

Marilyn Martin interviewed by Paul Sendziuk

Cape Town, South Africa, 17 July 2006

This is a verbatim transcript of a recorded interview. It should be noted that when engaging in spoken conversation, people do not phrase their thoughts in grammatically correct sentences. These imperfections have been retained in this transcript.

Paul Sendziuk: This is an interview with Marilyn Martin, it's the 17th of July, about ten o'clock in the morning, 2006, and we're at the South African National Gallery. I just want to start off with a matter not necessarily related to AIDS and AIDS art. You wrote a paper or gave a talk about the African Renaissance some years ago and you noted that many African artists had left the continent and were working elsewhere. I want to know if you were talking about Africa as a whole, or if you were talking about South African artists, and how that might've delayed or muted their response to HIV?

Marilyn Martin: That paper about the African Renaissance still actually has to be written. I've referred to it in other papers but I still want to go into the socio-economic and other matters that prevailed when the Renaissance happened in Italy and to see what it is, and to look into the issue of Afro-centrism, as opposed to Euro-centrism, and the kind of term pan-Africanist. So in terms of the African Renaissance, the application is a Pan-African one because that is Mbeki's agenda. It's a kind of a recycled agenda because it started with Nkrumah and others a very long time ago. I'm not too sure what has happened about HIV and AIDS in other parts of the continent, but I think that it would impact – we have examples of good progress from Uganda, Senegal – because the government took action long, long ago they have a very, very low infection rate – but I'm quite sure that the artistic community has been and is increasingly decimated and where is your, any Renaissance? How is it possible without your artists? The irony is too that while they established an Institute for the African Renaissance at the University of Durban Westville in KwaZulu-Natal, they simultaneously closed the departments of fine art and drama. And there are so many ironies but I think certainly with – I don't know if it's still 600 people dying a day...

That's the figures I've been quoted since I've been here, which is incredible. In Australia we've got the infection rates down to 600 per year, new infections, so there is, you know, a massive disparity there. Do you know that if there are many artists in South Africa currently living with HIV or have died of AIDS?

No I don't actually. I think there's still quite a lot of denial. People are only gradually coming out – somebody like Churchill Madikida with relatives dying of HIV and AIDS, but to my knowledge only Billy Mandindi – that's in the public sphere – Billy died in August last year of HIV and AIDS and that's a huge loss.

And so you think there might be more who are infected but are unwilling to disclose because of the discrimination and the stigma of the disease?

Well, I think that applies to everybody. First of all, I have personal friends who did not get tested in time and are now trying very hard to manage to stay alive – educated

people with all the information, all the knowledge but you know, there's always the – with disease, we're all "It can't happen to me," and particularly – you're a privileged, highly educated young person, you're certainly going to think "It's not going to happen to me." And then one has disclosed; he's a, kind of, and just won a prize for his book, Adam Levine, and his book *AIDS Safari*. Another, who I will not mention, has not disclosed and took a long time to even tell me that this is the case, because we also know that it doesn't show sometimes for a very long time. So I think it would apply to every single person.

What's your opinion of the current or the past government sponsored AIDS prevention campaigns? Just driving around the city I see billboards promoting safe sex or awareness about AIDS and I imagine there's been commercials on the television as well; what's your opinion of the kind of images that they're using, from an artistic standpoint? Do you think they're effective images? Do you think they're promoting behavioural change or could they be done in a better manner?

The images are effective. But the images created by artists for the Artists for Human Rights portfolio, those billboards are obviously more effective because I think artists always capture and communicate things in a much more compelling and powerful way than a simple advertisement. But it really is all kind of empty while leadership in the country denies that HIV and AIDS is caused by a virus, and while there's even intervention from government in order to allow Dr Rath's impounded vitamins, that supposedly have a cure [and which are promoted above proven anti-retroviral medications], to be released; that somebody from government insisted that they be released. And, of course, somebody like Jacob Zuma who publicly states that he, first of all, had sex with a woman who's HIV positive and that he took a shower to prevent infection! He has a following of millions of people! And this is why we're not having the success rate like a country like Uganda and Senegal, to mention two African countries, that we could've had. And these predictions were made in the early '90s when we started having exhibitions and insurance companies and people who – activists – were providing the figures and nobody wanted to listen.

Yeah, well it's not a matter that, "Oh, we didn't know what was happening and this is has all come upon us and by the time we got to it the infection rate was out of control."

And I think one of my great personal disappointments in Nelson Mandela – was a person I, like most of the rest of the world, admired just above, well, certainly above any other politician living on the planet, and leader of that calibre – while he was still president, we were all asked one day to have television monitors in our public spaces and to get to whoever is around us to watch that at noon on that particular day because he was going to address the nation. Well, he didn't; he sent out Mbeki instead, who didn't at that point say that HIV, you know, he didn't declare his ideas and his feelings about HIV and AIDS. But just that Nelson Mandela delegated something that important to the then vice-president.

