of taking an art practice developed by the Latino community or the African American community, and then using it for their own devices. ...Because they stole this, all of those things are being transmitted to the next generation."³

According to this logic, Black & Latinx feminist histories are adequately represented in *Art AIDS America* as residue, "transmitted" vicariously through white men. When our authorship is erased, our intersections are erased along with it. In dismissing the work of Black artists, Katz and Hushka dismiss the structural foundations on which the HIV/AIDS crisis is built. They erase the housing, education, and employment discrimination that lead to Black trans women reporting exponentially higher rates of HIV diagnoses than any other demographic. They erase the Black trans origins of the LGBT movement. They erase mass incarceration and the criminalization of HIV. They reduce Black experiences to aesthetics and intellectual property which they can steal and sell. By extension they convince the public that Black people are inherently poor, as opposed to redlined; and innately diseased, as opposed to colonized. They cover their tracks.

Our historical lands are ours.

Given the continuous destruction we experience, Black liberation is intergenerational by necessity. Preserving our histories allows us to collaborate with the past and the future. #StopErasingBlackPeople is a demand to decolonize the production of the past, allowing these future collaborations to take place. #StopErasingBlackPeople exists to connect Black artists, archivers and community organizers across the diaspora to

disrupt the erasure of Black activism, Black authorship, and Black community. #StopErasingBlackPeople calls for a collective economics which works across our diaspora communities to center the voices of those made most vulnerable by legislated anti-blackness, misogynoir, capitalism, and ableism. We recognize history itself as a critical battlefield in our sovereignty struggle. We are taking our lands back.

We were elated when Visual AIDS shared that they were commemorating Day With(out) Art 2017 by commissioning films from Tiona Nekkia McClodden, Kia LaBeija, Mykki Blanco, Reina Gossett, Thomas Allen Harris, Brontez Purnell, Cheryl Dunye & Ellen Spiro. We thank these artists for excavating Black histories, creating the present, and imagining alternative futures. This is what radical beginnings look like. Let's continue to the end.

You can participate in #StopErasingBlackPeople by:

- Divesting from white led arts and HIV/AIDS institutions and paying tithes to intersectional Black-led community organizing
- Signal boosting and co-conspiring with Black frontline communities in the global struggle for land, housing and space
- Investing in the preservation of Black histories throughout your community
- Directly supporting Black-poz organizers and creators to further their work
- Non-Black people: Recognizing the stolen territory you profit from and resourcefully returning that power to where it belongs
- Black folks: Operating with accountability to our frontline communities and to our most vulnerable; building relationships across the diaspora

Until liberation,
Tacoma Action Collective

Tacoma Action Collective is a Black-led partnership of community organizers working in grassroots action and education in Washington State. @Tacoma_Action

¹ Fields, C. Virginia. "Top 5 Stories Involving Black People and HIV in 2015." *The Huffington Post*. December 31, 2015. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/c-virginia-fields/top-5-stories-involving-b_b_8899392.html.

² Wallace, Rodrick. "A Synergism of Plagues: "Planned Shrinkage," Contagious Housing Destruction, and AIDS in the Bronx." *Environmental Research*, no. 47 (January 4, 1988): 1-33. <https://macaulay.cuny.edu/eportfolios/braine2014/files/2014/03/Wallace1988.pdf>

³ Jordan, Christopher. "You'll have to wait for the next one" Rock Hushka's case for the exclusion of Black artists from Art AIDS America." *Post Defiance*. December 17, 2015. <http://postdefiance.com/exclusion-of-black-artists-from-art-aids-america/>.

