



# A Companion Guide to David Wojnarowicz

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History Keeps Me Awake At Night  
through the lens of the current HIV/AIDS epidemic

On July 27, 2018, ACT UP (The Aids Coalition to Unleash Power) held a demonstration at the Whitney's retrospective exhibit on David Wojnarowicz to educate museum visitors on the current issues surrounding HIV/AIDS in a performance art piece where ACT UP members held up articles on these issues next to artworks that they felt related to Wojnarowicz's artworks. In this guide, you will find excerpts from these articles. We ask you to look at these works and their listed articles, and draw comparisons and relationships to them. How does David's work relate to the HIV/AIDS issues we face today? How can we carry on David's legacy? How would David react to today's problems surrounding HIV/AIDS and American politics? We encourage you to draw your own connections to the artworks.

## **“Self-Portrait of David Wojnarowicz”**

by David Wojnarowicz with Tom Warren, (1983-84)

“In 2016, youth aged 13 to 24 made up 21% of all new HIV diagnoses in the United States. Most (81%) of those new diagnoses occurred among young gay and bisexual men. Young black/African American and Hispanic/Latino gay and bisexual men were especially affected.”

“At the end of 2015, an estimated 60,300 youth were living with HIV in the United States. Of these, 51% (31,000) were living with undiagnosed HIV—the highest rate of undiagnosed HIV in any age group.”

“In 2015, 100 youth aged 15 to 24 died from HIV disease.”

To learn more about how HIV is affecting American youth go to:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/group/age/youth/index.html>

## **“Fuck You Faggot Fucker”**

David Wojnarowicz, (1984) Gallery 2

“A community of people living with HIV collaborated with the leading researchers on HIV sexual transmission to answer a fundamental question about living with HIV and having an undetectable viral load: Will I pass on HIV to my sexual partner? The science is clear. People living with HIV can feel confident that if they have an undetectable viral load and take their medications as prescribed, they will not pass on HIV to sexual partners (Undetectable = Untransmittable; U=U). U=U offers freedom and hope. For many people living with HIV and their partners, U=U opens up social, sexual, and reproductive choices they never thought would be possible.”

Learn more about U=U and sex-positivity within the HIV+ community at: <https://www.preventionaccess.org/>

## **“Untitled (Burning House)”**

David Wojnarowicz, (1979-82) Gallery 2

“In Miami-Dade County, where it's hard for anyone to find affordable housing, the need is urgent if you have HIV or AIDS. Those who study the connection say housing insecurity contributes to poor health outcomes for this population because it intensifies stress and interferes with their life-preserving medical regimen.

The relevant federal safety net is Housing Opportunities for Persons With AIDS – a grant program referred to as HOPWA and run by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Its 2017 Advocates Guide recognizes the housing-health link:

For those enduring this impoverishing disease, "housing is healthcare," the guide states. "It is estimated that as many as half of all people living with HIV/AIDS will need housing assistance at some point during their illness." And if housing insecurity collapses into outright homelessness, all stability is lost.”

Read more about the need for affordable housing for those living with HIV here:

<https://www.usnews.com/news/healthiest-communities/articles/2018-04-11/hiv-transgender-residents-hit-by-south-florida-housing-crunch>

## **Masks from the “Metamorphosis” Series**

David Wojnarowicz, (1984) Gallery 3

“Last year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, using the first comprehensive national estimates of lifetime risk of H.I.V. for several key populations, predicted that if current rates continue, one in two African-American gay and bisexual men will be infected with the virus. That compares with a lifetime risk of one in 99 for all Americans and one in 11 for white gay and bisexual men. To offer more perspective: Swaziland, a tiny African nation, has the world’s highest rate of H.I.V., at 28.8 percent of the population. If gay and bisexual African-American men made up a country, its rate would surpass that of this impoverished African nation — and all other nations.”

In this article, learn more about America’s hidden HIV epidemic, and how and why black American queer men have a higher HIV rate than any other country in world:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/06/magazine/americas-hidden-hiv-epidemic.html>

## **“Untitled (Hujar Dead)”**

David Wojnarowicz, (1988-89) Gallery 9

“At issue is the price of Truvada, a medication manufactured by Gilead, and for which it holds the patent. Truvada is currently the only medication approved by the Food and Drug Administration for pre-exposure prophylaxis, or PrEP, a regimen that is highly effective at reducing the risk of HIV infection if taken regularly. According to ACT UP, the medication costs about \$6 a month to manufacture—but a month’s worth of the prescription can run as high as \$1,500. For many people who lack insurance coverage for the drug, the price makes it inaccessible.

