A Day Without

December 1, 1999 By Nick Debs

Sometime in the mid-’80s it became painfully clear that AIDS was killing off the arts by killing off artists—not only through HIV, but through intolerance. The illnesses and deaths of too many artists to name, deranged congressional attacks on the NEA and a lamentable lack of support for the arts were the context in which Visual AIDS created A Day Without Art in 1989. It was designed to be at once grass-roots and establishment: Artists and arts professionals have pushed cultural institutions to observe this “day of action and mourning” in the decade since.

A general strike in the arts is impossible—in this nation, at least. So Day Without Art has been characterized by smaller “negative” actions—the draping of the Guggenheim’s facade in black fabric or the temporary removal of a Picasso from the Met’s galleries—as well as by pro-active programming such as Visual AIDS’ exhibits of work by artists with AIDS and its distribution of HIV-education broadsides. Each approach demonstrates what we’ve lost from AIDS and stand to lose, and challenges prevailing notions of the role that art can play in our public, political lives.

This is the last year Visual AIDS will coordinate Day Without Art. The organization will instead focus on providing services to artists with HIV. The choice is both heartening--these artists are now working and need support--and depressing--a tiny nonprofit is trying to fill a void created by the loss of public funds. As for Day Without Art, it’s too widespread and rooted to stop growing now.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/A-Day-Without-12253-5331