



**VIRAL
INTIMACIES
11.09. – 16.11.2025
GROUP
EXHIBITION**

**Exhibition Catalogue
neue Gesellschaft für
bildende Kunst (nGbK)**

V**Vulnerability,
Violence**

Viruses don't discriminate; structures do. HIV exposes vulnerabilities. HIV embodies violence—against trans people, sex workers, IV drug users, queer folk, racialized communities.

I**Intimacy**

It is the pause before a touch, the soft noticing: how your breath changes when the room grows colder.

R**Riot**

Rabia que es digna. The pink triangle was first used by the Nazis to mark queer men in concentration camps. Decades later, AIDS activists reclaimed and reversed it—refusing stigma, demanding political action. They rioted against the systematic neglect of their deaths.

A**AIDS**

Erworbenes Immunschwachesyndrom. Síndrome de inmunodeficiencia adquirida. AIDS consists of a few words: Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome, but it carries a whole universe of stories.

L**Love, Lust,
Liberation**

Zu lieben ist ein revolutionärer Akt. "The moment we choose to love we begin to move against domination, against oppression. The moment we choose to love we begin to move towards freedom, to act in ways that liberate ourselves and others." —bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture*, 1994

I**Inequality**

Who has access to antiretrovirals, the drugs to treat an HIV infection? Wer kann sich die HIV-Prophylaxe PrEP leisten—und ohne Sorge ficken?

N**Ní una más!**

HIV is not a single issue or the burden of one group alone. It has taught us to show up—and stand up—for one another.

T**Tod**

Silencio = Muerte. Silence = Death. "Ich bin tot," schrieb Jürgen Baldiga auf einer Postkarte, die ihn mit eingefallenem Gesicht und Clownsnase zeigte. Der Künstler nahm sich im Dezember 1993 das Leben, nachdem er vier Jahre mit Vollbild-Aids lebte.

I**Indetectable**

indetectable = intransmissible, undetectable = untransmittable "Art may be undetectable, but it's always transmissible." —Camilo Acosta & Santiago Lemus, *Yellow Manifesto*

M**Medicine,
Medikamente,
Mucha mierda**

Esto no es una cura. This is not a cure. 2024 erzielte das Pharmaunternehmen Gilead einen Gewinn von über 16 Milliarden Euro durch den Verkauf von HIV-Medikamenten.

A**Activism**

A los que se fueron, están yendo y se van a ir. Rest in power those who fought for us, the dykes, sluts, trannies, fags. Your names may be forgotten. But you are the ones who made our future queer.

C**Count to 200**

HIV attacks CD4 cells of the immune system. If a person has less than 200 CD4 cells per mm³ blood, they are said to have AIDS. HIV therapy reduces the replication of the virus. If less than 200 copies of HIV per ml blood are found, one is *undetectable*—and can't pass the virus on.

I**Injecting**

Needles shape bodies and lives. They administer drugs, hormones, vaccines, medication—and sometimes the virus itself. Each injection is a story: Of choice, coercion, chance, or a feeling called home.

E**Erasure**

"I nee_ to k_ep_our me_ories ali_e and te_l our s_ories"—Hanna Schach, *Who are we, if we're too afraid to be who you are?*

S**Sex**

"it is our promiscuity that will save us," wrote Douglas Crimp in 1987. War Sex unsere Rettung? ¿Será el sexo nuestra salvación?

5
Curatorial
Statement

9
Work
Descriptions

37
Hanna Schaich
in conversation with Kat Cheairs
“The meaning of HIV,
is not dead!”

47
Madi Awadalla
What the Virus Saw:
Touch, Borders,
and Other Infections

54
Santiago Lemus & Camilo Acosta
Manifiesto Amarillo/
Yellow Manifesto (2023)

57
Samuel Perea-Díaz
in conversation with Benny Nemer
Intimate Ancestries

65
Max Schnepf
Forever and You: PrEP and
HIV’s Archive of Feelings

75
Artist
Biographies

Curatorial Statement

Is intimacy as contagious as a virus—or even more so?

Intimacy thrives in proximity, spreading from one body to another like a germ seeking its next host. Like a virus, it can seize us—leaving us vulnerable, disoriented, enthralled. But intimacy is not only romantic or erotic. It shapes the textures of our daily lives—across private moments, political movements, and institutional structures.

Over evolutionary time, viruses have inscribed themselves into our very biology. Scientists estimate that nearly eight percent of the human genome consists of ancient retroviruses—the same viral family as HIV. These once-foreign agents have become part of us. In this sense, viruses don't just infect—they mutate, code, and co-create what it means to be human. Both intimacy and viruses move quietly—through fluids, memories, sex—rarely seen, yet deeply felt.

The exhibition and event program *VIRAL INTIMACIES* brings together artists, activists, and scholars to reflect on such intersections by addressing the contemporary conditions of HIV/AIDS as they are shaped by politics, biomedicine, and social locations. It assembles positions that linger in the entanglement of HIV and intimacy, in the charged spaces where they meet and transform each other. Twelve contemporary works show how HIV continues to shape life today—across borders and the politics of care. Rather than treating HIV/AIDS as a chapter closed, the exhibition insists on its presence: as stigma, survival, sex, struggle.

More than four decades into the HIV/AIDS epidemic, much of its histories remain untold. In response to the AIDS crisis, people came together

to support one another, fight for healthcare, distribute medication and knowledge, and intervene in science and policy. The queer politics of care, kinship, and resistance born out of HIV/AIDS still shape how we live, love, fuck, and resist today. These intimacies—like viruses—carry the potential to remake worlds, yet always remain exposed to rupture, loss, and withdrawal.

How do we listen to lives cut short, gestures forgotten, bodies rendered disposable? It requires attention to those that the dominant narratives of medicine and public health have dismissed or erased: people excluded from decision-making, those never invited into the room, and the forms of knowledge historically devalued. It also means situating HIV/AIDS within broader histories of extraction and colonial violence that have displaced communities and deepened inequalities. And finally, it necessitates resisting the illusion of historical closure. To this end, *VIRAL INTIMACIES* gathers fragments, counter-narratives, and fugitive traces—without claiming to complete the picture. It listens in the gaps, the shadows, the emotional surplus of official histories.

To this day, HIV continues to mutate across bodies, meanings, and time. But this mutation is not only biological—it is political, relational, intimate. As philosopher Paul B. Preciado reminds us, “Just as the virus mutates, if we want to resist submission, we must also mutate.”¹

NOTES

¹ Paul B. Preciado, “Learning from the Virus,” *Artforum* 58, no. 9 (May–June 2020).

Work Descriptions

**Camilo Acosta &
Santiago Lemus
Los Amarillos (2022)
Manifiesto Amarillo
(2023)**

Los Amarillos (2022) is an experimental fiction based on the artists' biographical experiences. It tells the story of two individuals in Bogotá, Colombia, who face alienation and ostracization due to their adherence to low-cost antiretroviral therapy for HIV/AIDS. Jaundice, or a yellowing effect of the skin, is a common side effect that can act as a signifier of HIV-positive people in Colombia. Resisting this stigma, the two artists ingest packets of antiretroviral pills throughout the video, slowly turning the color of their skin to an exaggerated yellow.

Manifiesto Amarillo (2023), a performative extension of *Los Amarillos*, shares what Camilo Acosta and Santiago Lemus term "The Yellow Principles" through a manifesto (see pages 52/53). Much like the daily intake of medication by an HIV-positive person, the artists ingest the words printed on edible paper as a way to swallow the demand, the sacred, the nostalgia, and the utopia. Within the ritualistic space, thirty political-poetic images question the ongoing challenges of living with the virus, the urgent need to dismantle stigma, the role of art institutions, and the place of dissident bodies are put forth. *Los Amarillos* is a collective founded by Lemus and Acosta, two openly gay visual artists who are also visible as HIV-positive individuals.

Video, 10:16 min

Performance, 40 min

**Manifesto printed on edible paper,
yellow ink, ninety cups, three water
containers, textile**

Jorge Bordello
THIS IS NOT A CURE
(2024)

Jorge Bordello, a person living with HIV, enters the space and takes an ART pill with a glass of water. He writes slowly and repeatedly the words, “This is not a cure,” until the chalk is completely used up and all boards are full. Reciting economic data associated with antiretrovirals, Bordello lays bare a paradox: antiretroviral medication can sustain life, yet it offers no cure. It brings into focus the everyday realities of living with HIV, the economic structures that shape the pharmaceutical industry, and the gap between medical progress and social justice. The use of chalk evokes fragility and impermanence, repetition and erasure—a reminder of the ongoing struggle for an actual cure.

Kat Cheairs
Voices at the Gate
(2021)

Voices at the Gate is a video work commissioned initially by Visual AIDS for the Day With(out) Art, 2021. Recorded minutes from the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility for Women in Upstate New York, *Voices* is a meditation on the intersection of HIV/AIDS activism, carcerality, landscapes, memory, being, belonging, and community care. Viewers are invited to witness, touch, and add to the natural materials on the altar excavated from sites near Berlin connected to histories of enclosure, containment, and incarceration.