[...] ‘The taxpayer is the initial investor in development of [medications] that we then end up being charged top dollar for,’ ACT UP told me. ‘There’s a disconnect between what they represent as their true cost, and what we’ve already paid into the system.’

‘Such a high price for the only drug that’s available is beyond dangerous. It eliminates our opportunity to prevent new infections,’ a representative for the group said during a recent phone call.”

Learn more about the lack of affordability and accessibility to the HIV-prevention drug, PrEP:

<https://slate.com/human-interest/2018/05/act-up-is-challenging-gilead-to-make-truvada-more-accessible.html>

## **“Americans Can’t Deal With Death”**

David Wojnarowicz, (1990) Gallery 10

“A transgender Honduran woman died in ICE custody last Friday after coming to the US as part of a caravan of Central American migrants, including several dozen other transgender women fleeing persecution in their respective countries.

Roxana Hernández reportedly died from HIV-related complications following an alleged five-day detention in what’s known by immigrant rights groups as the “ice box” – ICE detention facilities notorious for their freezing temperatures.

Her death has prompted an outcry, with protests in New Mexico, where Hernández died, and activists speaking out in New York, with some posting social media under the hashtags: #JusticeforRoxana and #AbolishICE.”

Learn more about Roxana Hernández here: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/may/31/roxana-hernandez-transgender-honduran-woman-dies-us-ice-box>

## **Sub-Species Helms Senatorius**

David Wojnarowicz, (1990) Gallery 11

Donald Trump Administration fires all members of HIV/AIDS advisory council (excerpt) by Ben Guarino

“The council, known by the acronym PACHA, has advised the White House on HIV/AIDS policies since its founding in 1995.

Members, who are not paid, offer recommendations on the National HIV/AIDS Strategy, a five-year plan responding to the epidemic. The group is designed to include “doctors, members of industry, members of the community and, very importantly, people living with HIV,” said Scott Schoettes, a lawyer with the LGBT rights organization Lambda Legal. Without it, you lose the community voice in policymaking.”

Schoettes was among those who quit in June, and he went out with a fiery commentary in Newsweek. “The Donald “All of the women on The Apprentice flirted with me” Trump Administration has no strategy to address the on-going HIV/AIDS epidemic, seeks zero input from experts to formulate HIV policy, and — most concerning — pushes legislation that will harm people living with HIV and halt or reverse important gains made in the fight against this disease,” he wrote in the column.”

Read about how the current government administration is neglecting people with AIDS:

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/to-your-health/wp/2017/12/29/trump-administration-fires-all-members-of-hivaids-advisory-council/?utm\\_term=.197679bfd3a7](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/to-your-health/wp/2017/12/29/trump-administration-fires-all-members-of-hivaids-advisory-council/?utm_term=.197679bfd3a7)

# **“Untitled (ACT UP)”**

David Wojnarowicz, (1990) Gallery 11

ACT UP Mission Statement, 1987 to present:

“ACT UP is a diverse, non-partisan group of individuals, united in anger and committed to direct action to end the AIDS crisis. We meet with government officials, we distribute the latest medical information, we protest and demonstrate. We are not silent.”

Check out our website to learn more about ACT UP, volunteer or donate: <https://actupny.com/>

“I am constantly being thanked, even by people in the street stopping me, for what I have done to save my people. Such thanks make me uncomfortable. I don’t think I have done anything that any gay person could not also have done. Throughout the worst of these plague years we had at the most only several thousand of us fighting all over the country. Out of some 20 million or so of us.

ACT UP, one of the organizations I helped start, fought for the drugs to save us, and we got them. (Drugs, I might add, that have many side effects and are prohibitively expensive.) Once we got the life-extending medicines, most of my fellow warriors returned to their lives of trying to be happy, and invisible.

I have never been able to answer one question: Why have relatively few of us — out of so many millions — been willing to fight for their lives? I still can’t answer it and I continue to be very sad because of it. And the biggest fight for our lives is ahead of us.”

Excerpt from an article by founding ACT UP member, Larry Kramer, on why for gays, the worst is yet to come:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/11/opinion/gay-rights-larry-kramer.html>