

OUT

ENTERTAINMENTART & BOOKS

VOICE = SURVIVAL Features Art Addressing the AIDS Epidemic



Mykki Blanco & Adinah Dancyger, *I Want a Dyke For President*, 2016

Visual AIDS collaborated with the Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation to create an informative Pride Month exhibition.

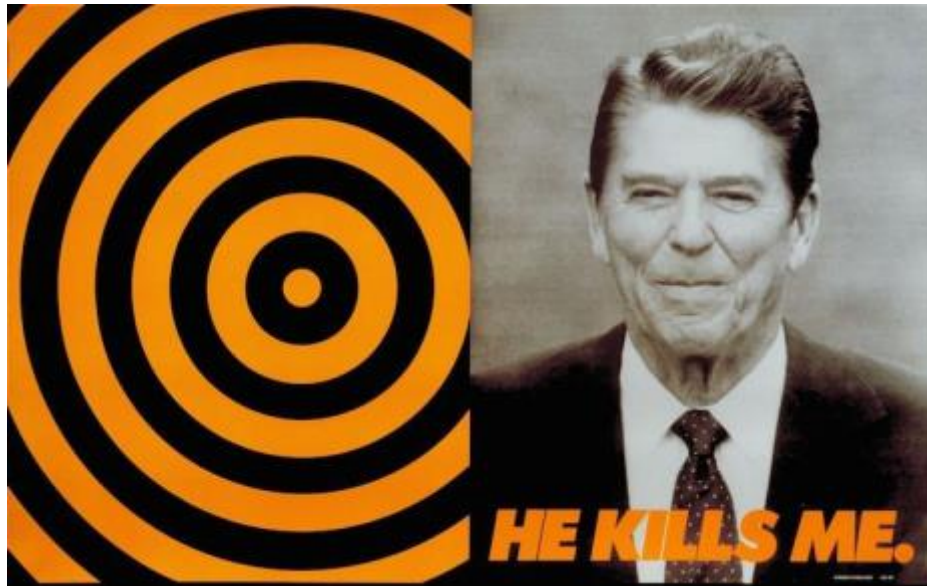
BY MICHAEL VALINSKY
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The Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation is an important force in building stronger communities through artistic interventions in

cities, public programming, and grantmaking initiatives for various organizations. For Pride Month, the foundation has collaborated with Visual AIDS, a non-profit arts organization that presents visual art projects and exhibitions that raise dialogue around supports artists living with HIV/AIDS. Claudia Maria Carrera and Adrian Geraldo Saldaña curated the multimedia group exhibition, entitled *VOICE = SURVIVAL*, for Visual AIDS at the Foundation's gallery, The 8th Floor.

The gallery was founded in 2010 in response to the Rubin's private art collection. "They've mostly focused on Cuban contemporary art since they've opened the Rubin museum, but we're not beholden to that focus anymore," said Artistic Director Sara Reisman. "What we've attempted to do is make the exhibition program much more public facing. That's aligned with the relatively new art and social justice mission of the foundation."

The show, which takes inspiration from ACT UP's motto "Silence = Death," explores the ways in which voice can be used as a mode of sustained and systematic protest. The curators consider voice as a metaphor and wanted to push ACT UP's slogan in a more productive and constructive direction. To explore these ideas, they've chosen to include a broad selection of work, ranging from film to poetry and embroidery.



Donald Moffett, *He Kills Me*, 1987

“We wanted to extend [the show] to other communities who have been excluded from the history and also the protocols around suffering and struggle, linking the kind of protest around the AIDS crisis to other forms of protest,” Reisman says.

The exhibition’s centerpiece is an archive of American artist David Wojnarowicz’s recordings. Wojnarowicz was a prominent AIDS activist who, in part, recorded his diary entries over the course of a few years in the late '80s and early '90s. The result is a large record of a man’s day-to-day life—a raw transcription of humanity at a time when humanity was lacking and focus on individuals was replaced by the devastating neglect of entire communities.

“This is related to Wojnarowicz’s habit or practice of doing these sound records of life,” Reisman says. “Cassette recording, answering machine. It’s partly about the personal existence—how that got tracked every day.” The artist, who died of AIDS in 1992, was interested in finding ways to preserve the memory of a person, and the curators thought Wojnarowicz’s work was a crucial anchor for the show.

TELL YOUR STRUGGLE WITH TRIUMPHANT HUMOR

Kameelah Janan Rasheed, *Tell Your Struggle with Triumphant Humor from How to Suffer Politely (And Other Etiquette)*, 2014

It's true that the other works in the show also involve a kind of witnessing—a listening in on the scream of somebody else's inner and outer voices. For this, the curators chose to present two supercut montages, one with sound and the other for which viewers need to headphones. So then viewers are constantly

tossed between the private experience of listening and the public one of hearing.

“There are lot of activist actions that have been documented and interestingly, they’re presented here but they’re not artwork, they’re archival,” Reisman says. The show itself feels like an archive, where goers have the option of spending hours listening to all the recordings displayed around the space. Another example are two compilations of poetry by Audre Lorde and Pat Parker, among others. The poems intensively address notions of repression and discrimination, but they also scream for the freedom of expression.

VOICE = SURVIVAL will be up through August 11 and is a must-see for those interested in the different ways you can use your voice to get behind a cause that matters, but also for those seeking a more historical understanding of the AIDS crisis and the art that came out of it.