Naya de Souza
My body is a country
you will never visit
(2025)

In *My body is a country you will never visit*, Naya de Souza offers a searing reflection on “sexual tourism.” Rooted in her personal experience stemming from a trip to Thailand and an earlier HIV diagnosis linked to a sexual tourist, the installation unfolds both as a testimony and critique. Two “tourists” stand before a projected video, a compilation of chat logs and collectively sourced material that makes explicit what they do not try to hide, yet the world refuses to see. This staged moment of leisure collides with digital fragments of exploitation, highlighting the absurdity and violence masked by the aesthetics of travel. Linking Brazil, Berlin, and Bangkok, the work exposes the racial, gendered, and viral economies at play in the global sex industry. Simultaneously, it skews the performative innocence of travel influencers and the myth of the “authentic experience” they aim to sell. *My body is a country you will never visit* reveals the gaze of the ones who move freely, and those whose bodies are reduced to a destination.

Christa Joo Hyun D'Angelo
Protest and Desire
(2019)
It's Complicated
(2019)

Protest and Desire is a video artwork that challenges popular STD (sexually transmitted disease) and HIV discourse by focusing on how women of color deal with intimacy, sex, and age in relation to STDs and HIV within the landscape of white Europe. The work delicately unveils inherent biases that are bound up with women of color and their struggle to attain acceptance both within and outside their own communities. Through dream-like sequences and whimsical imagery, *Protest and Desire* imagines new ways to define what is normal and offers new meaning to “sickness,” desire, and relationships by confronting the ghosts of the past and the fears that haunt our present realities.

**Video installation 4K, 2-channel video,
surround sound, 19:55 min
Projection, red neon light sculpture,
pillows, carpet**

**3 phase blinking neon
90 x 90 cm
Collection of Klaus Dierkes and
Xiaochan Hua**

**Pascale Espinosa
(aka Tomas Espinosa)
Ein Sommer in Berlin
(2021–2023)**

365 ceramic pills lie on the floor. Handmade and painted, each one is unique, yet they form a whole: they represent the amount of antiretroviral drugs that a person who is HIV-positive must take in a year to protect themselves and others from the disease and, at the same time, to reduce the number of days it takes for HIV to become undetectable in the blood with 100% certainty. Taking the medicines is still a daily commitment, as HIV is still considered incurable.

Life during the pandemic in 2021 is also a fundamental context to the work. Ceramic is a fragile material that can break and splinter easily. In this context, it also represents the human body and the uncertainty that arises when it is fundamentally and continuously at risk of disease—especially during a pandemic. At the same time, the pills represent the fact that some bodies are exposed to greater dangers due to the social mechanisms that force them into situations where they are exposed to higher health risks. The work *Ein Sommer in Berlin* not only symbolizes the continuous and physically demanding process that people undergoing treatment for HIV go through but also raises questions about social justice and inequality when it comes to biomedicine.

**Ato Kwamina Hasford
(Oteanankanduro)
We Are Not Your Risk
(2025)**

We Are Not Your Risk is a sound missive that confronts the racialized surveillance of queer African bodies in European hookup cultures. Through layered narration, soundscape, and ambient textures, the piece challenges the entitlement to medical histories, the pathologizing of Blackness, and the way HIV stigma is used to silence and control. Drawing from the artist's lived experience, the work expands on themes from their ongoing *Decolonising Queerness* (2024) series. It leans into sound as presence, intimacy, and haunting. Referencing colonial echoes of containment and the current complicity of queer spaces, *We Are Not Your Risk* refuses the idea that care must come through suspicion. Presented through a minimalist installation—an old radio, stools, and headphones—the work uses the metaphor of broadcast to speak both to and beyond the room. It invokes questions around who gets to feel safe, who gets to be heard without proving innocence, and what happens when institutions mirror the harms they claim to resist.

This is not a plea. It is a declaration. You don't get to police us. You get to meet us—or move.

Kia LaBeija
BABIES WITH AIDS
HAVE NO PARENTS
(2025)

I lost my father at the end of 2024, twenty years after my mother's death to an AIDS-related illness. All three of us were diagnosed with HIV in 1993 and together, as a family, we did our best to survive the crisis before there was any available treatment. In the 1980s and 90s, the sentiment by the US government around babies and children living with HIV was that many were abandoned by "irresponsible mothers" and were therefore a costly burden to states. "Babies with AIDS have no parents" is a quote from Emma Day's book *In Her Hands, Women's Fight Against AIDS in The United States* (2023). As an adult survivor of pediatric HIV who has now lost both parents, I felt a deep resonance. I was compelled to re-contextualize this outdated, derogatory statement as it pertains to my own experience. Through poetry, text, and a photograph I took of them during our final New Years together in 2004, I honor my parents who loved and took care of me (and each other) under unimaginable circumstances.—Kia LaBeija

**Ivan L. Munuera
(with V. Rotie and P. Saiz)
PrEP Bread (2023)**

PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) has revolutionized bodies and their chemical landscapes. Used to prevent the contraction of HIV, tenofovir and emtricitabine block the enzyme that HIV needs to replicate, thereby reducing the amount of virus in the body. To enhance their absorption, they should be taken with a light meal, and gluten-free bread has been proven effective. The ingredients in the recipe to make a slice of bread to be consumed with PrEP span vast geographies where politics and ideologies are factors in configuring internal organs, chemical regimes, food ingested, bacteria that live off of air and feed leavening, viruses that coexist with bodies, batteries that charge electronic devices, and the electricity grids that power them—in friction with other human and non-human bodies. The varying recipes involve material exchanges across Californian laboratories where PrEP is also manufactured and in the corn fields of Argentina needed for gluten-free flour, with gas from Eastern Europe, lithium from the Atacama desert, oil from Kazakhstan or Libya, flour from processing plants in Navarra, latex from Thailand, and lubricant from Almeria.

PrEP Bread is a visual project developed for the 18th Venice Architecture Biennale consisting of a graphic novel, mappings, microbiological cartographies, archeological botanies, and other graphic materials. It discusses the wide cartographies involved in the production of PrEP, its consumption, its marketing, its sociopolitical implications, and the uneven geographies that it produces.

Samuel Perea-Díaz Hearing Silence (2025)

Hearing Silence is a generative sound installation that engages the possibilities of listening through the sonification of AIDS-related death statistics from UNAIDS, articulating the tension between presence and absence, sound and silence. By displaying sonic impulses at the limit of human hearing, the installation challenges audiences to witness AIDS-mortality data by ear. Each death is rendered as a near-inaudible acoustic event—a burst of a 20kHz sine wave—calculated to occur at intervals matching the temporal frequency of these losses. Each speaker is archiving a different year, resulting in a soundscape of silence and near-silence that quietly underscores the scale of global suffering. Data sonification reveals that the average interval between sound pulses increases over time, reflecting a changing but still persistent pattern of loss. Despite its minimal aesthetic and near-undetectability, *Hearing Silence* is charged with urgency and historical memory. It references the sonic activism of groups like ACT UP, which used auditory interventions—such as air horns or chants—to give voice to the lives lost and demand attention from the state and its medical institutions. In contrast, this work retreats into silence, asking us to listen to what is not immediately there. The sine wave becomes a spectral marker, a sonic trace of those not always counted or remembered.

Hanna Schaich
**Who are we, if we're
too afraid to be
who you are?**
(2023)

This work grows out of a wound, a memory I carry in my body: my aunt Claudia—drug user, sex worker, AIDS-positive—who took her own life at the age of 29, in the mid-1990s. Her story, and the way my family and society abandoned her, carved itself into me. Watching her—and the others in that hospital—dissolve, first emotionally, then physically, left a scar that became my compass as both a queer person and artist.

I came to understand what they made her—and still make us—feel: shame, invisibility, exile. The fight to be seen as we are runs like a red thread through my work. I have lived through loss, abandonment, and violence, watched friends disappear into suicide and addiction, and these ruptures have shaped me, but also sharpened my senses to vulnerability, to silence, to the fragile and the fierce.

This poem I wrote—for her, for me, for us—speaks of grief, rage, and loss, but also of defiance, tenderness, and the refusal to be erased.

In homage to Félix González-Torres, an artist whose work has deeply inspired me, I invite anyone who finds themselves in these words to take a poster, freely, to carry it with them. Like him, I want to dissolve the boundary between artist and audience, between private grief and public memory. Through sharing and remembering, we keep the lost alive—if only for a moment longer.

—Hanna Schaich

Manuela Solano Wanna Party? (2025)

Sometimes I am sitting at a bar or waiting in line for the toilets and a stranger will ask me if I'm really blind, as though they find it hard to believe that a blind person could really be out partying on her own. They ask me why I have scars all over my body. They ask if I have a dick or a pussy. Or they ask me if I'm blind from birth or if I became blind, which leads them to ask how I became blind, as though such an obviously tragic event was an acceptable topic for small talk. And it's not that I want to hide my past—but I don't want to talk about serious things when I'm trying to have fun, much less have to engage in a conversation about my HIV status with people who, more often than not, don't even know what it means for one's viral load to be undetectable. And because it baffles me that complete strangers don't see anything inappropriate in trying to make me put such intimate matters on display to satisfy their curiosity.

