



M O C R A

Museum of
Contemporary
Religious Art

on the campus of
Saint Louis University

Consecrations

The Spiritual in Art in the Time of AIDS

A National Group Exhibition

October 16 - December 18, 1994

Tuesday - Sunday, 11 am - 4 pm

Opening Reception:

October 15, 5 - 8 pm

Liturgy

(detail)

mixed media, 19"x8"x3"

by Alec Vargo

Fullerton, California

Consecrations: The Spiritual in Art in the Time of AIDS is the first group exhibition that seeks to put AIDS within a spiritual framework. The twenty-eight artists in **Consecrations** represent the religious, ethnic, cultural, sexual and geographical diversity of this country. Several of the artists are expressing first-hand experience with this deadly disease while others are responding to how AIDS has affected close friends.

There are artworks in this exhibition that are very difficult, while other works are serene and peace-filled. In all cases, the art reflects a profound empathy for anyone who has been touched or will be touched by the reality of AIDS. What becomes clear is that AIDS is everyone's concern, and the twenty-eight artists in **Consecrations** have given us images of suffering, courage, compassion, hope, faith, and love.

We wish to dedicate this exhibition to all who have died of AIDS or who are living with AIDS or HIV.

This exhibition was made possible, in part, by private donations and by a generous grant from the Missouri Arts Council, a state agency.

The Artists

Seyed Alavi: Seyed and his wife Andrea are both artists working in the San Francisco Bay Area. Born in Teheran, Seyed addresses issues of mortality and immortality in his work. **Forever**, comprised of 120 candlesticks and candles, poignantly reflects these concerns. Although not done specifically with AIDS in mind, the artist sees this moving work as a way of honoring those who have died of AIDS.

Gryphon Blackswan: California fashion designer Gryphon Blackswan combines his pride in his African-American heritage with an interest in Asian aesthetics to create eloquent apparel. Mr. Blackswan, who has AIDS, has said that his experience of this disease has deepened his appreciation for that which is truly important in life. In his fashion designs, he tries to capture the spirit of the person for whom the clothing is being made. For the **Consecrations** exhibition, he has designed a set of priest's vestments for the Mass in the time of AIDS. He has also designed burial shrouds for people who have died of AIDS, which are to remain in St. Louis and be used by anyone who chooses to be buried in them.

Ross Bleckner: New York artist Ross Bleckner has gained international recognition for his memorial pieces dedicated to people who have died of AIDS. These are poetic visual epiphanies in which the spirits of those who have died are rendered in the forms of memorial urns, birds in flight, and constellations of light. Mr. Bleckner will have a major retrospective at the Solomon Guggenheim Museum this January. We are pleased to exhibit three of Mr. Bleckner's work in **Consecrations**.

Fabian Bunten: St. Louis artist Fabian Bunten, who died this past June of AIDS-related causes, has created a body of work that combines intense expressionism with tenderness. His paintings are constructions containing mixed media and possessing a power of votive altarpieces. In addition to his paintings, Mr. Bunten created a rich and varied range of custom-made furniture. In the work on display in **Consecrations**, Mr. Bunten pays homage to a friend who, while going back home to die, nonetheless experienced an isolation from his family as he was made to eat alone and off of paper plates and plastic utensils.

Mark Calderon: Seattle artist Mark Calderon reflects his Mexican ancestry with traditional milagros in which the central image of the heart is rendered to resemble the human torso. Milagros are devotional pieces incorporating an image of that which is in need of healing. For Mr. Calderon, it is the human heart that is most in need of healing.

Ken Chu: Chinese-American artist Ken Chu lives in New York and has addressed the issues of gender, sexuality, and race in his large bold figurative constructions. In the work displayed in **Consecrations**, Mr. Chu deals with a subject not often seen in the AIDS artistic discussion--babies born with AIDS.

Michael David: New York artist Michael David came to national prominence in the early 1980's with strong expressive, abstract paintings that incorporated iconographic symbols associated with Judaism and Christianity. More recently, Mr. David has produced a body of work featuring realistic human images that are sealed beneath a two inch thick layer of wax. The work on display in **Consecrations** shows an early childhood portrait of a man, Tadeus Rychard Danek, who died of AIDS some 30 years after the depicted image. The poignancy of this image is enhanced by the pouring of encaustic wax over the surface. Mr. David is represented by the Knoedler Gallery in New York.

San Francisco artist **Eleanor Dickinson** has created a series of large scale Crucifixions done in the baroque style with dramatic foreshortening. The Crucifixions however are not of Jesus; rather they represent ordinary contemporary men and women for whom the passion has significance in their lives. One of her most moving Crucifixions deals with someone dying of AIDS.

