

ALTERNATE ENDINGS, ACTIVIST RISINGS



VISUAL AIDS • DAY WITH(OUT) ART • 2018

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Visual AIDS presents *ALTERNATE ENDINGS, ACTIVIST RISINGS* to mark the 29th anniversary of Day With(out) Art. On World AIDS Day, December 1, 1989, the first Day With(out) Art was created by Visual AIDS as a national day of mourning in response to the AIDS crisis.

ALTERNATE ENDINGS, ACTIVIST RISINGS highlights the impact of art in AIDS activism and advocacy today by commissioning short videos from six inspiring community organizations and collectives—**ACT UP NY, Positive Women’s Network - USA, Sero Project, The SPOT, Tacoma Action Collective, and VOCAL-NY**. The program represents a wide range of organizational strategies, from direct action to grassroots service providers to nationwide movement building, while considering the role of creative practices in activist responses to the ongoing AIDS crisis.

ALTERNATE ENDINGS, ACTIVIST RISINGS seeks to reflect the urgencies of today’s HIV/AIDS epidemic by pointing to pressing political concerns. In their commissioned videos, organizations address intersecting issues including anti-Black violence, HIV criminalization, homelessness, and the disproportionate effects of HIV on marginalized communities. At a moment of growing interest in the histories of AIDS activism, *ALTERNATE ENDINGS, ACTIVIST RISINGS* foregrounds contemporary engagements between activists, artists, and cultural workers on the front lines.

Visual AIDS commissioned the What Would An HIV Doula Do? collective to develop this resource guide as a supplement to Day With(out) Art 2018.

View and share these videos online starting December 3:
www.vimeo.com/visualAIDSnyc

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A DOULA'S GUIDE to ALTERNATE ENDINGS, ACTIVIST RISINGS

What Would An HIV Doula Do? is a collective of artists, activists, AIDS service employees, chaplains, doulas, and others living with and/or impacted by HIV who understand that community engagement needs to be more visible and better supported in order to maintain and build on gains made over the last 40 years of AIDS activism. Historically, a doula is someone who provides holistic service to a person during childbirth. Increasingly, doulas have also been used for end of life care, abortions and in dealing with gender. In thinking about what would an HIV doula do, we have come to understand a doula as someone who holds space and provides support in times of transition, with the understanding that HIV is a series of transitions that start long before someone takes a test, and continues long after someone might start HIV treatment, regardless of their HIV status.

Since we began two years ago, we have been using public meetings, writing workshops, art making and social media to bring people together to take action and discuss the epidemic. It was a great honor when Visual AIDS asked us if we would create the *ALTERNATE ENDINGS, ACTIVIST RISINGS* resource guide to support the videos made by grassroots AIDS activist collectives and groups. For us, these organizations represent the truth that just as no one contracts HIV alone, no one should have to deal with HIV alone either. We need community to support us in our well-being, fears, successes, and expression.

To make the guide, we gathered over two nights in small groups. We watched, journaled and discussed together. Among the first things to be said was how happy we were to see people on screen who are too rarely shown talking about HIV, including youth, black women, people from the South, and people actually living with HIV. With that in mind,

we were also aware of who was not on screen, what issues were not discussed, and the limits of any project to fully represent the breadth of the ongoing epidemic.

Watching the videos was a reminder that before there was a medical or governmental, or even artistic response to the AIDS crisis, there was a community activist response. It was people living with illness, their loved ones, and related and concerned communities who were the first to serve as end-of-life doulas, caretakers, peer educators, advocates and witnesses.

Similarly, the project is also an echo of early AIDS video activists from DIVA TV, Women AIDS Video Enterprise (WAVE), Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) and Bebashi, who picked up cameras to document their work as a form of media activism, resource sharing, and community building. Watching all the works together, we appreciated that while each video stood strong on its own, it was helpful to consider the works in conversation with each other, and across time and various AIDS activist histories.

As we considered the type of guide we wanted to share, we knew we wanted to make something that opened up the experience of viewing, facilitating the kind of conversation we were able to have. To do that, we knew that our guide would have to do more than just share information, it would have to provide a process. In the end, we hope we have made a doula tool, a resource that holds space for communities of viewers transitioning from what they thought they knew coming into the screening, to having more information; and from individual reactions to group discussion. As you watch, we hope you will be inspired to ask yourself and others: What can we do to reduce the harm of HIV, and end the AIDS crisis tomorrow?