—Manuela Solano

Since 2024, Manuela Solano has been producing a series of paintings on paper titled *Blind, Transgender and Wild*. She began this work as an attempt to produce paintings that were more playful and immediate, an approach that has resulted in a series that references the artist's day-to-day experiences in Berlin nightlife, the art world, and her interactions with men using humorous touches throughout. With these works, Solano communicates what it's like to socially navigate overlapping states of exception while still trying to have a good time.

**Conversations
and Essays**

**Hanna Schaich
in conversation with
Kat Cheairs
“The meaning of HIV,
is not dead!”**

H I'm so excited to sit down with you again, Kat. I still remember our first meeting in 2023 at that loud coffee shop in the West Village. We met while I was doing research at the Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York. I remember being struck by how many voices had been lost, buried, or barely preserved—especially those of women of color, sex workers, and drug users living with HIV/AIDS. That silence felt personal. My aunt was a sex worker and drug user and had AIDS—she died in the mid-90s. Sitting with those gaps in the archive made me think a lot about who gets remembered and who doesn't. I'd love to hear about how your work on HIV/AIDS began.

K I've been engaged with stories about HIV/AIDS, especially in the Black community, since the early 90s. Back in high school, I was volunteering with a youth education program in Atlanta. As part of our training, we attended an AIDS 101 symposium. I was around 15 or 16 and I went to a session on HIV in the Black community. This was around '92 or '93, right in the middle of the crisis. I was probably the only young person there, surrounded by Black gay men sharing openly about their experiences—about living with HIV and the layers of marginalization they faced. That space changed me. I was deeply moved, and I always trace my connection to this work back to that moment. Since then, I've always felt that HIV/AIDS is inseparable from my love and commitment to Black people. Even though I'm not living with HIV myself, it's never felt like something outside of me. Whatever impacts Black communities, impacts me. These aren't separate conversations—they never have been.

H How has your perspective on the intersections of race, health, and structural marginalization evolved since then?

K I am not sure it's changed much because I think I always understood it as an intersectional issue even if I didn't have that language at an earlier time in my life. I think my understanding of the Black artists we lost like Essex Hemphill, Marlon Riggs, Assotto Saint, Joseph Beam, Donald Woods, and so many others has contributed to my awareness over the last several years. And I think of all these figures, which includes the activists Joann Walker, Katrina Haslip, and Twillah Willis Wallace, as ancestral presences that guide us in the world of the living; that when we say their names, it renews their place in our lives. They rejoice when we remember them.

H In the exhibition *VIRAL INTIMACIES* at the nGbK, we're showing your video art piece *Voices at the Gate* (2021). How did you approach this piece?

K The journey started while I was co-curating the 2019 exhibition *Metanoia: Transformation Through AIDS Archives and Activism* at the One Institute. We didn't initially set out to focus on Black women in prison, but as we explored the archives, that theme emerged organically. We focused on voices that had been marginalized or absent from dominant AIDS narratives, including women who weren't officially recognized within the CDC's (Center for Disease Control and Prevention) definition of AIDS until 1993. I kept saying, "If we want these stories, we have to dig deep—they're not going to be on the surface."

We got a finding aid from the LGBT Community Center in New York, and much of the exhibition emerged from the materials in

their archive. One collection, donated by Judy Greenspan and labeled “HIV/AIDS, women, incarceration,” stood out. There were about eight boxes, donated around 2008/09, and they had never even been opened.

I’ll never forget opening box five. It was filled with newsletters, letters, flyers—so much life. These were the voices of Black women organizing from within the Central California Women’s Facility (CCWF). Their courage and clarity were stunning. I get chills just remembering it.

H Can you tell me more about Judy Greenspan and her role within ACT UP?

K Yes, Judy was active in the Prison Issues Committee of ACT UP in the Bay Area and had long been involved in political prisoner organizing. A lot of that work is reflected in the papers at the LGBT Center. One powerful story is her connection with Joann Walker, an incarcerated woman at the CCWF in the early 90s who was advocating for compassionate release for women dying of AIDS inside the prison. Walker reached out to ACT UP, and Judy responded—they exchanged letters, became friends, and Judy supported their legal efforts. She was in full solidarity with the women inside.

H Can you share more about the women you encountered in the archive—what did their stories reveal about HIV care and activism within the prison system?

K Walker, Twillah Willis Wallace, and others organized around mutual aid and healthcare inside prison walls. In the early 90s, people in prison weren’t getting any HIV care, and women’s prisons were especially neglected. They weren’t receiving even basic medical interventions like pap smears or breast exams.

It wasn’t just anti-feminist or anti-woman—it was outright neglect.

In the early 1990s at CCWF, Joann Walker, nearing the end stages of AIDS, started a peer education program to combat the lack of HIV resources. She later teamed with fellow activists Twillah Willis Wallace, Brenda Lee Ivy, and Deborah Paul to establish a formal support group, with help from Judy Greenspan and ACT UP San Francisco.^{1/2} Walker also led a successful campaign for the compassionate release of her terminally ill roommate, Betty Jo Ross.³ She died in 1995.

Twillah Willis Wallace was an influential HIV-positive peer educator and activist within the prison system. She co-founded the first HIV peer-education program for incarcerated women in California, dedicated years to advocacy for better health conditions inside prisons, and passed away in 2001 shortly after her release.^{4/5}

As a Black woman myself, it was incredibly inspiring to see incarcerated Black women saying, “No, we deserve healthcare. We deserve human rights. We deserve HIV medication.” They also fought to get their sisters out of prison so they could die with dignity, surrounded by family. They organized around compassionate release for Black women and other women of color dying from AIDS-related complications—often in horrible conditions. Guards would leave them unattended in terrible states. They simply said “enough.” For me it was the ultimate expression of internal freedom.

H Is there one piece of writing that particularly moved you?

K One that stands out is one of the first writings I found from Walker. It is a hand-drawn flyer presenting four women of various ethnicities with text at the top that reads, “Woman State Prison.” At the bottom is a poem by Walker called *The Name of the Game*. It reads,

HIV is the name of the game, to beat this thing you got to do your part, have a strong will and love in your heart.

Make your doctor get on down, don't let anyone push you around! Don't stress out, it will mess up your T-cell count.

Stress is the number one killer for people like you and me. From stress we must be free.

Take care of yourself, get plenty of exercise, don't you ever think of dying.

This is not a death sentence so clear your head. The meaning of HIV, is not dead!

Phew—so powerful. The writing feels like a direct address to the women beside her and to all of us. The last sentence is radically prophetic, announcing life beyond death and the body. It captures the tension between state-sponsored premature death and the promise of a life not contained by either. It still moves me deeply.

H That's incredibly moving. How did seeing these archives, especially from incarcerated women, affect you emotionally and artistically?

K It was transformative. During *Metanoia*, I came across a tiny photo of Walker in one of the newsletters. There was something in her eyes—this powerful gaze that just stopped me. I didn't know who she was, but I felt it deeply. She commanded so much presence just in that small image. That moment felt like a gift. It gave me a new understanding of liminality in artistic practice—the archive feels almost quantum, like it calls to you.

H When I made my piece *Who are we if we are too afraid to be who you are* (2023)—about my

—it felt like I was carrying her with me. The world and my family treated her cruelly, which deeply shaped how I see the world and my path as an artist. Way later, I wrote a poem about and for her which was my way of holding that weight—transforming grief and pain into something that could be witnessed and felt. It was a way to honor her humanity and resist the erasure she experienced.

K I'm reflecting on your personal work with your aunt—how holding those stories makes you a container for pain and meaning. Your aunt was reaching out and you were open enough to receive her message. That dynamic shifted how I see art: beyond ideas, something calls to you. Discovering Katrina Haslip and other Black women activists later reinforced this—their fearless claim to humanity and rights inspired me deeply. They lived the truth that “I am human, therefore I deserve these things” long before we named intersectionality.

Katrina Haslip was an influential AIDS educator and activist who fought to have women's AIDS symptoms recognized by the government. While incarcerated, she learned she was HIV-positive and co-founded AIDS Counseling and Education (ACE) for women

at the Bedford Hills prison, later starting ACE-OUT for women after release. She was a plaintiff in a landmark lawsuit to expand AIDS benefits eligibility. Haslip died in 1992, shortly before the CDC officially acknowledged that women could be affected by AIDS.⁶⁷

What struck me as radical was this way of being with loss and presence—how these individuals, even absent physically, communicate through archives, urging you to look closer. Creating that space—emotionally and mentally—is a lot to ask of anyone, myself included. How do you create the space to let these stories come through?

H It's about holding the pain—whether through archives, lost voices, or conversations—and finding ways to connect. I often reflect on who's erased, who's amplified, and what stories get space. There's a constant decision about what to highlight or silence, and that in itself is political and emotional. A line from your exhibited video installation stayed with me: "You may kill this body, but you can't kill this soul." It echoes how my aunt faded in body but not in spirit. How do you see the soul surviving when the body is under threat, discarded, or erased?