FURTHER CONTEXT

The Center for Disease Control's initial report on the HIV/AIDS epidemic on June 5, 1981 stated that "five young men, all active homosexuals," in Los Angeles had contracted a rare form of pneumonia that would later be linked to immunodeficiency caused by HIV. The report did not mention the race of these men, who were all white, and neglected to mention two additional documented cases—one gay African-American man and one heterosexual man from Haiti living in Los Angeles. "The story of AIDS currently begins with white suffering... and this has largely informed our ethics and actions ever since," writes Ted Kerr.¹

Indeed, the omission of race continues to characterize discussions of HIV/AIDS today, despite the fact that nearly half of the 1.2 million people living with HIV in the United States are Black.² While antiretroviral treatment has rendered HIV a "manageable disease" for some, access to these medications remains mediated along lines of race, class, and geography. The disparities are stark: the CDC predicts that one in two Black gay and bisexual men will seroconvert in their lifetime, compared to one in 11 for their white counterparts. In cities like Jackson, Mississippi, 40% of gay and bisexual men are living with HIV, with an HIV-related death rate seven times higher than the country as a whole.³ These discrepancies aren't just about gay men, either—the number of new diagnoses among Black women is 16 times higher than those of white women. Trans women are the fastest-growing population of HIV-positive people in the United States, but only 11% of HIV-positive trans women are white.⁴

In her recent account of the dire state of HIV services in the South, "America's Hidden HIV Epidemic," Linda Villarosa explains how these statistics speak to a myriad of barriers around healthcare that disproportionately affect people of color and those in the South. Many southern states refused the Medicaid expansion that accompanied the Affordable Care Act in 2010, making healthcare unaffordable to populations that are already facing structural barriers around lack of employment, education, and transportation.

Even though funding for the United States government's global HIV initiative (PEPFAR) continues to receive billions of dollars of bipartisan funding, there is little federal strategy or funding for addressing the

domestic epidemic. In fact, the website for the Office of National AIDS Policy has remained disabled since President Trump's inauguration. The President has proposed slashing \$186 million from the CDC's funding for HIV/AIDS prevention, testing and support services while attempting to dismantle the Affordable Care Act.

Given this context, it is increasingly urgent to represent the complex relationships between race, class, geography and healthcare that characterize the contemporary HIV/AIDS epidemic in the United States.

~Kyle Croft

¹ Kerr, Theodore (ted). "AIDS 1969: HIV, History, and Race." *Drain Magazine*, drainmag.com/aids-1969-hiv-history-and-race/.

² "HIV in the United States: At A Glance," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/statistics/overview/ata glance.html>.

³ Villarosa, Linda. "America's Hidden H.I.V. Epidemic." *The New York Times Magazine*, 6 June 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/06/06/magazine/americas-hidden-hiv-epidemic.html.

⁴ "HIV among Transgender People," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/group/gender/transgender/index.html>.

Visual AIDS presented

Day With(out) Art 2017 ALTERNATE ENDINGS, RADICAL BEGINNINGS

**at approximately 100 art
institutions, universities and AIDS service
organizations internationally
on /around December 1, 2017**

Visual AIDS public programs involving the artists and curators took place at four marquee screenings:

The Whitney Museum of American Art, December 1, 6:30PM, followed by a post-screening discussion featuring Reina Gossett, Tiona Nekkia McClodden and Brontez Purnell in conversation with Day With(out) Art curators Erin Christovale and Vivian Crockett.

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, December 4, 6:30PM, in collaboration with The Studio Museum in Harlem, followed by a post-screening discussion featuring Cheryl Dunye, Ellen Spiro and Thomas Allen Harris in conversation with Day With(out) Art curators Erin Christovale and Vivian Crockett.

Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, December 5, 6:00PM, followed by a post-screening discussion featuring Rae Lewis-Thornton, Charles Long and Tiona Nekkia McClodden in conversation with Visual AIDS Programs Director Alex Fialho.

The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, December 7, 7:00PM, in collaboration with ONE Archives at the USC Libraries and the ONE Archives Foundation, followed by a performance by Kia LaBeija and a post-screening discussion featuring Reina Gossett and Kia LaBeija in conversation with Day With(out) Art curators Erin Christovale and Vivian Crockett.

For a listing of all screenings and further information, visit:
www.visualaids.org/projects/detail/alternate-endings-radical-beginnings

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Visual AIDS is the only contemporary arts organization fully committed to HIV prevention and AIDS awareness through producing and presenting visual art projects, while assisting artists living with HIV/AIDS. We are committed to preserving and honoring the work of artists with HIV/AIDS and the artistic contributions of the AIDS movement.



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