A Doula's Guide to *ALTERNATE ENDINGS, ACTIVIST RISINGS* was created by the What Would An HIV Doula Do? (WWHIVDD) collective and students from the Fall 2018 class, "Life During Memorialization: History and the Ongoing Epidemic of HIV/AIDS in the USA" at The New School: Annalisa Dick, Brad Walrond, El Roy Red, E G Condon, Emily Colucci, Justin Yockel, Katherine Cheairs, Ollin Rodriguez Lopez, Rupert McCranor, Sur Rodney (Sur), and Tamara Oyola Santiago.

There are WWHIVDD chapters in New York City and St. Louis.
For more info: HIVDOULA.work

Vocal-NY

Vocal-NY.org



Started in 1999, VOCAL (Voices Of Community Activists & Leaders) is a grassroots membership organization based in New York State that builds power among low-income people affected by HIV/AIDS, hepatitis C, the drug war, homelessness, and mass incarceration in order to create healthy and just communities.

In the film, we see activist footage of VOCAL demonstrations from the New York State Capital to New York City streets. Using direct action, music, humor, statistics, memorialization and what VOCAL organizer Jawanza James Williams describes as “political theater,” we see VOCAL activating a multitude of creative tactics to reduce the harm of HIV and end the AIDS epidemic in the state. VOCAL’s tactics remind us that there is still a place for direct action, although the system might have us believe otherwise.

QUESTIONS

1. Why is housing important for people living with HIV? What does stable housing and access to care make possible for someone who is living with illness?
2. Jawanza James Williams from VOCAL-NY suggests that one of the major lessons from AIDS activism history is the power of people putting their bodies on the line. How does VOCAL continue working in that tradition? Have you put your body on the line? If so, what did that look like? How did it feel? What were some of the results?

GO FURTHER

- + Housing is not just a New York State issue. To find out more about the US Federal Housing Assistance program, google [Housing Opportunities for Persons With AIDS \(HOPWA\)](#), the only federal program dedicated to addressing the housing needs of people living with HIV and AIDS as well as their families.
- + Along with housing, VOCAL is also focused on the ongoing impacts of the opioid crisis and the war on drugs. Interested in learning more about this worldwide issue? Look online for the Open Society Foundation publication: *The War on Drugs and HIV/AIDS: How the Criminalization of Drug Use Fuels the Global Pandemic*. Also, visit [vocal-ny.org](#) and check out their Drug Policy page, to see what they are fighting for and the successes they have had, including successfully campaigning to legalize medical marijuana in New York.

Positive Women's Network - USA

PWN-USA.org



Since 2008, Positive Women's Network - USA (PWN) has been a national membership body of women living with HIV and allies that exists to strengthen the strategic power of all women—trans inclusive—living with HIV in the United States. Founded in 2008 by 28 diverse women leaders living with HIV, PWN-USA develops a leadership pipeline and policy agenda that applies the lens of gender to the domestic HIV epidemic grounded in social justice and human rights. Every day, PWN-USA inspires, informs and mobilizes women living with HIV to advocate for changes that improve lives and uphold rights.

In this video, viewers are invited in as women create art—making masks at the 2018 Positive Women's Network summit in Florida and screenprinting at the home of a PWN member in Colorado—providing us a view into the intimate places of mutual care they have created together across the nation.

Throughout the film, the power of community is discussed as a source of strategic strength. As PWN member Kimberly Wilson suggests, "the more casual the environment, the more willing people are to say more," and as a result, the more her community is able to lend a hand.

QUESTIONS

1. The film begins with activist and PWN member Barb Cardell explaining that, "In the early days when we didn't have anything but our anger, when we didn't have medication, we didn't have an HIV test, we had art." Decades later, now with medication and HIV tests, Barb and her peers are still making art. Why do you think they continue to create?
2. PWN organizing director Waheedah Shabazz-El makes a distinction between a support group and advocacy. What do you think differences are between the two?