K When my brother died suddenly, grief overwhelmed me. While recording at Bedford Hills, nature held my sorrow—the cycles of life and loss felt comforting. I resisted showing the prison directly, instead filming the nature and power lines across from Bedford Hills to suggest its presence indirectly. I wrote a poem about trees as silent witnesses. Since then, losing my father has deepened my sense of a loved ones' presence. Naming and remembering them—like Haslip—keeps their spirit alive.

As a Black person, there's a constant tension with death since structural violence targets Black lives. Yet, I believe death isn't the final word. The soul or energy can't be destroyed—only transformed. This spiritual and quantum perspective offers a subversive hope beyond structural oppression, affirming ongoing existence despite premature death.

H Grief never ends; it changes but stays with us. I had a similar moment with my aunt, who loved butterflies. At her funeral, with the huge letters "INFECTION RISK" on her coffin, a butterfly followed me to her grave, which

gave me deep comfort. It felt like a sign that something beyond death remains.

K I've been reflecting on despair lately, especially given the world today. While people often push hope, I believe despair can be generative. Facing grief honestly can help us stop tearing each other apart. For years, I just told myself, "I'm here, let's get through the day." Despair has its own beauty and spiritual depth. I think of the women in the Bedford Hills and Central California prisons—watching their sisters die but still building care communities across race, class, sexuality, and religion.

H When you're in despair, you're face-to-face with truth—unfiltered. And from that place, something new can begin. In your work, there's this line about how these women—Black, white, Hispanic, robbers, murderers, rich, poor, Christian, Muslim, Jewish, bi, gay, hetero—had managed to build communities of care inside the prison. How do you see the possibilities of care and solidarity emerging in places of deep marginalization? And what can we learn from those communities today—about survival, resistance, and the kinds of worlds we might still build?

K Even this act of coming together—this collective experience that you've all curated—is part of resisting segregation. Because segregation is how we end up with fractured, bifurcated societies where people simply don't know each other. And I think there's a choice involved—to show that another way is possible. You have to be intentional about not being segregated because if you're not, the default *will* be separation.

That line in the poem speaks to that. Prisons are communities too—complex ones with

different perspectives, politics, and beliefs. But during the AIDS crisis, barriers started to dissolve because everyone was so affected. So AIDS, despite its stigma, became an unexpected entry point into collective action. It was generative.

That's the power of thinking through HIV and AIDS—not just as a medical condition, but as a way to imagine care, to imagine new political relationships. It's not about diagnosis—it's about how we understand community, responsibility, and care. And from there, we begin to imagine entirely new ways of being together. That's where transformation begins.

H Kat, I feel that's a beautiful note to end on. Thank you so much.

NOTES

- 1 *Los Angeles Times*, "Joann Walker Began a Peer Education Program While Incarcerated at CCWF," August 31, 1997.
- 2 J. Greenspan and ACT UP San Francisco, "Proposal for Formal Peer Education / Support Group at CCWF," *Modern American History*, n.d.
- 3 J. Greenspan and ACT UP San Francisco, "Campaign for Compassionate Release of Betty Jo Ross," *Modern American History*, n.d.
- 4 *The Body*, "Legacy Honored in Metanoia Exhibit on HIV-Related Prison Activism," n.d.
- 5 K. Bailey, "Katrina Haslip, AIDS Activist and Educator," in *Women and AIDS: Activism and Advocacy*, n.d.
- 6 *ibid.*
- 7 *POZ Magazine*, "Katrina Haslip: AIDS Activist Who Changed the CDC Definition," January 1, 2025, www.poz.com/article/aids-is-everyday-december.

The notes for this interview were mostly gathered through archival research and thereby authors and dates were not always reliably available.

Kat Chaeirs and Hanna Schaich are also contributors to the *VIRAL INTIMACIES* exhibition; their biographies are listed among the exhibiting artists at the end of the publication.

Madi Awadalla What the Virus Saw: Touch, Borders, and Other Infections

Where Did You Get It?

The doctor's office looked almost homely.

The question was familiar, spoken gently, like small talk.

But the click of his keyboard told me it wasn't small at all.

Where did you get it? From your country?
From your lover? From your sin? From the club?

From a night you barely remember?
From a needle passed between fingers in trance?
From a border you crossed?

A question sounds harmless, but it's an X-ray.
A fingerprint. A border control scan.

A way of deciding what kind of body you are,
and what should be done with you.

*Where did you get AIDS? Where did AIDS
come from?*¹

Same question, different scales.

One zooms into the skin, the other pans out
to the map, searching a continent for a culprit.
A science that chases the virus back to a dot on
the map, a body orifice in an exchange between
two strangers, framed into identity.

Both circle the same wound:
the geographies of blame.

In these maps, Africa is marked in red.

Who shapes these cartographies?
The researcher, the academic, the scientist.

I see them bent over their notes, as if numbers
could float free of history.

They speak of objectivity, clean as the doctor's
white coat.

But every answer hides one truth while dressing
another in certainty.

And what if the story didn't begin in a forest
at all, but in a conference room?

What if its first lines were drawn in Berlin, in
1884, when Europe's powers sat down to divide
a continent?

What if AIDS came not from Africa, but from
the stories Europe told about Africa?

Extraction Protocols

Protocol #1: Patient Quarterly Review

Date: 2019—HIV Clinic, Berlin

Every three months, the same choreography: take
a number, wait to be called, present your insurance
card or proof of eligibility, confirm your address,
phone number, immigration status. Offer your arm
to extract blood (CD4 count, viral load, liver and
kidney function), data points added to your file. Re-
view your antiretroviral therapy, prove your adher-
ence. Report side effects, but only the ones you
can properly name. Get screened for co-infections:
hepatitis, tuberculosis, syphilis. Receive a prescrip-
tion refill, just enough to last until the next visit.
Be asked about new sexual partners, travel, drug
use; note how each answer is typed, stored, kept.
Schedule your next appointment, take the re-
minder slip, leave through the same corridor you
entered.

Protocol #2: European Colonial

Administration—Rainforest Extraction Orders

Date: 1910—Congo River Basin²

Assemble expedition party at dawn. Confirm rifles,
specimen jars, chains, and measuring instruments.
Hunt monkeys and other wildlife for food and
specimens; tap rubber trees until flow is exhausted.

Replace natives lost to illness, exhaustion, or desertion. Punish natives refusing quotas with flogging or amputation; note able-bodied men for future drafts. Load crates with ivory, rubber, quinine bark, and animal tissue. Draw blood from captured animals and unwilling human subjects. Burn refuse to prevent contamination. Chart return route along river. Deliver extracted resources and catalogued remains to port for shipment to European markets and laboratories. Leave a cleared patch, stumps where trees stood, and strike defunct names from the labor register.

An archived complaint to the Doctors' Syndicate

To Whom It May Concern,

The first time I entered the clinic, I believed it was a place of care. The doctor made me think I would die, he told me my viral load was too high, my CD4 count too low. I asked for a printout. He handed it to me as if it were a verdict. Later, reading the numbers, I saw they were not as severe as he claimed. That was the first border. Trust broken.

When I reported feeling dizzy, he adjusted the dosage without reviewing my file.

When I said I felt lonely, he told me to create a Grindr profile.

The doctor told me to undress so he could inspect me thoroughly. His hands lingered like a customs officer, where they should not have.

I entered the clinic expecting treatment. I left it understanding that here, care is something promised at the door and stripped away in the room.

Filed: [No response recorded]

Breaking Health Bulletin

Migrants continue to arrive in Germany, carrying only their bodies—still enough to trigger fears of “medical tourism” and exploitation of the system. No confirmed outbreaks yet, though the press is ready for the first case to appear in a migrant neighborhood. When it does, the headline will already be written: a cultural flaw, not a social determinant, will be to blame.

Sources insist a positive HIV status is not, officially, grounds for asylum. If your country is deemed able to provide medication, your claim will be rejected and you will be sent back. Contrary to the belief that keeps many migrants from seeking services, an HIV diagnosis is not, according to the same sources, a reason for deportation. In the current climate, these assurances rarely take hold.

Officials also note that asylum applicants in Germany are not required to disclose their HIV status—unless the state decides otherwise. In those cases, tests have been carried out without consent, and results have been delivered in letters written only in German, stripping away confidentiality and the gesture of counseling.

Community experts warn: access is not the same as justice. The pill is not the cure. You can bring your viral load down to “undetectable” and still light up the state’s radar when they need someone to blame.

[Untitled Ballad]

There were nights
when the only thing keeping me here
was a hand in mine.

When the hours in the waiting room had no end,
someone leaned close and made it bearable.

When a single pill on the table
wasn't enough for all of us,
someone broke it in half.

We've always shared
whatever lived in our veins,
whatever remained.

I drank from a glass still wet from another's lips.
A mouth found mine in the dark.
The world fell away.
Our breath became one breath,
skin against skin,
salt against salt.

Dream about us together again.
What I want: us together again, baby.

No angels.
only a stranger's eyes undressing me.
No heavens,
just the two of us,
for as long as we lasted.
Just the two of us.