Don Eddy: New York artist Don Eddy is internationally known for his painstakingly rendered photo-realist paintings. Collected by some of the finest museums here and abroad, Eddy has produced an impressive body of work in which ordinary objects that are brightly colored or that are made of glass and metal are multiplied and painted often against mirrored surfaces. The result is kaleidoscopic and surreal. His more recent work explores more deeply the realm of pure light as he depicts nature, water, and island skies. There is a mystical, religious quality about these works, further reinforced by their altarpiece-like structure. We are pleased that two intimate works Mr. Eddy did in memory of artist Juan Gonzalez, who died of AIDS last December, are on display in **Consecrations**.

Louise Fishman: New York artist Louise Fishman has earned a reputation of creating some of the most beautiful and strong abstract paintings of any contemporary artist. She has been featured in prestigious shows around the country, and will be honored by having a large retrospective at New York's Jewish Museum in the spring of 1995. Ms. Fishman is represented in **Consecrations** by two paintings: **Mary**, done in memory of a friend who died of AIDS (and featured in the June 1995 issue of Art in America) and a small, tender work entitled **Secrets of the Heart**.

Nancy Fried: Nancy Fried lives in New York and is known for her terra-cotta sculptures that deal with her own experience of breast cancer and mastectomy. Other works deal with gender issues. We are showing two works Ms. Fried did for her friend Juan Gonzalez, small terra cotta pieces that resemble Latin American shrines and that reflect her compassionate and supportive presence in the life of Juan Gonzalez as he struggled with AIDS.

Max Gimblett: New Zealand artist Max Gimblett creates a series of abstract pieces that incorporate universal symbols (the quattrafoglio, the circle, the ziggurat, the cross) with precious metals and expressive applications of paint. The two works in the nave gallery (**Chariot** and **Crown**) are both variations on the mandala and

they metaphorically refer to the sun and the moon, to the cycles of life, to death and rebirth.

Daniel Goldstein: San Francisco artist Daniel Goldstein's art is concerned with mortality and transcendence in the face of AIDS. We are exhibiting three of his "found-object" works from the **Icarian** series that resemble the Shroud of Turin. Mr. Goldstein took the leather covers from exercise benches in a gymnasium in San Francisco's Castro district. He mounted the leather vertically in sarcophagus-like cases. The images of human forms and faces were created completely by the perspiration of the thousands of men who used the gym. They were in no way altered by Mr. Goldstein. The result is startling and haunting.

Juan Gonzalez: The inspiration for this exhibition came the curator's friendship with Juan Gonzalez and his family. Ritual and the religious dimension were quite important to Mr. Gonzalez and are reflected throughout his art. In realist/surrealist images, Juan Gonzalez, throughout his art, has created paintings that are overtly and covertly autobiographical.

We are honored to present a large piece he did in 1987 for the street windows of New York University's Grey Art Gallery for AIDS-Awareness Month. The work has not been shown publicly since then. In fact, the title of the exhibition was inspired by the title of the piece, **Don't Mourn, Consecrate**. **Don't Mourn, Consecrate** was done for a six week viewing for the Grey Art Gallery of New York University in 1987 in honor of those who have died of AIDS. On display in the Gallery's street windows that face Washington Square, the work was a diptych. It is large in scale, the combined width being approximately 20 feet. The left panel, a photo-collage with charcoal drawing and paint stick, depicts the entombed Christ of Hans Holbein laid out against a stormy sky with shafts of light appearing above Christ's head. Suspended in front of this image is a wreath of white roses. For Juan Gonzalez, the white rose symbolizes hope in a time of trouble. On the window glass, Gonzalez has diagonally placed the title in large letters, "Don't Mourn, Consecrate." Gonzalez did not deny the grief that occurs with the loss of a loved-one or friend. What he suggested in this work is to see the lives of those who have died as sacred. In the other window was a large simple memorial card, plain white except for the black border. On this card were placed the weekly death toll of those who have died of AIDS. When the next week began, the previous week's number would be struck by a simple line. Seeing the growing list of numbers of deaths is a sobering experience. The artist gave the work to Fr. Terrence E. Dempsey in 1990, and its exhibition at MOCRA will mark only the second time that it has been publicly shown. Sadly, the numbers of deaths have increased exponentially since its 1987 showing, when the total number of fatalities in the United States numbered approximately 25,000.