GO FURTHER

- + Until 1993, the US Centers for Disease Control's definition of AIDS did not include opportunistic infections that impacted women, a systemic failure that meant that women living with HIV were being denied possible life saving treatment and state support provided to men with AIDS. To learn the role that women like Katrina Haslip, Terry McGovern, and others played in making this change, look for the film *NOTHING WITHOUT US: The Women Who Will End AIDS* and search YouTube for [Women of ACT UP NY History](#).
- + Decades into the epidemic, women continue to have to fight to be counted and considered. Medical trials consistently are conducted involving only cis men. To read more about this inequality, visit [AIDSMAP.com](#) and look up Roger Pebody's article, *Women Underrepresented in HIV Clinical Trials*.

The SPOT



The SPOT (Safe Place Over Time) is dedicated to providing services and opportunities for wellness, empowerment, and leadership to young men in Jackson, Mississippi. In her 2017 New York Times Magazine article “America’s Hidden H.I.V. Epidemic,” Linda Villarosa highlighted the ongoing urgency of the HIV epidemic in the American South, particularly in Jackson, where 40 percent of gay and bisexual men are living with HIV—the nation’s highest rate.

In this film we spend time with Cedric, Jermerious, and Regi, who were all highlighted in Villarosa’s article, and are invited into a tight-knit community of people using expression, gender play, dance, and other tools to save each other’s lives. The impact of creativity, along with treatment and other forms of care, are vital. As Regi says at The SPOT on camera, “dancing is a healing art.”

QUESTIONS

1. In the film we see young men at The SPOT holding hand-held blue mirrors. Known as the “Man in the Mirror” exercise, it is an opportunity for people to really see themselves. What could be the impacts of doing this exercise with your community?
2. Regi shares his term “hoe-ography,” reclaiming what is traditionally a negative term to encourage people to improve their relationship to their bodies. In a sense, Regi is in conversation with Michael Callen and Richard Berkowitz who laid out the framework for safer sex and advocated for mutual affection as a form of AIDS care in their 1983 publication *How to Have Sex in an Epidemic*. How can you continue this tradition of sex positivity to reduce the harm of HIV?
3. The film begins with a shot of a building in Jackson. For the rest of the film we are inside The SPOT. What does this tell you about the need for safe space and the importance of community privacy? What does your community need to thrive and express?

GO FURTHER

- + Suggested viewing: *Wilhemina’s War*, about HIV’s impact on one family in the southern United States, and *Endgame*, a broader look at HIV within Black communities around the US, including parts of the American South. Both are on PBS and are powerful to watch in a group or with a class, clips are available online.
- + People can connect to their bodies at The SPOT. In his book, *Anti-Black Racism and the AIDS Epidemic*, Adam Geary urges us to see how it is not what we do with our bodies that most often determines our health, but the limits of what we can do with and for our bodies as imposed by the state. For more information, look for Adam Geary’s interview on the Visual AIDS blog.

Tacoma Action Collective

@TacomaActionCollective



Founded in 2015, the Tacoma Action Collective is a partnership of Black community organizers working in grassroots action and education. In this video, members of the collective make connections between anti-Black racism, Black Lives Matter, cultural production, HIV/AIDS and self care through an exploration of their process as artists, activists, writers and community healers.

Tacoma Action Collective responds to interconnected structural violence with the demand #StopErasingBlackPeople. In their video, we see their 2015 die-in protest at the Art AIDS America exhibition at the Tacoma Art Museum, intervening against the lack of Black artists in the exhibition, examples of street art being made, and their work at the 2016 International AIDS Conference in South Africa.

