The Art Of Living

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“It’s such a hard blow to lose someone you love,” says dancer Bryan Haynes (right), who took part in the fifth annual HIV/AIDS and the Arts Conference in New York City this fall. “As an individual and an artist, you’re faced with the same thing: to figure out what to do with that understanding.“ When Haynes’ older brother died of AIDS in 1990, he turned to what he knew best: a creative expression of the loss and love his family could not convey.

To dramatize the enormous loss of life and promise AIDS visited on the arts community, the organization Visual AIDS established A Day Without Art in 1989, covering Picassos, silencing symphonies and darkening Broadway on December 1. But with the breathtaking blackouts of the early ’90s yielding to boredom and burnout, the new millennium marks a subtle but significant shift. This year, rather than conjuring the never-to-be-made in the arts nationwide, Visual AIDS will focus on giving aid and comfort to the living. “We want to support those who are surviving with HIV,” says assistant director Nelson Satos, who will work with the group to HIVers to spend the day in residence at schools, galleries and museums.

Doneley Meris, founder of the HIV Arts Network and organizer of the conference in New York City, is already planning similar events that combine panels, workshops and performances across the country in 2001. “It’s a healing community event,” he says. “And so much of the art being created has shifted. It’s less about ‘AIDS’ and more about artists living their lives.”

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