

SCHEMA

THE YEAR IN REVIEW 2016 | 2017



smith college museum of art



CONNECTING PEOPLE TO ART

ON VIEW

ERIC AVERY: AIDS WORK

AUGUST 12–DECEMBER 11, 2016

ERIC AVERY: AIDS WORK INCLUDED MORE THAN 30 prints and books by Dr. Eric Avery acquired by SCMA and the Mortimer Rare Book Room in 2014. This material represents a cohesive and important body of work that documents three decades in the life of the major public health crisis of AIDS. As an artist, physician and gay man, Avery was at the center of the crisis both personally and professionally.

The artworks Avery first created on the subject of AIDS after its initial outbreak in the early 1980s focused on his personal experience with the disease. Later works incorporated medical and policy information on the treatment of AIDS, and also expressed and disseminated vital information about risk factors and protective measures to combat the spread of infection.

This desire to inform and inspire change in the world is central to Avery's view of his purpose as an artist: "If you believe that information can lead to change, then bearing witness is the narrative function of art and serves a social purpose. If one person, after seeing one of my art actions, were motivated to change an HIV risk behavior and did not get HIV, then this would be my evidence that art can save lives."

The exhibition was accompanied by a robust roster of public programs, many of them generated by Smith student groups.

FACULTY AND STUDENT INPUT WAS INSTRUMENTAL in planning programs for this exhibition. In Spring 2016, faculty from various disciplines gathered with museum staff and the artist himself to look closely at Avery's artwork, hear from the artist directly and brainstorm programs. This process was repeated with representatives from the student organization VOX (now known as Smith Students for Reproductive Justice). Each session sparked interest and led to productive collaborations.



This exhibition piqued the interest of the biological sciences department, resulting in multiple class visits from BIO 101: Modern Biology for the Concerned Citizen, BIO 132: Cells Physiology and Development and BIO 334: Bioinformatics and Comparative Molecular Biology; Psychology 240: Colloquium: Health Promotion also took advantage of the material presented. In addition, Avery spoke to a full house for the department's annual Life Sciences lecture. The artist along with faculty had encouraged a program including immunologist, physician and entrepreneur Anne S. De Groot '78, founder, CEO and CFO of EpiVax, Inc. A dialogue between Avery and De Groot about their approaches to activism and advocacy through art and science was presented on World AIDS Day to a standing-room-only audience dominated by students.

VOX worked closely with museum staff to develop and implement an early semester afternoon with Eric Avery, who engaged students in an interactive gallery talk followed by artmaking and advocacy. Also presented in relation to World AIDS Day was a screening

of *COMPULSIVE PRACTICE*, a video compilation of compulsive, daily and habitual practices by artists and activists who live with their cameras as one way to manage, reflect upon and change how they are deeply affected by HIV/AIDS. VOX students led a discussion with peers following the screening of the video, which was produced by Visual AIDS.

The museum's collaboration with faculty and students was rich and resulted in programs relevant to

the campus community and deep engagement with the exhibition.

This installation was supported by the Louise Walker Blaney, class of 1939, Fund for Exhibitions and the Carlyn Steiner '67 and George Steiner Endowed Fund, in honor of Joan Smith Koch.

For detailed information about the exhibition and related programs visit the *Eric Avery: AIDS Work* website: smith.edu/artmuseum/On-View/Past-Exhibitions

ON VIEW/ERIC AVERY: AIDS WORK

STUDENT PERSPECTIVE: TARA SACERDOTE '18



FOLLOWING MY SOPHOMORE YEAR, I INTERNEED with Visual AIDS as a practical experience for my museums concentration. Visual AIDS is a New York-based arts nonprofit organization committed to HIV/AIDS advocacy. Among many other things, Visual AIDS facilitates art exhibitions and fosters conversations centering on HIV/AIDS as an ongoing and continually relevant issue. *Eric Avery: AIDS Work* underscores these ideas of contemporaneity and it was an honor for me to support the continuation of this type of dialogue at Smith.

As part of Smith College VOX (now known as Smith Students for Reproductive Justice), I helped to coordinate programming surrounding *AIDS Work*, including a small group discussion with Dr. Avery and VOX members as well as a public gallery tour and printmaking workshop with the artist. Dr. Avery articulated

a specific perspective on this issue, as an artist and a medical professional in his late 60s. His knowledge introduced a crucial intergenerational element to our discussions and prompted us to consider not only the lastingness of HIV/AIDS, but also the ways in which this crisis has changed and how the activism surrounding it has adapted.

Activating the artwork through these programs expanded the exhibition and asked us to consider more deeply the centrality of art and artmaking as tools for activism and education. The programming in support of *AIDS Work* invited Smith students from different academic backgrounds to engage with one another. It was exciting to see my peers at Smith interested in the relationship between images and HIV/AIDS, a topic of interest to me because of my work with Visual AIDS. Re-energizing this conversation with new people, in a new place, was refreshing and inspiring.

I was lucky enough to return to Visual AIDS for a second summer as a programs assistant to continue working at the intersection of art and HIV/AIDS. I am immensely grateful for the resources and support offered by SCMA staff—especially Charlene Shang Miller, for her encouragement and honesty.

My engagement with *Eric Avery: AIDS Work* specifically, and with the museum generally, continues to shape my understanding of art's central role in conversations surrounding critical social issues.