QUESTIONS

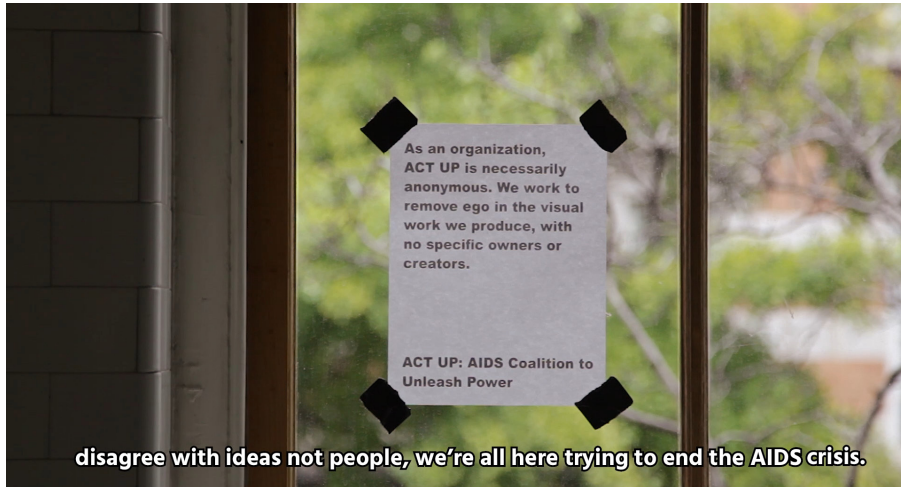
1. Protesters hold "I Am Sandra Bland" signs in the film, referring to the activist from Illinois who was killed in 2015 while unjustly held by police. TAC works "to eliminate systemic oppression and structural violence." For you, what is the connection between police violence and HIV/AIDS? How do you see HIV as being related to systems and structures of oppression?
2. In its initial iteration, *Art AIDS America* only included five Black artists in a roster of over 100 artists, despite the fact that HIV disproportionately affects Black communities. Thinking about #StopErasingBlackPeople, why is it important to hold museums and cultural institutions responsible for how they represent cultural histories?

GO FURTHER

- + From the Tuskegee syphilis experiment, to the dehumanizing experiments of Dr. J. Marion Sims, to the underacknowledge exploitation of Henrietta Lacks, there is a documented history of medical violence and bias against Black people. This creates mistrust, and makes the efforts of doctors, nurses and others doing culturally competent care that much more worthy of attention. Learn more: search the underlined words above and consider a book club with Harriet A. Washington's *Medical Apartheid* and *Killing the Black Body* by Dorothy Roberts.
- + Decolonize This Place is a collective calling for, among other things, the reparation of African and indigenous objects, a commitment from museums to have deeper diversity of curatorial staff and leadership, and occupied indigenous land acknowledgement. Learn more about their work at decolonizethisplace.org.
- + We would be a lesser world were it not for organizations like the Black Panthers, the literary collective Other Countries, the Philadelphia-based liberationists MOVE, "Where We At" Black Women Artists, Inc, and The Counter Narrative Project. Why are these groups seldom taught and rarely canonized? Add to this list and peer educate.

ACT UP NY

ACTUPNY.com



Since 1987, ACT UP NY has held weekly Monday meetings, most often at the LGBT Community Center. Their early demonstrations, media campaigns, and direct actions promoted an intersectional understanding of HIV and AIDS as a raced, classed, and gendered issue as well as a medical matter; they were also successful in getting drugs into bodies by lowering drug prices and changing the process for drug trials. They transformed mourning into public action with political funerals and their legendary protests against the NIH, CDC, Catholic Church, and US government harnessed the collective rage and despair of the first decades of the AIDS crisis.

In 2018, an arm of the collective organized #HIVPreventionDay in conjunction with Prep4All, calling on Gilead Sciences to release their patent for Truvada, a drug that has the ability to reduce HIV transmission by 99%. In this video, the ACT UP Graphics and Visual Tactics Working Group pairs audio from planning meetings with seven sites in New York while sharing values and strategies the collective uses to build power.

While much cultural production has been made about the history of ACT UP, this video is one of the few self-reflective projects ACT UP has made in recent years.

QUESTIONS

1. While ACT UP has a history of putting bodies, faces, and reputations on the line through cultural production, direct action activism, and meetings with government officials, this video uses anonymity as a tactic to reduce ego from the work. Why do you think they chose to represent themselves in this way? What are the pros and cons of working anonymously?
2. ACT UP created #HIVPreventionDay, a day of action to raise awareness about HIV prevention and pharmaceutical patents. What are differences between activism that centers people living with HIV versus prevention for people who are HIV negative? How can they be seen as separate strategies? How can they be seen as interconnected and related strategies?