We are honored to exhibit the last painting of Juan Gonzalez entitled **Free Fall**, finished just one week before his death. This extraordinarily hope-filled work is part of Juan Gonzalez' **Diver** series in which he pays homage to the ancient Greek fresco of the diver of Paestum. Gonzalez' divers are diving into a new dimension that signifies for the artist the hope of resurrection. The last work in this series, on

display at **MOCRA**, features a number of men all diving into an ocean of light. These figures represent the many friends of Gonzalez who have died of AIDS-related illnesses, and he has joined their company. Below the divers, in a different zone of the painting is a modern day predella-panel that features a beautifully rendered image of the Ancient Greek bronze sculpture, **Sleeping Eros**, based on the sculpture owned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gonzalez is known for the dramatic dialogue between his exquisitely painted canvases and his carefully designed frames. In **Free Fall**, the painting is surrounded by a smooth frame covered with burnished gold leafing. The frame appears flawless, except for a dramatic V-shaped gash on the frame's top side. From the gash a vertical crack moves down through the frame and bisects the painting. The hope of the spirit living on does not eradicate the experience of pain endured.

Donald Grant: Bay Area artist Donald Grant has created a poignant mixed-media piece entitled **Vessel** that recognizes the fragility of mortal life and the triumph of the spirit. The vulnerability of the glass is shattered by the entry of light.

Rene de Guzman: Filipino-American artist Rene de Guzman also serves as Assistant Director of the new Yerba Buena Cultural Center in San Francisco. Using organic materials in minimalist structures, Mr. de Guzman creates moving ritual-like pieces. In the piece entitled **Metamorphosis**, which is exhibited in **Consecrations**, Rene de Guzman gives us a large square. What at first appears to be a work done in the Minimalist tradition reveals itself to be a sculpture of human and animal blood sandwiched between plexiglass panels. The organic nature of the blood is disintegrating before our very eyes. The sacramental role of blood in the Catholic liturgy, the history of the Penitentes in the Philippines, the life and death associations of blood in the time of AIDS, and the identification of blood with the passion and death of Christ are but a few of the associations that are made by this compelling work.

Carolyn Jones: New York fashion photographer Carolyn Jones gained prominence in the area of AIDS with her stunning series of portraits entitled **Living Proof**. In over seventy photographs, Carolyn Jones has photographed with tenderness and insightfulness men, women and children who have AIDS. The entire series of photographs is now touring the country, and a film has been made of the creation of this series of images. The five photographs on display here are now part of the Museum of Contemporary Religious Art's collection.

Tobi Kahn: New York artist Tobi Kahn and his wife, author, Nessa Rapaport have collaborated to present an installation of images and prose dedicated to their friend Juan Gonzalez. Mr. Kahn has gained national acclaim for his hauntingly still reflections on nature and the spirit. Nessa Rapaport is most recently receiving acclamations for her most recent work, **A Woman's Book of Grieving**.

Adrian Kellard: New York artist Adrian Kellard died two years ago of AIDS-related causes. Throughout his art, done as the sculptural version of large woodcuts, he dealt with his coming to terms with being an Irish-Italian, Catholic gay man loved by God. There is no bitterness in his work, and as he grew

progressively ill, his work reveals a deeper understanding of entering into the passion of Christ. Concurrent with the work being shown at **MOCRA**, the work of Mr. Kellard is being in the University of Maryland's exhibition, **Significant Losses** and in Boston's Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum's exhibition, **Art's Lament**.

Horatio Hung-Yan Law: Originally from Hong-Kong, Mr. Law moved to New York in his early teens. He is respected by many St. Louisans who came to know him when he worked on his MFA at Washington University. Presently he is teaching at the University of Oregon. Through his medium of print-making, Mr. Law has produced a remarkable body of art that deals with ethnicity and gender. On display in **Consecrations** will be two of his **Stations of the Cross for People with AIDS**.

Tim Liddy: St. Louis artist Tim Liddy is viewed by many as one of the most talented artists at work in St. Louis today. His work involves a variety of media, primarily painting and sculpture, and his work enters into a dialogue between tradition and contemporary technology. The work, **Monster**, on display in this exhibition, uses the grade-school chalk board to reflect on the global dimensions of AIDS as well as many of the attitudes associated with the reality of AIDS.

Whitfield Lovell: New York artist Whitfield Lovell creates evocative homages to family and friends in large formatted works on paper. Using oilstick and charcoal, Lovell fashions rich, layered surfaces in which images of his African-American heritage are mingled with memorial tributes to significant people in his life who have died. The memorial piece (entitled **Heap**) being shown at **MOCRA** was done especially for the exhibition, **Consecrations**.

