Now See This

To mark Day With(out) Art, POZ asked four positive artists to create works that make us think, feel and remember.

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Here at *POZ*, we're forever arguing, venting, laughing and, above all, *talking* about AIDS. But Day With(out) Art challenges us, once a year at least, to shut up and reflect on our obsession in a different way, to put aside our endless discussions—CD4 counts, right-wing prevention conspiracies, the global AIDS nightmare, lipodystrophy, HAART—and let artists guide us, silently, toward emotional discovery about how the disease has shaped our lives, for better and worse.

When it was launched, in 1989, Day With(out) Art had no parentheses in its name. Following the lead of a new organization called Visual AIDS, museums and galleries closed their doors or draped artworks with sheets and cloths to mourn the swelling ranks of artists lost to AIDS. By 1997, however, HIV was no longer a death sentence, and the day of protest had inspired thousands of actions worldwide in which creating and displaying art played a role. Thus, Day With(out) Art—now a familiar adjunct to the December 1 commemoration World AIDS Day—earned its life-affirming name change. To mark the event's 15th anniversary, *POZ* commissioned original works from four positive artists that express what it means to be both an artist and an HIV positive person. We're honored to showcase four divergent talents, each of whom has tackled the assignment in a very different way. For more info on Visual AIDS or Day With(out) Art, go to www.thebody.com/visualaids, or call 212.627.9855.

Bryan Hoffman

What Now?

The '80s were a thrilling (if terrifying) time to be an HIV positive gay artist in New York City. Comrades like Keith Haring and David Wojnarowicz were creating the most impassioned, politically charged American art in decades. When 1990 rolled around, the new decade looked to be equally exciting, so Bryan Hoffman, who had been working in advertising, decided to take his painting seriously. "People had to become mature really quickly," says the soft-voiced artist. "To face AIDS and mortality head on—that's the stuff of art." Indeed, Haring and Wojnarowicz would both be dead by 1992.

Nearly 15 years since, Hoffman's artistic inspiration still derives from AIDS activism, however indirectly. The 44-year-old Hoffman says that "my angst still comes from politics"—and angst,

anxiety and fear permeate his work. His images exude a campy, menacing excess that creates a malicious sense of uncertainty: a woman's manicured hand stretched out lazily over an expanse of unruffled, too-perfect lawn; a nervous man hiding an object beneath a sofa cushion; or, as in this piece for *POZ*, a doctor standing beside the words *you are going to live…maybe*, printed neatly in black space.

The phrase captures the artist's own dilemma. "We all thought we were going to die, and then we find out we're going to live," he says of the HAART revolution. "And what are we to do? How are we going to plot out our lives?" For Hoffman, one important step was moving in 1999 to Lake Huron, Michigan, where he has family. On disability, Hoffman spends his time gardening and working with a nonprofit group that helps the disabled. "And, of course," he reminds us, "I paint."

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Joe De Hoyos

Statement
Some teenagers play sports. Others read books. Joe De Hoyos collected magazines. "I always loved photography and graphic art," he says. "I grew up in Houston, and I amassed this huge collection of magazines." Two decades, a college art class, stints in fashion and book publishing and seven years in New York City later, De Hoyos has translated a love of glossy rags into a career as a graphic artist whose collages are as conceptually compelling as they are ingeniously executed.

His confrontational work, including this piece for *POZ*, owes a debt to Gran Fury, the infamous art collective that served as the propaganda arm of ACT UP. But the 42-year-old De Hoyos mixes heavier doses of naïveté and humor into the urgency of his messages. "Back in the '80s, my work was very angry and made an obvious statement about AIDS," he says. "Now, it's still about AIDS, but it's open to interpretation. It just feels right to be more subtle, to try and make the work appeal on different levels." Then he pauses, adding, "Or maybe I'm just getting older."

Not that he's unhappy about it. De Hoyos, who lives in San Francisco, has a fledgling company, LOL! Brands, whose T-shirts and baseball caps bear the artist's original designs. And for the first time since 1987, "my T cells are above 500," he says. Even without such good news, the self-described optimist would likely be taking life in stride. His personal mantra—and his company's slogan—*is peace, love, sex & art*. Who can argue with that?

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Rebecca Guberman-Bloom
The Dream Is Real

Rebecca Guberman-Bloom has the high voice and bell-like giggle you would associate with a carefree young woman, cosseted and content in a lacy room in her parents' house. Indeed, until

recently, the 33-year-old artist lived with her family. “They thought I wouldn’t live that long, so they spoiled me rotten,” says Guberman-Bloom, who grew up in California and Colorado. “I didn’t pay rent until I was 28 or 29!”

Her photo collages and paintings portray a less cozy universe, where femininity mingles hauntingly with darkness and despair. Her piece for *POZ*, The Dream Is Real, was born, she says, out of one of the most troubled periods of her life. Guberman-Bloom has been living with HIV since she was diagnosed at 17—but avoided meds until a few years ago. Then, after two successful years on HAART, she took a break from the pills “and had a few months of debauchery and wrecked my health.”

So is Guberman-Bloom’s *The Dream Is Real* about finally facing HIV? Confronting death? The particular struggles of a woman? The moody imagery provokes disturbing questions and few easy answers. “My work is about me, but I’m not sure what that means, really,” says the Portland, Oregon–based artist. “People identify me as an artist who has done AIDS work, and it’s part of everything I do. But it comes from a different place than just illness.” Whatever the source of her creativity, Guberman-Bloom would be lost without it. “My art,” she says, “has been my best friend and therapist for years.”

For more on Guberman-Bloom, visit www.guberman-bloom.com.

Sunil Gupta

Love & Light
Sunil Gupta has spent most of his adult life hopscotching between India (where he was born), Montreal (where he moved with his family as a teenager) and New York City and London (where he studied). But India is most on his mind lately. “The attitudes there toward HIV are terrible,” says the 51-year-old photographer. “The consequences for most people who are diagnosed as positive remain pretty grim.” That’s why Gupta, who tested positive in 1995, recently showed his work in his homeland. “I received quite a large and varied response,” he says. “All in all, I feel I can be more useful there than sitting here in London.”

It’s no wonder Gupta’s photographs had people talking. His work fearlessly explores his identity as a gay HIV positive Indian: *In Mundia Pramar, Uttar Pradesh/Chesapeake Bay, Maryland*, a diptych from his “Homelands” series, he juxtaposes a brown cow standing in a field with an enigmatic self-portrait, in which he appears naked, thin, and turned almost entirely away from the camera. The piece creates a clash of ideas, at once comic and despairing: We could chuckle cynically at the comparison of an HIV positive man to a (sacred?) cow or feel an immigrant’s sorrowful disconnection from his culture.

When he tested positive, Gupta remembers thinking, *No, I don’t want to be an HIV positive artis*t. Yet the news also reminded him that life was precious and “I should use it to make work.” Which may account for the way in which HIV is both present and buried in his photographs. Wherever Gupta goes in his autobiographical art, so goes his HIV—this lyrical piece for *POZ* is the beginning

of a new series exploring his first relationship with an (HIV negative) Indian man. (A serodiscordant gay Indian love story is something “we have few images of,” Gupta says.) But his experiences—the blurry intoxication of romance, the crisp focus of solitude—remain universal.

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