GO FURTHER

- + In the Fall of 2018, ACT UP held demonstrations at an exhibition of artist David Wojnarowicz's work at The Whitney Museum of American Art, reminding museum-goers that "AIDS IS NOT HISTORY" while arguing that the museum was contextualizing HIV as an historical issue. The group was successful in getting the Whitney to change wall text within the exhibition to acknowledge the ongoing epidemic and David Wojnarowicz's role in ACT UP. Search [Whitney, ACT UP and David Wojnarowicz](#) for further details.
- + Briefly mentioned in the film, the IAC stands for the International AIDS Conference, which takes place every two years. It is slated to be hosted in San Francisco and Oakland in 2020. Many activists think this is a bad idea, citing travel bans and the increasing violence directed towards sex workers, trans women and other people marginalized by the United States. For more information, search [#AIDS2020ForAll](#).
- + For Day With(out) Art 2012, Visual AIDS presented the film *United in Anger*, a documentary about the history of ACT UP directed by Jim Hubbard. Search for it online, and check out the tumblr we made: [Wisdom in Being United In Anger](#).

Sero Project

SeroProject.com



Sero Project is a U.S.-based network of people living with HIV (PLHIV) and allies fighting for freedom from stigma and injustice. The name Sero Project refers to “serostatus,” which is another way to say HIV status. Sero is particularly focused on ending the inappropriate use of one’s HIV status in criminal prosecutions of PLHIV, including for non-disclosure of serostatus and potential or perceived HIV exposure.

The criminal justice system considers HIV a deadly weapon, and in many states exposing someone to HIV is a crime, regardless of condom use, viral load, or actual risk of transmission. For people living with HIV, a contentious relationship, a personal misunderstanding, or even a minor infraction of the law can lead to prison sentences of over thirty years, sensationalized media coverage, and registration as a sex offender.

With the Positive Women’s Network - USA, Sero Project produces the biennial HIV is Not a Crime training academy to support advocates mobilizing at the grassroots level for HIV criminalization reform. The 2018 conference included a showcase of visual art and poetry made by advocates working against HIV criminalization. In this film, four of the featured artists are interviewed, discussing creativity and the impact of criminalization on their life chances and spirit.

QUESTIONS

1. In the film we see Contonna’s painting which depicts his three hearts, impacted by stigma. If you were to make a similar painting, what would be your three hearts?
2. Do you think the police and the criminal justice system can be effective tools for responding to the HIV/AIDS epidemic? How might they exacerbate health disparities and inequality in access to treatment and healthcare?
3. Thinking with others, what are the impacts of HIV Criminalization on individuals and communities living with HIV? For people in prison?

GO FURTHER

- + Visual AIDS collaborated with Avram Finkelstein to create a broadside project to educate about HIV criminalization. Google [You Care About HIV Criminalization \(You Just Don’t Know It Yet\)](#) to get the facts about criminalization and to print your own copy.
- + Over 30 states across the US have HIV-specific laws that criminalize people living with the virus, and states without specific laws have been known to use general laws to punish and increase jail time for people living with HIV. Find out more about your state by going online to The Center for HIV Law and Policy.
- + In the past few years, more research on HIV criminalization and its history has been published. Consider a book club for: *Punishing Disease: HIV and the Criminalization of Sickness* by Trevor Hoppe; *Making Media Work For HIV Justice* by Olivia G. Ford and Positive Women’s Network - USA, on behalf of HIV Justice Worldwide; and *Cell Count*, edited by Kyle Croft and Asher Mones.
- + To listen to the impacts of HIV criminalization on people who have been prosecuted search [Sero Project Videos](#). Share what you learn. Organize a group listening session.

GLOSSARY

Below is additional information that could be helpful for watching *ALTERNATE ENDINGS*, *ACTIVIST RISINGS*. Consider what words, terms, and definitions you would add.

AIDS ACTIVIST VIDEO is a direct descendant of a rich and varied tradition of alternative cinema. The immediate impetus for AIDS activist video was the deadly, inadequate government response and the meager and antagonistic reporting of the mainstream media. Videomakers felt compelled to tell the real story of AIDS from the point of view of People With AIDS (PWAs). The tapes portrayed PWAs as neither victims nor pariahs, but as empowered activists taking charge of their health in both the political and medical arenas. This was not the whole story, but it served as a necessary counterpoint to the relentlessly negative depictions by the mainstream media. (source: Jim Hubbard)