NOTES

- 1 Ahmed Awadalla, "Where Does AIDS Come from?": The Untold History of the AIDS Epidemic," *Jeem*, February 28, 2022, <https://jeem.me/en/bodies/1121>.
- 2 Science claims HIV began as a simian virus that crossed into humans upriver in Cameroon, carried by the same currents that once moved ivory, rubber, and human bodies. The cargo changes; the logic of extraction does not.

Madi Awadalla is a writer, historian, and transdisciplinary artist whose practice spans performance, visual storytelling, and multiple forms of writing. Grounded in counter-histories, archival intervention, and embodied research, their work engages critical debates on public health, sexuality, displacement, and the afterlives of colonialism; and has been featured in international journals, anthologies, and film festivals. Awadalla holds an MSc in Health History from the University of Strathclyde in Scotland.

Santiago Lemus & Camilo Acosta Manifiesto Amarillo (2023)

1. Este Manifiesto no es un Test serológico.
2. El amarillo no es la capa de la vergüenza, es la bandera de la victoria.
3. Las manchas pálidas en la piel son el recordatorio del estado urgente de la ternura.
4. El arte puede ser indetectable, pero siempre es transmisible.
5. Las instituciones artísticas son EPS creativas.
6. El museo es un sarcófago cuando no denuncia.
7. El rojo que mancha nuestras cavernas también ha escrito la historia de la humanidad.
8. La sangre contiene oro blanco que no es comerciable.
9. Nuestros párpados son dos girasoles que están en oración al sol.
10. Este amarillo, como el amor, es una enfermedad incurable.
11. El VIH no es una enfermedad, es un sintoma político.
12. Nuestro estado serológico no nos impedirá foliar con ganas, ni hallar el amor, ni habitar el dolor.
13. Cada mes cruzaremos los laberintos de las salas de espera y venceremos al tedio.
14. La profundidad esclerótica del amarillo está guardada detrás de nuestro globo ocular, ahí permanecerá nuestro orgullo.
15. Habrán diagnósticos para la fobia y los reactivos vestirán la capa de la vergüenza.
16. Aquellos que se fueron seguirán reclamando a través de este grito mudo.
17. Sembraremos el esperma, acusaremos el estigma.
18. Nuestra fuerza es un virus y se replicará en cada conciencia.
19. Incitaremos la reivindicación del escarnio público, de la enfermedad visible.
20. Los anti —cuerpos dejarán de discriminar.
21. Nos opondremos a que exista únicamente la melancolía de la enfermedad.
22. Tendremos un Ministerio de salud seropositivo.
23. Ya no seremos convalecientes de una enfermedad que no se siente.
24. Besaremos las pieles amarillas hasta que se derritan en nuestros labios.
25. Dormiremos sin temor al olvidar la pastilla y el amanecer estará libre en nuestras manos.
26. Excavaremos la grieta hasta encontrar nuestro verdadero color: el de la luz, el del sol de los venados, el del principio del mundo.
27. El miedo se hará polen y de él brotarán nuevas flores.
28. Chispa a chispa alimentaremos la llamada, no bajaremos la mirada, nuestro destino es ser fuego.
29. Tremolarán las banderas de nuestra revolución conmovedora.
30. El VIH será un mito, el SIDA será una sigla ilegible y la muerte será la celebración del azar.

Santiago Lemus & Camilo Acosta Yellow Manifesto (2023)

1. This Manifesto is not a serological test.
2. Yellow is not the cape of shame, it's the flag of victory.
3. Pale spots on the skin are reminders of the urgent need for tenderness.
4. Art may be undetectable, but it's always transmissible.
5. Artistic institutions are creative health systems.
6. A museum becomes a sarcophagus when it does not denounce.
7. The red that stains our caves has also written the history of humanity.
8. Blood contains white gold that cannot be traded.
9. Our eyelids are two sunflowers in prayer to the sun.
10. This yellow, like love, is an incurable disease.
11. HIV is not a disease, it's a political symptom.
12. Our serological status will not stop us from fucking passionately, finding love, or inhabiting pain.
13. Every month we will cross the labyrinths of waiting rooms and conquer boredom.
14. The sclerotic depth of yellow is stored behind our eyeball, where our pride will remain.
15. There will be diagnoses for phobia and reactive people will wear the cape of shame.
16. Those who have left us will continue to demand justice through this silent cry.
17. We will sow seed, and we will accuse stigma.
18. Our strength is a virus and will replicate in every conscience.
19. We will incite the reclamation of public shame and visible disease.
20. Antibodies will stop discriminating.
21. We will oppose the existence of only the melancholy of illness.
22. We will have a seropositive Ministry of Health.
23. We will no longer be convalescents of an illness we do not feel.
24. We will kiss yellow skin until it melts on our lips.
25. We will sleep without fear of forgetting the pill, and the sunrise will be free in our hands.
26. We will excavate the crack until we find our true color: the color of light, the color of the sun of deer, the color of the beginning of the world.
27. Fear will become pollen and new flowers will bloom from it.
28. Spark by spark we will feed the flame, we will never lower our heads, our destiny is to be fire.
29. The flags of our moving revolution will flutter.
30. HIV will be a myth, AIDS will be an illegible acronym, and death will be a celebration of chance.

Santiago Lemus and Camilo Acosta are also contributors to the *VIRAL INTIMACIES* exhibition; their biographies are listed among the exhibiting artists at the end of the publication.

**Samuel Perea-Díaz
in conversation with
Benny Nemer
Intimate
Ancestries**



- 1 **Vollbild Aids. Eine Kunstausstellung über Leben und Sterben (Full Blown Image AIDS. An Exhibition on Life and Death).** RealismusStudio, nGbK, Künstlerbahnhof Westend, Berlin 1988. Work by Gran Fury, subway station Wittenbergplatz, Berlin. Image courtesy: © Gran Fury
- 2 **LOVE AIDS RIOT SEX,** an exhibition by RealismusStudio, nGbK, Berlin, 2013/14. Guided tour by Frank Wagner in front of works by Elmgreen & Dragset, General Idea, Susi Pop. Image courtesy: ©Christin Lahr / VG Bildkunst

S It was the sound work *The Return* (2010) that first got me intrigued by your work. I encountered it in the handout of the exhibition dedicated to HIV/AIDS and French AIDS activism at the Mucem in Marseille. We then met some years later at a conference in England,¹ where you told me that this artwork, which was produced a decade before the exhibition, was not directly conceptualized as an artistic response to HIV/AIDS. I would like to start by asking you: how, then, did the alarming singing voice that features in *The Return* come to be included in that exhibition?²

B It is true, I made *The Return* with other concerns in mind: a general curiosity for interstitial voices —between masculine/feminine, adult/child, human/machine—and a deepening desire for contemporary queer identity to be grounded in an awareness of the lives, actions, and feelings of our ancestors. So *The Return*, in which a boy soprano from the Wiener Sängerknaben (Vienna Boys' Choir) sings the cry of an air raid siren, broadcast from a gilded megaphone, was meant as a call to “return” to some abstract, earlier state of queer being, especially on a collective level. When you and I spoke in York, I mentioned that the Mucem exhibition was not the only time this piece had been curated into an exhibition about HIV/AIDS. I couldn't remember which setting then, but I do now: it was the exhibition *Coming After* (2011–12),³ curated by Jon Davies for the Power Plant in Toronto. The exhibition looked at positions by artists who were teenagers during the 1980s, who came into their queer identities while, or “after,” our ancestors were living and dying through the first wave of the AIDS crisis. Davies

heard in the boy soprano's cry an echo of my own childhood voice, as though *The Return* called backwards through time to this critical moment in which the emergence of my adolescent queerness coincided with the mass death of my kin.

S Considering *The Return* found an unexpected resonance with HIV/AIDS exhibitions, how has your work evolved in addressing the AIDS crisis?

B *The Return* was produced at a turning point in my artistic practice, when my interest in song and pop music culture shifted towards an investment in the cross-generational transmission of ideas, figures, and actions from the so-called “queer past.” I made a video in which men sing citations by Harry Hay, Quentin Crisp, and other queer elders while cruising Berlin's Grunewald (*The Legacy*, 2010); and revised and restaged a scene from Rosa von Praunheim's 1971 film *Nicht der Homosexuelle ist pervers, sondern die Situation in der er lebt* (*It is Not the Homosexual Who Is Perverse, But the Society in Which He Lives*) with a group of queer and trans men in Hamburg (*The Rosa Song*, 2011). The powerful feelings of longing for queer mentors that propelled these works led me naturally to the generational rupture brought about by AIDS. I created *The Nightbird* (2013), a sound installation in which I sing as birdcall the names of artists who died of AIDS; followed by *The Lovers* (2014), in which men and boys mimic the sound of bells, singing a phrase lifted and revised from the Soviet monument in Berlin's Treptower Park. The original slogan on the monument read “Die Heimat wird ihre Helden nicht vergessen” (The homeland will not forget its heroes). I remember seeing this and thinking that it was the opposite

of the truth, and besides, I don't trust who the nation state recognizes as a "hero" in the first place. My rewrite sought to focus on the necropolitics of forgetting, and to acknowledge the heroism of lovers. So in the piece, the boys and men sing: *The homeland will forget the heroes, the heroes will forget the lovers, the lovers will forget the homeland*. Both audio works are broadcast through gilded megaphones like *The Return* and are exhibited outdoors, suggesting public monuments to AIDS losses.

