

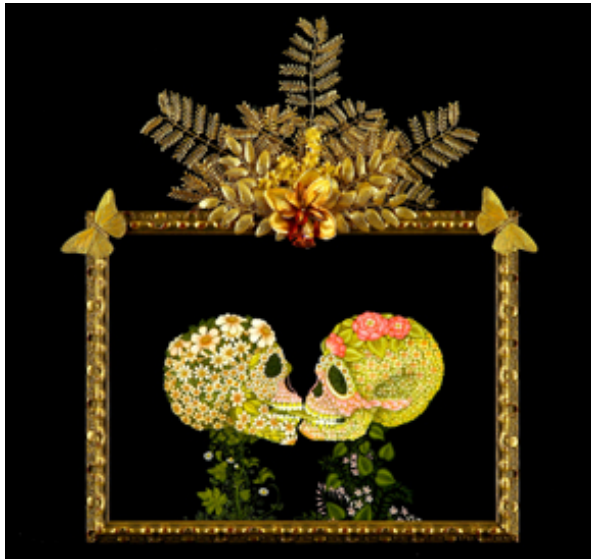
# TACOMA ART MUSEUM

1701 Pacific Avenue, Tacoma, WA 98402

## MEDIA RELEASE

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Media Contact: Julianna Verboort, 253-272-4258 x3011 or [JVerboort@TacomaArtMuseum.org](mailto:JVerboort@TacomaArtMuseum.org)



## Art AIDS America: Groundbreaking Exhibition Debuts at Tacoma Art Museum on October 3

**Tacoma, WA** – Politics, sex, religion, loss, and beauty – all of the topics that you can't talk about over dinner but can at a museum – are open for discussion in *Art AIDS America*, an exhibition that reveals for the first time how the AIDS crisis forever changed American art. It debuts at Tacoma Art Museum on October 3.

Since the first reports of mysterious illnesses in the early 1980s, HIV and AIDS have touched nearly every American in some way, and operated as an

undeniable (though often unacknowledged) force in shaping politics, medicine, and culture. *Art AIDS America* presents the full spectrum of artistic responses to AIDS, from the politically outspoken to the quietly mournful.

*Art AIDS America* is a story of resilience and beauty revealed through art, and the community that gathered to bring hope and change. While recognizing and honoring loss and grief, it refutes the narrative that AIDS is only a tragic tangent in American art, exploring how artists' responses to the crisis and its legacy continue to inform contemporary American art. These artworks offer a vibrant representation of community, caring, creativity and activism. And, *Art AIDS America* will serve as a vivid reminder that the crisis is not over; HIV infections are increasing. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than 1.2 million Americans are living with HIV.

A decade in the making, this exhibition is co-curated by TAM's Chief Curator, Rock Hushka, and Jonathan D. Katz, PhD, Director, Visual Studies Doctoral Program, University at Buffalo.

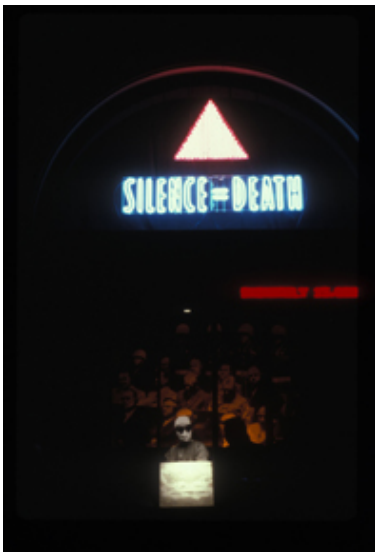
"AIDS fundamentally changed American art, remaking its communicative strategies, its market, its emotional pitch and – not least – its political possibilities. But we've repressed the role of AIDS in the making of contemporary American culture, as we've repressed the role of AIDS in every other aspect of our lives. This exhibition underscores how powerfully a plague that is still with us has



changed us,” says Katz. “*Art AIDS America* creates spaces for mourning and loss, yes, but also for anger and for joy, for political resistance and for humor, for horror, and for eroticism.”

The exhibition assembles 125 significant works in a wide range of media. The artists are diverse, including the internationally acclaimed such as Robert Gober, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Keith Haring, Jenny Holzer, Annie Leibovitz, Robert Mapplethorpe, and Martin Wong, and those not yet as widely celebrated such as Luis Cruz Azaceta, Chloe Dzubilo, Derek Jackson, Kia Labeija, and Joey Terrill. The works date from 1981 to today, and some, like Catherine Opie’s photographs of the 1986 AIDS/ARC vigil in San Francisco, will be on public view for the first time.

“Art reflects and reacts to social, cultural, and political climates, and in the past 30 years, HIV and AIDS has been a constant presence,” says Hushka. “So many of us recall friends, family, and partners we have lost and the terror of the early years of the crisis, while younger people are just learning this story. We seek to create a deeper understanding of the legacy of HIV/AIDS in contemporary American art, and encourage our visitors to see their experiences in these works.”