ANTI-BLACKNESS can be understood through a quote and a prompt from Ta-Nehisi Coates: "If there's one thing missing in our country, it's an acknowledgment of the broad humanity of Black folks. Racism—and anti-Black racism in particular—is the belief that there's something wrong with Black people." Anti-Blackness encompasses systemic historical, cultural, political, and economic violence. (source: Aorta)

DECOLONIZATION is the active principle that attempts to undo state violence, including Eurocentric dominance, white supremacy, racism, ethnic cleansing, genocide, slavery, land theft, imposed treaties, broken promises, relocation, forced assimilation, government manipulation, corporate control, psychic violence and all the associated forms of oppression that continue to impact indigenous people and people of color in the Americas are identified, confronted, called out, and resisted. Decolonization attempts to undo the colonization of the individual, the community and the earth with protest, social justice activism, civil disobedience, education, cultural projects and legal battles. (source: Unsettling America, Decolonization in Theory & Practice)

DIRECT ACTION activism can be understood as having three fundamental principles: 1. Win concrete improvements in people's lives. 2. Make people aware of their own power (by winning victories). 3. Alter the relations of power between people, the government, and other institutions by building strong permanent local, state and national organizations. (source: Bread & Roses Community Fund)

GRASSROOTS organizing happens when people are drawn together by something that they have in common that has both personal and community consequences, and they grant themselves the authority to solve the problem they are facing or create the future they desire without institutional support. (source: Janis Foster)

The **HUMAN IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS (HIV)** attacks the body's immune system, specifically the CD4 cells (T cells), reducing their number, making the person more likely to get other infections or infection-related cancers. If not treated, HIV can lead to AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome). People are diagnosed with AIDS when their CD4 cell count drops below 200 cells/mm or if they develop certain opportunistic illnesses.

(source: Centers for Disease Control)

HIV CRIMINALIZATION refers to the use of criminal law to penalize alleged, perceived or potential HIV exposure; alleged nondisclosure of a known HIV-positive status prior to sexual contact (including acts such as biting or spitting that cannot transmit HIV); or non-intentional HIV transmission. (source: AIDS Watch)

INTERSECTIONALITY is a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw that helps us see where power comes from and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LGBTQ problem there. Many times that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things. (source: Kimberlé Crenshaw)

PRE-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS (or PrEP) is when HIV-negative people take daily HIV medicine called Truvada to lower their chances of getting the virus. Gilead, the pharmaceutical company that manufactures Truvada, currently controls the patent and pricing for this drug. (source: Centers for Disease Control)

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE is one way of describing social arrangements that put individuals and populations in harm's way. The arrangements are structural because they are embedded in the political and economic organization of our social world; they are violent because they cause injury to people. (source: Paul Farmer)

SOCIAL PRACTICE can include any artform which involves people and communities in debate, collaboration or social interaction. This can often be organised as the result of an outreach or education program, but many independent artists also use it within their work. A dinner, a health clinic, or a dance party can all be considered artworks from the perspective of social practice. (source: Tate Museum)

UNDETECTABLE refers to how regularly taking HIV medication can lower the amount of HIV in your blood (aka your viral load) to an undetectable level. People who are undetectable (or, you can say, whose viral load is suppressed) cannot transmit the virus to others. This doesn't mean you no longer have HIV—it means that by continuing your plan of treatment, you can live with HIV by managing your health on your own terms. (source: Housing Works)

WHITE SUPREMACY can be understood through this quote by Frances Lee Ansley: "I do not mean to allude only to the self-conscious racism of white supremacist hate groups. I refer instead to a political, economic and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings." (source: Frances Lee Ansley)

Day With(out) Art

In 1989, to make the public aware that AIDS can touch everyone, and to inspire positive action, Visual AIDS presented the first Day Without Art—organizing museums and art institutions nationwide to cover up their artwork, darken their galleries, and even close for the day—to symbolically represent the chilling possibility of a future without art or artists. Since then, Day With(out) Art has grown into a collaborative project in which organizations worldwide present exhibitions, screenings and public programs to highlight work by HIV+ artists and artwork addressing current issues around the ongoing AIDS pandemic.

Visual AIDS

Founded in 1988, 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, and preserving the work of artists with HIV/AIDS and the artistic contributions of the AIDS movement.



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