S Many of the artists featured in *The Nightbird* were previously showcased by Frank Wagner in various exhibitions at the nGbK. For example, Peter Hujar and David Wojnarowicz were included in *Vollbild AIDS. Eine Kunstaussstellung über Leben und Sterben* (1988/89), the first exhibition in Europe to address the AIDS crisis.⁴ Wagner also curated an exhibition with two installation works by Félix González-Torres at the nGbK in 1996. Beyond his curatorial achievements, Wagner was a pivotal figure in fostering and supporting emerging queer artists in Berlin. You lived in Berlin for many years—how might you have encountered Wagner or his influence within the Berlin art scene?

B It is lovely that you make this connection, not only because of my enduring respect for Frank, but also because the gathering of the artists' names for *The Nightbird* has a kind of "curatorial" quality to it. In fact, while the sound piece is installed outdoors, it is accompanied by a handwritten list of the names I sing, which appears inside the exhibition space in mirrored vinyl. Curator Ingeborg Erhart likened this list to a speculative group exhibition for which I am the curator.

I had the good fortune of meeting Frank on many occasions, and experiencing numerous exhibitions he curated at the nGbK when I lived in Berlin between 2001 and 2016, including *LOVE AIDS RIOT SEX* (2013–14). While Frank and I were not close, he was supportive of my work, and notably championed my funding application to the Berlin Senate for my first artistic research project on queer libraries. I regret not quite grasping how important a figure Frank was within queer curatorial history; I am sometimes so focused on dead chosen ancestry that I miss my chance at connecting with those who are alive, available, and right there in front of my face.

S *The Return* and *The Nightbird* use sound to connect with the queer past. Now, in your project for the *VIRAL INTIMACIES* public program, you're using postcards to pay tribute to Hervé Guibert, another writer and artist who died of AIDS. Building on your discussion of generational connections and the loss of queer mentors, how does this project, which focuses on Guibert's intimate objects, function as a way to reconstitute not just an archive, but a sense of queer kinship and love across time? Is there a connection between this work and your earlier artistic research on queer libraries, particularly in how it addresses memory and archives of HIV/AIDS?

B It was while researching the private libraries of elder gay scholars and writers during my PhD studies that I had the chance to visit Hervé's book collection, which was kept at the home of his executor after his death in 1991. At the time, I was unfamiliar with Hervé's writing but knew some of his photographic oeuvre, notably

a photo he took of his library, in which about sixty postcards appear standing in front of his books. It was what Hervé's executor told me about the whereabouts of these postcards that prompted a rather complex artistic research project in which I am still involved now over six years later. I had flirted with postcards in artworks before, and have created a body of work involving writing, transcribing, reciting, and circulating letters from various sources. But my research into Hervé's collection led to a new intimacy with the postcard as a unique visual and epistolary format, with a host of new artistic and intellectual concerns, as well as a growing awareness of the ways postcards appear as relational material in the lives and practices of a number of gay artists of Hervé's generation. A rather rich terrain of inquiry has therefore emerged from this research, and my performance lecture for *VIRAL INTIMACIES* aims to trace its labyrinthine contours, and to share with the audience the ways I have enlisted the help of my contemporary queer kin to make transhistorical contact with Hervé and his kin.

NOTES

- 1 *Art, Visual Culture & HIV/AIDS: Local, Regional and Transnational Perspectives*, organized by Theo Gordon, conference, June 12–13, 2025, at the University of York.
- 2 *HIV/AIDS: The Epidemic Is Not Over!* (original title: *VIH/sida: l'épidémie n'est pas finie!*), exhibition at Mucem, Marseille, December 15, 2021–May 2, 2022, curated by Stéphane Abriol, Christophe Broqua, Renaud Chantraine, Caroline Chenu, Vincent Douris, Françoise Loux, Florent Molle, and Sandrine Musso.
- 3 *Coming After*, exhibition at The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, Toronto, December 10, 2011–March 4, 2012, curated by Jon Davies, www.thepowerplant.org/whats-on/exhibitions/coming-after.
- 4 In the leaflet of the exhibition *LOVE, AIDS, RIOTS, SEX I* at nGbK, Berlin, November 16, 2013–January 5, 2014, Frank Wagner with RealismusStudio wrote: "Vollbild AIDS. Eine Ausstellung über Leben und Sterben (*Full Blown Image AIDS. An Exhibition on Life and Death*), focused on the artistic dealing with the issue of AIDS and its social implications. In 1988 it was not only the first show of its kind in Berlin and Germany, but in all of Europe."

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

Samuel Perea-Díaz is also a contributor to the *VIRAL INTIMACIES* exhibition; his biography is listed among the exhibiting artists at the end of the publication.

Max Schnepf
Forever and You:
PrEP and HIV's
Archive
of Feelings

When Wolf took me on a walk through the grave-stones, I expected tales of grief—of friends and lovers lost to HIV/AIDS. Admittedly, I also longed to take part in a kind of inherited nostalgia: for a past I hadn't lived through but had consumed in books, films, and TV shows from the US—the sense of community that forms under duress, the tenderness of chosen families, the erotic and political intensity of those early years.

I first met Wolf at a networking event he organized for older gay men. He had invited me to attend and conduct interviews as part of my research on the community impact of a new HIV prevention drug known as PrEP. It wasn't until he retired, a few years after we first met, that I realized Wolf must already be in his late sixties. For most of his adult life, he worked as a pedagogue at a gay community center in a mid-sized German city. When AIDS hit, the center became a vital space for care, advocacy, and mutual aid with Wolf at the heart of it, splitting his time between western Germany and weekend visits to Berlin.

After his retirement, Wolf relocated to Berlin. So it wasn't a huge surprise when, a few months after the networking event, we ran into each other again, at a graveyard café. Not just any graveyard, as Wolf was quick to explain, but the Alter St.-Matthäus-Kirchhof in Berlin-Schöneberg, where many people who were part of German HIV activism and the gay movement are buried. He tended several graves there and had already reserved a spot for himself in a group grave with friends and acquaintances.

As we started the tour, Wolf pointed at the chapel and said he had lost count of the funerals he'd attended there since the first one in 1986—twenty at least, maybe more. Only at the end of our walk did he single out one funeral in particular: of

Uli, his *Herzensfreund*, or “friend of the heart.” Wolf had been in love with Uli for a while and, together with friends, had cared for him when he fell sick and became like a child due to toxoplasmosis in his brain.

Apart from Uli's story, Wolf did not linger in mourning. Nor did he invite me to. There were no theatrics, no misty-eyed remembrances, no invocations of a tragic, fateful community. Instead, his way of remembering felt quiet, grounded, at peace with the past. He wasn't turning away from that chapter of his life, but he also wasn't letting it define his present. Tending to the graves and telling stories about those buried was, for Wolf, an act of living with the past—honoring it without being held captive by it.

I'm slightly ashamed of my initial hunger for the drama, the tears, the righteous rage, especially since Wolf was not interested in such nostalgia. If anything, he seemed invested in what Marika Cifor calls “vital nostalgia”: one that doesn't linger in the past but becomes a critical force for imagining a liveable present and future.¹

I carry with me the image of Wolf, the gardener, standing over the graves as he worked to preserve them—standing atop the past while tending to the stories of those who are no longer with us. Wolf spoke warmly about the dead, teased some (“just between us: a very unpleasant person”), and seemed deeply connected to the cemetery. “Yes, this is where I'll be buried, this is where I want to be,” he said, “A place that truly reflects what Berlin means to me, to my biography, to my life.”

He introduced me to a generation of activists, eccentrics, and friends—people who, in different ways, helped shape what queer life in Berlin and in Germany looks like today. He called them *schwul bewegt*, a phrase that evokes both “moved by gayness” and “the gay movement.” He told me who

they were: how they contributed to grassroots organizing and community support, who tried to turn graveyards into cruising spots, who used to greet Wolf by pressing their damp moustache onto his mouth, and who was “such a sexy bastard” (*eine derart geile Ratte*).

I had the sense that what mattered most to Wolf was not preserving a fixed past, but carrying it forth, passing it on without burdening others with the pain it might still carry. A past that had shaped him, but one he had, to some extent, also laid to rest. Perhaps he had to, in order to go on living—a life after AIDS.

Almost proudly, Wolf told me how his generation’s relationship to death had reshaped mourning and memorial practices—made them more open, more vibrant, more queer. Maybe that’s why he appreciated the beautifully decorated graves of the *Sternenkinder*, stillborn children. When spun by the wind, the pinwheels that sit atop the grave bring some kind of liveliness and joy to the graveyard, Wolf explained.

