

# Eric Rhein's 'Leaves' Memorial Artwork on Display for World AIDS Day

November 25, 2014 By [POZ Staff](#)



Eric Rhein: detail from Leaves. Image courtesy the artist.

Eric Rhein has been working on his AIDS memorial artwork, *Leaves*, for nearly 20 years. As the title suggests, it is a collection of “leaves,” each one created by a thin wire and representing a person he has lost to the epidemic. He adds to the piece every time someone close to him dies of complications from AIDS. As such, it is a decades-long work in progress.

Rhein has made art in New York’s East Village neighborhood since 1980. In 1987, at the height of the AIDS crisis, the then-27-year-old artist learned he was HIV positive. The effects of HIV/AIDS on his community and himself can be seen throughout his work, especially in the portraits that form *Leaves*.

In 1996, during a fellowship at the MacDowell Colony, Rhein began *Leaves* while walking the grounds, contemplating his own newfound good health in the face of so many others who had not survived. “One by one, I picked up leaves until a host of kinsmen was gathered in my arms,” the artist said in 1998 about the project. “In death, they continue to be the teachers that they were in life, generously sharing with me the gifts of their individual attributes.” He translated the shape of each fallen leaf into wire, which he then mounted onto paper, every silhouette representing a different friend he had lost.



Eric Rhein: Life-Altering Spencer. Image courtesy the artist.

A portion of the *Leaves* portraits, which now number nearly 200, will be among the works presented at *Eric Rhein: The Course of My Life*, an exhibit of Rhein’s nature-based art at the Johnson & Johnson World Headquarters in New Brunswick, New Jersey. The visual memoir exemplifies the way Rhein interprets deeply personal subjects through natural forms and materials. “Through art making, at its best, one can be a vessel to communicate with Spirit--touching the divine in ways that otherwise may be inaccessible,” he says. “Through art I feel

connected to a channel, a source to bring forth its wisdom.”

Eric Rhein: The Course of My Life opens on World AIDS Day, December 1, and runs through January 31, 2015, at the Johnson & Johnson World Headquarters, 1 Johnson & Johnson Plaza, New Brunswick, New Jersey. The exhibit is open to the public by appointment 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. To schedule a visit, email [CorporateArtProgram@corus.jnj.com](mailto:CorporateArtProgram@corus.jnj.com). For more information about Rhein and his work, visit [his website](#).

---

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

<http://beta.docker.poz.com/blog/-eric-rhein-has-been>