Works in the exhibition will generally fall into two categories: art with a clear tie to AIDS, and art that requires the viewer to look beyond the surface to understand its connection to HIV/AIDS. Some artists addressed the AIDS crisis through activist works, community projects, graphics, and direct political statements. For example, the collective ACT UP NY/Gran Fury’s installation *Let the Record Show...* sears the words of public officials whose actions inflamed the crisis, including the silence of President Ronald Reagan, who would not speak publicly about AIDS until 1987. Other artists use camouflage, coding, misdirection, symbols, or other covert strategies to address the social, political, and physical impacts of HIV. An example is Robert Sherer’s beautifully rendered *Sweet Williams*, a basket of cut flowers, painted in HIV-negative and HIV-positive blood, about the untimely deaths of so many young men. The exhibition will be organized roughly by works created pre- and post-

cocktail (in this case, ‘cocktail’ refers to the combination of drugs and therapies used to manage HIV and prevent the development of AIDS).

“Tacoma Art Museum is a safe space where people are able to address important and challenging issues. We are proud to present *Art AIDS America*. It is fitting that the exhibition debuts in Tacoma, the city that established the nation’s first government-sanctioned needle exchange program in a proactive approach toward controlling the spread of AIDS,” said Stephanie Stebich, TAM’s Executive Director. “TAM also has the scholarship to support this exhibition through our chief curator Rock Hushka and the exhibition’s co-curator Dr. Jonathan D. Katz, who also co-curated the award-winning *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*, which we brought to TAM in 2012.”



The *Art AIDS America* catalogue is a significant component of the exhibition, with 15 contributors, nearly 300 pages, and more than 200 illustrations. It is published in association with the University of Washington Press of Seattle and London and designed by Marquand Books, Seattle.

*Art AIDS America* is organized by TAM in partnership with the Bronx Museum of the Arts and will tour nationally. See it first at TAM, on view October 3,

2015 through January 10, 2016. The exhibition will then travel to Zuckerman Museum of Art, Kennesaw State University, GA; and The Bronx Museum of the Arts, NY.

### **Art AIDS America Tour Schedule**

Tacoma Art Museum

October 3, 2015 – January 10, 2016

Zuckerman Museum of Art, Kennesaw State University, Georgia

February 20, 2016 – May 22, 2016

Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York

June 23, 2016 – September 11, 2016

For more information: [www.TacomaArtMuseum.org/AAA](http://www.TacomaArtMuseum.org/AAA)

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#### **Image Credits:**

**Tino Rodriguez** (Born Ciudad Obregón, Sonora, Mexico, 1965), *Eternal Lovers*, 2010. Oil on wood, 18 x 24 inches. Private collection.

**Robert Sherer** (Born Jasper, Alabama, 1957), *Sweet Williams*, 2013. HIV- and HIV+ blood on paper, 24 x 18 inches (framed). Courtesy of the artist.

**ACT UP NY/Gran Fury**, Active New York, New York, 1987–1995. *Let the Record Show...*, 1987/recreated 2015. Mixed media, window installation. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of Gran Fury and the New Museum, New York.

**Joey Terrill** (Born Los Angeles, California, 1955), *Still-Life with Forget-Me-Nots and One Week's Dose of Truvada*, 2012. Mixed media on canvas, 36 x 48 inches. Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art, Foundation purchase.

*Art AIDS America* is organized by Tacoma Art Museum in partnership with The Bronx Museum of the Arts, and co-curated by Dr. Jonathan D. Katz, Director, Visual Studies Doctoral Program at the University at Buffalo (The State University of New York); and Rock Hushka, Chief Curator at Tacoma Art Museum. The exhibition is made possible by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, The Paul G. Allen Family Foundation, Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art. Additional support provided by Gilead Sciences, Inc.

#### **About Tacoma Art Museum**

Celebrating 80 years, Tacoma Art Museum has become an anchor in the city's downtown and a gathering space for connecting people through art. TAM's collection contains more than 4,500 works, with an emphasis on the art and artists of the Northwest and broader American west. The collection includes the world's largest retrospective museum collection of glass art by Tacoma native Dale Chihuly on continued view, the world's largest collection of jewelry by Northwest

artists, key holdings in 19th century European and 20th century American art, and one of the finest collections of Japanese woodblock prints on the West Coast. TAM recently welcomed a gift of 295 works of western American art in the Haub Family Collection, one of the premier collections in the nation and the first major western American art museum collection in the Northwest.

**HOURS** – Tuesdays–Sundays 10 am–5 pm.

**ADMISSION** – Adult \$14; Student (6-17), Military, Senior (65+) \$12; Family \$35 (2 adults and up to 4 children under 18). Children 5 and under free. **Third Thursdays free from 5–8 pm.** Members always free.

**CONTACT** – 253-272-4258, <http://www.TacomaArtMuseum.org>