Anne Minich: Philadelphia artist Anne Minich was a close friend of Juan Gonzalez and shares his interest in an almost liturgical, ritualistic arrangement of objects on her canvases and in her sculptures. Often her work resembles small shrines and intimate altarpieces. The piece on display (**Annie's Tulips and the Moth**) talks about the circle of life, for at the time of Juan Gonzalez's death, Anne's granddaughter Annie was born.

Joseph Raffael: Mr. Raffael, who now resides with his wife in France, has exhibited internationally and is regarded as one of the finest figural artists at work today. In the 1960's his oil paintings were regarded as part of the Photo-Realist movement. He has always shown an interest in nature, and in his recent work, he has masterfully used the medium of watercolor to shape large, sumptuous, mystical flowers. His use of watercolor is unique. He puddles the paint, paints wet into wet, and works on one section of the paper while rolling the rest to keep it invisible to his eye until the work is complete. These works are deeply imbued with a quiet and uplifting spirituality, as they symbolize life's endless cycle of seeding, flowering, withdrawing, and rebirth. We are honored to show Mr. Raffael's **Spirit Flower for Juan**, a glorious peony done last spring in memory of his friend Juan Gonzalez.

Rod Rhodes: New York artist Rod Rhodes died in 1989 of AIDS-related causes. He left behind him a body of work that combines the Joseph Cornell-like miniature

environments with the pristine geometry of the Minimalists. His works are shrines and temples in which issues of gender, illness and spirituality are dramatized. His final series, **The Stations of the Cross**, deal with his own experiences with AIDS.

Judy Silver: While born in New York, Judy Silver has lived in Sydney, Australia since 1981. She has worked in various media and has won international awards in painting. Most recently she has produced a series of "sound" artworks. The 12-minute long piece in the **Consecrations** exhibition is entitled **Angels in Australia**, and is based on the telephone messages she recorded of her friend Michael Speros who died of AIDS. Through the manipulation of his taped messages along with orchestration, Ms. Silver allows us to come to know this man, to experience his wit, his pain, and his sense of the presence of protective angelic realities.

David Turner: Palo Alto artist David Turner has prepared a memorial book that caringly remembers the lives of so many of his friends who have died of AIDS. The format of the book allows the reader a very intimate entry into the lives of just a few of the many casualties of this disease.

Alec Vargo: While the figural sculptures of Fullerton, California artist Alec Vargo are small in scale, they have a monumentality and a boldness about them that is inescapable. Rodin comes to mind immediately but unlike the light-flickering smooth surfaces of Rodin's sculpture, the surfaces of Mr. Vargo's work have a volcanic roughness about them that intensifies their meaning. In his work **Liturgy** (one of two sculptures by Vargo to be shown in **Consecrations**), Mr. Vargo has placed two men within the framework of a gothic baldacchino, one figure (physically robust) holding his dying companion. Its "Pieta-like" theme shows both suffering and compassion, as one figure supports his dying friend. The standing figure has his head thrown back and is screaming, but the scream is stifled by the rope in his mouth that serves as a gag. The pain is there, but he must express it in silence. As Mr. Vargo has stated, "in today's society, some people are not permitted to grieve publicly for those significant persons in their lives."

Programs in Conjunction with
Consecrations: The Spiritual in Art in the Time of AIDS

Saturday, October 15, at 6:00 pm

University Theater, Xavier Hall

Dance performances by John-Mario Sevilla and Jude Woodcock of the Pilobolus Dance Theatre and Danny Clark, former principal dancer for the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and current choreographer for the St. Louis Black Repertory Theater. Free.

Tuesday, November 1, at 8:00 pm

Cupples House, Saint Louis University

The Amici String Quartet will dedicate one of the musical works on their program to people who have died of AIDS or who are living with AIDS or HIV. Free.

Saturday, November 5, at 7:30 pm

Museum of Contemporary Religious Art

Saint Louis University

Thomas Sokolowski, Director of the Grey Art Gallery at New York University and co-founder of Day without Art, will speak on the "Changing Face of AIDS," a look at the art that has been produced dealing with AIDS from the early 1980's to the present day. Free.

Sunday, November 13, at 4:00 pm

Museum of Contemporary Religious Art

Saint Louis University

Terrence E. Dempsey, SJ, Director of MOCRA and curator of **Consecrations**, will speak on the diverse spiritual expressions that deal with AIDS in the exhibition. Free.

Thursday, December 1, at 5:30 pm

Museum of Contemporary Religious Art

Saint Louis University

Day without Art gathering of the arts community of greater St. Louis at MOCRA for a memorial service. The public is encouraged to join in this moving tribute to those who have died of AIDS.