Wolf led me to the grave of Rio Reiser, gay singer and frontman of the German rock band Ton Steine Scherben, who provided the soundtrack to his “very wild years.” But most importantly to Wolf, Reiser wrote “the most beautiful love song,” his 1986 song “Für immer und dich” (Forever and You):

Vergesse mich
Erinner mich
Für dich
Und immer für dich

[Forget me / I forget myself
Remember me / I remember
For you
And always for you]

Somewhat cryptic and difficult to translate, these lines embody the uneasy movement of memory and its conflicting emotions. They seem to express the ambivalent pleas of those laid to rest to be forgotten and to not be forgotten at the same time: *forget me, remember me*. But they also gesture at the labor of memory performed by an ellipsed “I,” a subject who loses themselves in the act of remembering others: *I forget myself, I remember*. Reiser’s song captures the questions that I found partially answered in Wolf’s quiet rituals of care—his weeding of graves, his tending to the stories beneath them. How can, and how should, we remember this particular past of HIV/AIDS today?

Today, biomedical advancements to treat and prevent an HIV infection shape how we do so. Short for Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis, PrEP is a medication that protects HIV-negative people from contracting the virus. It has been celebrated as a tool to stop new transmissions and, eventually, to end AIDS altogether. This optimism is encapsulated in the UNAIDS goal to “end AIDS by 2030.”² And yet, the promise of a pharmaceutical “magic bullet” coexists with vast inequalities in access, especially for those most affected by the epidemic: racialized communities, intravenous drug users, sex workers, trans people, and women in the Global South. The narratives of progress are not only at odds with a reality of uneven pharmaceutical distributions; they can also feel out of sync with the lived histories and enduring memories of those who, like Wolf, survived the HIV/AIDS crisis.

In my ethnographic research, I approach PrEP not as a straightforward medical intervention, but as a substance that reshapes how people relate to themselves and others. I set out to understand how the introduction of PrEP in Germany has

impacted queer life in Berlin. Through interviews and everyday participation in the field of sexual health, I asked how people relate to questions of responsibility, desire, and the past and future of HIV/AIDS now that protection no longer depends on condoms alone.³ I was curious how people remembered or imagined the 1980s and 90s in light of PrEP's promise of a future without the virus. What place does the history of HIV/AIDS assert, when PrEP promises a future—a world—without it? How do past experiences carry forward into a present shaped by biomedical possibility? And which stories get to be remembered?

To ask what PrEP makes possible is also to ask what it might displace. I borrow the term “archive of feelings” from Ann Cvetkovich’s work on trauma and lesbian public culture—a concept that speaks to the ways emotions, memories, and embodied histories resist linear storytelling and straightforward documentation of historical facts. These archives are often messy and fragmented, assembling “a past that can be painful to remember, impossible to forget, and resistant to consciousness.”⁴ Walking through the graves of the Alter St.-Matthäus-Kirchhof with Wolf evoked such an archive of HIV/AIDS in Berlin. It provided the material basis for history to be told as partial and unfinished memories, alongside or askew to HIV cultural production of the past decades. These rearticulated experiences formed a backdrop to PrEP’s arrival, destabilizing hasty proclamations of AIDS-free futures.

When PrEP became covered by German statutory health insurance in September 2019, it didn’t just provide protection—it stirred up feelings long thought left behind. The possibility of having condomless sex without fear of HIV was met not

only with joy and pleasure, but also suspicion. Within and beyond queer communities, PrEP reignited old stereotypes of gay promiscuity—echoes from the early years of the epidemic. Dion Kagan calls this a “re-crisis,” a renewed moral panic, despite HIV being treatable and no longer fatal with proper care.⁵

For some, PrEP brought liberation. For others, it summoned ghosts. For two of my interlocutors, it did both. Bert, 63, from a small German city, and Andrew, 56, originally from New York City, both described PrEP as relief and release. Andrew recalled the horror of seeing “skeletons” with Kaposi’s sarcoma (AIDS-related skin cancer) and the fear that gripped him in those early years of the pandemic. Bert only came out in 2011. First the criminalization of gay sex in Germany and then the shadow of HIV/AIDS had kept him in the closet. He told me: “I grew up in the time of the AIDS campaign. That was real brainwashing. ‘Sex gets you sick. Sex can kill you.’ And I never really got that out of my head. I hope that PrEP will take away this fear.”

For Bert and Andrew, PrEP made the past palpable again—but only so they could finally lay it to rest and move on. Their turn toward PrEP was a turn toward the future, away from the emotional weight of HIV’s history. Their use of PrEP aligned with a broader narrative of closure and biomedical progress. Or as Kagan puts it: “The past, the practices associated with that past, and the abject and unhappy feelings associated with AIDS must be buried and forgotten in order to embrace the meaningfulness of reproductive futurity.”⁶

Wolf’s approach was different. Less about closure, more about tending to what remains. His quiet rituals of care offer a counterpoint to triumphalist visions of “ending HIV.” Wolf did not let the past take over the present. Nor did he turn away from

memory altogether, in hopes of leaving the past behind. His embodied way of remembering not only draws on HIV's archive of feelings, it sustains and expands it.

"Our lives move forward, collecting experience and feeling, and we drag our stories with us," Keiko Lane writes in her memoir about HIV activism.

"We drag our ghosts into our imperfect, shifting embodied present."⁷ These ghosts don't easily wither away. Like the weeds in Wolf's graves, stories and memories persist and re-emerge, haunting how generations of queer people place themselves in the course of history. PrEP changes how we face the future but also how we relate to the past. It doesn't offer a clean break from history, but a reworking of it—a messy, affective negotiation.

These ambivalent emotions often resist neat representation, and this is precisely why creative forms of engagement matter. Art, writing, and ethnography not only document, they also feel through, imagine otherwise, and make space for what resists objective description. This is also the work this essay attempts: to approach memory, loss, and survival not as fixed facts of the past, but as felt experiences that demand storytelling in light of new biomedical possibilities. These creative forms explore the space in the interstices between hopeful futures and lost histories. They let us sense what an archive of feelings is: how remembering and forgetting, self and other, past and future, coexist.

Forever and you.

NOTES

- 1 Marika Cifor, *Viral Cultures: Activist Archiving in the Age of AIDS* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2022).
- 2 UNAIDS, *The Urgency of Now: AIDS at a Crossroads* (Geneva: Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2024), www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/2024-unaids-global-aids-update_en.pdf.
- 3 Max Schnepf, "Care, and the Less of It: Haunted Gestures and the Affective Economy of Pharmaceutical HIV Prevention," *Feminist Anthropology* 6, no. 1 (2025): e70001, <https://doi.org/10.1002/fea2.70001>.
- 4 Ann Cvetkovich, "In the Archives of Lesbian Feelings: Documentary and Popular Culture," *Camera Obscura* 17, no. 1 (2002): 110, https://doi.org/10.1215/02705346-17-1_49-107.
- 5 Dion Kagan, *Positive Images: Gay Men and HIV/AIDS in the Culture of 'Post Crisis'* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018).
- 6 *Ibid.*, 225.
- 7 Keiko Lane, *Blood Loss: A Love Story of AIDS, Activism, and Art* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2024), 6.

Max Schnepf is a social and cultural anthropologist at Freie Universität Berlin, working at the intersection of Medical Anthropology, Queer Studies, and Affect Theory. In their doctoral research, Max investigates the effects and affects of Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP), a drug used to prevent HIV. Max's engagement with HIV prevention and sexual cultures spans Germany, Colombia, and Australia, tracing the connections between affect, public health, the arts, and activism. Their writing has been published in the *European Journal of Women's Studies*, *sub\urban. zeitschrift für kritische stadtforschung*, and *Feminist Anthropology*.

Artist Biographies

Camilo Acosta & Santiago Lemus

Camilo Acosta HunterTexas is a visual artist with a focus on audio-visual projects, video editing, experimental video, VJ sets, and music video production. His video work has been exhibited in Spain, Germany, Mexico, Canada, and France, among others. He has also developed curatorial projects involving performance, video, and live arts in both conventional and unconventional spaces.

Acosta is a co-founder and active member of the House of Tupamaras, a collective committed to research and creative production around issues of gender, performance, and public space. He is also part of the performance collective Street Jizz.

Santiago Lemus is an artist and educator. His interdisciplinary practice explores the entangled relationships between art, nature, natureculture, and landscape through installations, site-specific interventions, performances, and video. He engages socio-ecological processes through image, sound, and sculpture, creating sensitive devices in dialogue with beings and materials of the Earth. His work has been exhibited in Bogotá, Barranquilla, Berlin, and other cities. He co-founded Tomamos la Palabra, a collective that intervenes in public space to denounce homophobia, transphobia, racism, and violence. His practice spans interdisciplinary research integrating visual arts, science, and traditional knowledge systems, as well as community-focused museology.

Jorge Bordello

Jorge Bordello's work focuses on the wrinkles between document and fiction, the family archive and the national narrative, and the montage of the body and public life. He is a founding member of PA, a network of people living with HIV in Tlaxcala,

bringing together peers around writing and artistic expression. Jorge won the Jury Prize at the Mexico City International Documentary Film Festival (DocsMX) and the Tlaxcala State Prize for Visual Arts. He participated in exhibitions at the Rufino Tamayo National Painting Biennial, the FEMSA Biennial, the New Museum (New York), MOCA, MACBA, the Museum of Modern Art (Cuencal), and the Jumex Museum. He has presented his research on HIV, film, and visual culture at UNAM, the University of York, and MoMA.

