I Can Still Love You From Here

The Visual AIDS May Web gallery addresses the silent struggle that is carried by those with chronic illnesses.

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“I Can Still Love You From Here” presents a collection of multidisciplinary works by artists from the Visual AIDS Artist Registry who have dealt with life, loss, isolation, and transformation in response to HIV and COVID-19. In the past year, we’ve all come to understand what it means to adjust to sudden shifts in the world around us, how frustrating it can be not understanding these changes, wondering why it even occurred, and how little choice we truly have in the matter. The title, “I Can Still Love You From Here” references the work of Shan Kelley, who uses language, identity, trauma, and biopolitics in order to deconstruct and examine the relationships between space, place, and people.

One isn’t asked, considered, or accommodated, there is no say in the matter; you adapt. While we all had to adapt to external circumstances, there were those of us who were already well acquainted with the idea of adapting to changes, of which occurred internally. The combination of the two brought about an entirely new dialogue that none of us ever thought we’d face in this lifetime.

Covid Central Park, 2020, oil on canvasCourtesy of Visual AIDS/Patrick Webb

Despite still dealing with the effects of it, COVID-19 blindsided the world. An aggressive and unforgiving viral pandemic rapidly forced changes to lives globally, allowing no time to process what was happening to the world. In a matter of months, we were in government mandated quarantine; cut off from friends, family, and loved ones. Patrick Webb confronts the topic of chronic illness in his work consistently, but has brought his personal experiences into the discourse of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the aesthetic of Commedia dell'Arte and the figure Punchinello, he lightens the mood of despair, and shows allegorical reference to this character which one can identify with. There was so much we didn't know, and so little that we did know, spending everyday waiting and hoping for some form of good news of things returning to normal. We used the time being subjected to isolation to understand ourselves and one another. We shared art, stories, songs, and ideas, opening ourselves to truly understanding the differences between each other and the world before quarantine. The piece Isochronous by Roberto Ekholm evokes the physicality of inactivity, whether from sickness or from situation, a duality that could not have existed pre-COVID. The piece uses the sound of labored breathing in the context of discarded free weights to reference the inability to do mundane activities one once used to do—referencing both chronic illness and the struggle of lockdown. We learned that isolation and heightened awareness of oneself was new to only some of us, there are those who were well acquainted with these things.

Isochronous, 2020, cast iron weights, paint, varnish, wood, headphones, sd-card, sound piece Courtesy of Visual AIDS/Roberto Ekholm

Chronic illnesses are not simply health conditions with long-lasting effects, but conditions that also impact most daily routines. One is constantly aware of these impacts, no matter how long they've been dealing with them. They are constantly aware of something that has manifested in them that they have little to no control over. Being chronically ill requires a new sense of awareness of self that wasn't present prior. Adjustments must be made for this newfound awareness of one's limitations, and accepting the fact that the world is not a granting factory for your disability and how to navigate a world that doesn't accommodate their invisible conflicts.

There's a silent struggle that is carried by those with chronic illnesses, the struggles from complications and burdens that make every day life a struggle. This leaves room for mental strife in which those affected are not only fighting their illness but also fighting the act of giving it power over them in order to win the mental battle, creating further exhaustion.

Addressing themes on the passing of time, illness, and isolation in relation to the politics of the body and representation allow us to look backward and make an attempt at redeeming the history of ignorance and prejudice throughout the years. To this day, HIV is still a topic that's surrounded by much ignorance and insensitivity. Nancer LeMoins confronts the feelings of invisibility and the marginalization of women, especially mature women, within the HIV+ community, in a blunt yet often humorous way.

Woman on Shoe 1, 2012, silkscreenCourtesy of Visual AIDS/Nancer LeMoins

The exhibition includes art works by Shan Kelley, Clair Walton, Camila Rocha, Joseph Stabilito, Yen Yen-Jui Lai, Kia LaBeija, Albert Winn, Ronald Lockett, Ben Cuevas, Maxine Angel Starling, J. Hartz, Amos Beaida, Keiskamma Art Project, Grahame Perry, Jorge Bordello, David Jester, Patrick Webb, Gin Louie, Roberto Ekholm and Nancer LeMoins. With the support of Visual AIDS, this exhibition presents a collaborative project between MFA and BFA students from Pratt Institute under the instruction of Steven Sergiovanni.

Click here to view the full web gallery on the Visual AIDS website.

The May 2021 Visual AIDS Web Gallery has been organized by Professor Steven Sergiovanni's

Artist as Curator class, made up of a collaboration of both MFA and BFA students from Pratt Institute. The group of 12 artist-curators met virtually from China, Korea, and the United States to consider curating from a “maker’s” point of view. They explored how to present a remote exhibition in a way that was both innovative and fair to the art. Each artist-curator brought knowledge and experience from their individual practices of painting, drawing, printmaking, photography, video, collage, sculpture, and installation that informed their consideration and selection of artists from the Visual AIDS Artist Registry. BFA/MFA curators are: Isabelle Sun Lee, Abby Zhang, Lanthanum Zhu, Jane Lang, Motong Li, Jaybe Lee, Elli Butto, Marie Moeller Joergensen, Yahan Qiu, Xitong Ding, Khaska Dottin, and Gabbi Agee.

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