Kia LaBeija

Kia Michelle Benbow, known professionally as Kia LaBeija, is an image maker and storyteller born and raised in the heart of New York City, Hell's Kitchen. Her multidisciplinary approach to art making includes photography, text, movement based performance, collage, installation, and film. She composes cinematic and theatrical autobiographical and auto-fictional works by staging, re-imagining, sometimes documenting in real time, or all of the above. Her performative self portraits embody memory and dream-like imagery to narrate complex stories at the intersection of womanhood, sexuality, and navigating the world as a lifetime survivor of HIV and woman of African American and Filipino descent. Kia received a BA from the New School. She serves as the Communications and Narrative Director for the Lifetime Survivors Network—a national network of people living with HIV since birth or early childhood. She is a 2019 Creative Capital Awardee alongside her partner Taina Larot.

Kat Cheairs

Katherine “Kat” Cheairs is an interdisciplinary artist, arts administrator, curator, educator, and researcher. Kat founded the Makeda School for Art, Media, and Humanities, an alternative educational and specula-

tive learning space drawing from progressive education and Black feminist instructional pedagogies. Kat frequently collaborates on archival and video-based projects that intersect with AIDS, art, and activism. Kat is pursuing a doctorate in art and art education at Teachers College, Columbia University. Their research focuses on Black women art educators' pedagogy and practice through the lens of Black feminist onto-epistemology, Black studies, feminist pedagogy, queer theory, and affect studies. Kat serves on the board of Visual AIDS. Kat has presented on panels at the Tribeca Film Institute, Pratt Institute, The New School, NYU, Vassar College, The Studio Museum in Harlem, Poster House, BAM, The Aperture Foundation, Whitney Museum of American Art, and UnionDocs.

Christa Joo Hyun D'Angelo

Christa Joo Hyun D'Angelo's work confronts fear, vulnerability, and what is thus invisible through video, neon, installation, and sculpture. Drawing on personal narratives, experience, and memory, she navigates lewd behaviors and precarious conditions and attempts to redefine what is normal while embracing difference as a source of inspiration and empowerment in order to discover new means of acceptance and ultimately, healing. Christa studied under TJ Demos at The Maryland Institute College of Art and later The Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow, Poland. Her works have been exhibited at KINDL Centre for Contemporary Art, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Kunstverein Braunschweig, Hua International, and The Goethe Institut (Washington D.C.). D'Angelo's work is included in The Federal Collection of Contemporary Art Germany. Her first monograph, *Fatal Attraction*, was published by Mousse Publishing in 2023.

Naya de Souza

Naya de Souza works under different alter-egos like “LUX VENÉREA” and “Bundaskanzlerin,” transitioning between disciplines such as performance art, comedy/stand-up, and cooking. Multilingual by birth and transdisciplinary by heritage, Naya's body of work transcends traditional boundaries, whether between disciplines, countries, or institutions. She views art as a perpetual process of immigration and translation. Her online Bundaskanzlerin serves as a social media critique of Germany's exclusionary political/art world, utilizing found footage, video collages, photography, and memes. Naya's work was showcased at Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Hebbel Am Ufer, 1&2, Kampnagel, Martin Gropius Bau, Gorki Theater, Kammerspiele, Belvedere Theater, CCBA, Deichtorhallen, WORM, and Wiener Festwochen. She was awarded the TAG DER CLUBKULTUR prize in 2023. As an educator and HIV rights activist, Naya collaborated with institutions such as Aids-Hilfe (Berlin, Mittelhessen, Zurich), Checkpoint, TriQ, MigrationsRat, and LesMigraS.

Pascale Espinosa's (aka Tomas Espinosa)

Pascale Espinosa's (aka Tomas Espinosa) installations focus on the relationship between private and public situations. Understanding their work as a reflection on encounters and the time we need for them—time to touch, time to speak, time to share—Pascale invites us to approach the histories of places that are “other.” Through performances, videos, sculptures, and installations, they address questions around memory to make visible the realities that usually remain untold, and put forth the effects they have on other geographical latitudes. In recent years, Pascale's work has focused on different forms of violence, namely

in their home country, Colombia, and those they face as a non-binary person. Their practice is guided by proximity and intimacy: “We think we know what we are seeing. But in reality we don’t; we are only seeing and analyzing from a distance.” Pascale’s work has been exhibited across countries like Brazil, China, Czech Republic, Ethiopia, The Netherlands, Germany, and Colombia, among others.

**Ato Kwamina Hasford
(Oteanankanduro)**

Ato Kwamina Hasford (Oteanankanduro) is a multi-disciplinary artist and writer working across sound, performance, video, and text. Their work explores African queerness, Black spiritual life, and the afterlives of colonialism through intimate and insurgent modes. Often drawing from embodied experiences as a queer African moving through Europe, Ato’s work blurs the lines between the testimonial and the mythical, the essayistic and the ceremonial. Their ongoing series *Decolonising Queerness* (2024)—published primarily through Instagram—uses digital media as a space of refusal, tenderness, and critique. Ato’s work has been featured in exhibitions, festivals, and conversations across Europe and Africa, always centering those who are spoken over and rendered suspect.

**Ivan L. Munuera
(with V. Rotie and P. Saiz)**

Ivan L. Munuera is a scholar, critic, and curator working at the intersection of culture, technology, politics, and bodily practices in the modern period and on the global stage. He is Assistant Professor at Bard College and was awarded the Harold W. Dodds Fellowship at Princeton University in 2020. Ivan has presented his work at various

conferences and academic forums, such as the Society of Architectural Historians, Association for Art History, European Architectural History Network. His work has been published in the *Journal for Architectural Education* (JAE) and *The Journal of Architecture* (RIBA), among others. Munuera has curated many exhibitions, including Museo Reina Sofía, Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo, Fundació Suñol, Ludwig Museum, and developed a series of projects, including *Flying Plasma* (Mayrit Biennial), *PrEP Bread* (Venice Architecture Biennale), *Your Restroom is a Battleground / The Restroom Pavilion* (Venice Architecture Biennale), and *Unzipped Parties* (Russian Federation Pavilion at the Venice Architecture Biennale).

Samuel Perea-Díaz

Samuel Perea-Díaz is an artist, researcher, and lecturer whose work spans sound art and curation. Samuel focuses on sound and archival practices, exploring how sonic activism and aural architecture can impact listening. Samuel creates site-specific installations, sound-focused works, and listening workshops that incorporate sonification, sound relocation, and field recording. With a background in architecture and an MA in Sound Studies and Sonic Arts, Samuel’s PhD investigates the impact of HIV/AIDS on sound art. Samuel has participated in several group shows, such as at C3A, daadgalerie, Berghain Halle, Haus der Statistik, WeAreVillage, Errant Bodies, and TAT. His festival participation includes the Electroacoustic Music Festival of Sound Art Kontakte ’19 and the biennial of Sound Art Dystopia. Samuel’s curatorial work includes the projects, *An AIDS Walkthrough* at WeAreVillage, and *Ocaña, der Engel der in der Qual singt* at the Schwules Museum.

Hanna Schaich

Hanna Schaich is a video artist, filmmaker, and poet. Their work moves with courage along the edges of human experience, traversing autobiographical territories of sexual abuse, violence, and forced institutionalization. Yet, their pieces are driven by the desire to return to the body and the possibility of inhabiting it again in liberation, love, and a breaking free from social constraints. Many of their video works interweave image, voice, and poetic texts, accompanied by minimal, intimate visual narratives where seemingly ordinary moments become charged with poignant emotional force. In this sensitive and unsentimental weave, everyday fragments turn into spaces of revelation—permeated by solitude, longing for closeness, nostalgia for a sense of home, and a tireless search for the other. Their works have been presented internationally, receiving numerous awards and grants, most recently from the Film/Video Künstlerinnenprogramm of the Berlin Senate, Development Grant Film Department, Start Stipendium Media Arts, research grant (Berlin Senate), and a DAAD fellowship.

Manuela Solano

Manuela Solano explores identity, memory, and humor in her work that is referential and intimate, queer and nostalgic, silly and provocative, exuberant and engaging. Having lost her sight due to complications from an HIV-related infection in 2014, she uses ubiquitous references and pop culture imagery to make commentaries about her experiences and self. Her work has been shown in numerous institutional exhibitions worldwide. Her main solo shows have taken place at Dundee Contemporary Arts (2022), Pivô, São Paulo (2021), Kunsthalle Lissabon (2021), the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami (2018)

and Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil, Mexico City (2016). Her work has been included in group exhibitions at the Henie Onstad Art Center, Palais de Tokyo, New Museum, and Museo Universitario del Chopo. Her work has recently entered the collection of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

IMPRINT

Berlin, 2025
ISBN 978-3-949969-05-8
Printed in Germany
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This catalogue is published on the occasion of the exhibition *VIRAL INTIMACIES* at neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst (nGbK), Berlin September 11–November 16, 2025

ngbk

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neue Gesellschaft für bildende
Kunst (nGbK) is funded by



VIRAL INTIMACIES is supported by

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As part of

BERLIN
ART 10 — 14 SEP 2025
WEEK