Was it going to be an announcement just about HIV or was it a bit of a 'State of the Nation' address?

It was a 'State of the Nation' address to alert people and to encourage people to, you know, be faithful, use condoms, all the things that we hear all the time and which people, you know, very few listen.

That was my next question. A lot of the foreign money, foreign aid money for AIDS prevention, is tied to a particular ideology, which is the ABC model of abstinence, be faithful, use condoms a distant third; can you see those messages coming through quite clearly in the AIDS prevention campaigns in those billboards – not the Jan Jorjaan's project, but the other things and the other commercials on television?

The messages are clear but they can't take the place, as they've done in South Africa, of providing medication for people who are infected and whose lives can turn around as we've seen time and time again.

What point have we got to in terms of getting access to ARVs for pregnant women and trying to prevent the spread of HIV through mother-child transmission? I know there was a push to give all mothers the anti-retrovirals.

I'm not too sure that I have to statistics for that. I think you'd have to maybe speak to the Treatment Action Campaign or to someone who's more directly involved, or Doctors Without Borders.

Yeah, that's easy enough to do.

Or someone in the government.

You've written a little bit about the exhibition that you curated for the Harvard AIDS Institute and which was staged at the International AIDS Conference in Durban in 2000, 'Artworks for AIDS', and you mention that very few visual artists in South Africa had been confronting the epidemic before that exhibition was held and you actually had to go out and commission works from people – and that's in 1999, or 2000. Why do you think that there was so little work going on in that area until that time?

Generally, again we were living and we continue to live in a broader context of denial about – no matter how many statistics we see and no matter how much advertising – people are in denial. But in the early stages people were not so directly affected – the visual artists, I would have to qualify that, visual artists whom I contacted – and the people I contacted were artists who are socially engaged, obviously didn't look for work by artists who paint, you know, focus on still life or make more metaphysical works, works differently inspired. So I think they had genuinely not been directly affected and I also think that many of them – well, added to that was the fact that it is a contentious issue and it is oppositional to government and we have a new government and many South Africans are happy and proud about the new government so – and particularly the socially engaged artists – I think in one way they were tired because they had been socially engaged and battled for this, the political freedom and to now engage negatively with the government, because you cannot engage with the HIV pandemic without doing that – was probably not a comfortable thing for them to do. But as Willie Bester said to

me at the time, and really is a person of great integrity and honesty, he said, "I will make a picture of a clinic for you, and people visiting the clinic, but I don't know anybody who is HIV positive and who has AIDS." So and I think what was very important there was that some artists like Sue Williamson and Berni Serle – those are the two that come to mind immediately – continued to work along those lines, were then stimulated to think more about the pandemic. There are others, Hentie van der Merwe – I don't think Hentie lives in South Africa any longer though – have you been in touch with him?

No.

Hentie van der Merwe and Andrew Putter started making works quite a long time ago, and Lien Botha. Those are the three exceptions.

And Gideon Mendel, I suppose, doing his photography.

And Gideon, of course, yes. Since then it has changed, you know, and this is why I could have such a long list of works and get 500,000 rand from our department from our Department of Arts and Culture to acquire works dealing with the pandemic now because there's greater awareness and also people are more directly being affected and realising once again that art can play a role.



Willie Bester, *Landscape Crossroads*, mixed media on board, 42 x 87cm, 2000.

When you were initially commissioning those works around 2000, were they works that you purchased from the artist or were they donated by the artist?

No, they were commissioned and they were paid with – by money from Bristol-Myers Squibb and then they were auctioned at Harvard AIDS and the money went back, so the artists were paid for their work.

Have you got an idea of how much money was raised at the auction?

No.

'Cause it was 31 works, I think.

Yes, everything was not sold because some of the works were quite difficult and they were mostly private collectors. A work by Sam Nhlengethwa did go to the Smithsonian Collection.

I suppose that's the other answer to why artists are reluctant to engage with HIV as a theme in their work: it doesn't sell, except maybe to institutions who are interested in the history of their countries. An institutional collector is unlikely to buy a confronting picture about sexuality and AIDS for the foyer of their bank or, you know, whatever. And that's, I think, the case in America at the moment when so little work is now being made about AIDS. It's artists basically saying, "I have to make a living and I can't be making works about AIDS and managing to feed myself," so there's been a drop off in work being done there.

Well, of course artists like Sue Williamson, Berni Serle and Clive van den Berg and many others don't only make work about HIV and AIDS – the same could be said about works that engage in a very powerful way with apartheid or with any other – with the criminal situation in South Africa, somebody like Lisa Bryce who was also a participant in that Bristol-Myers Squibb commissioning exercise; she's living in London. So we've also lost quite a number of artists who were involved in those early stages but who made work about HIV and AIDS and continue to do so but also make other work. So I don't think it can be an excuse not to engage with the pandemic.

That exhibition travelled, as I said, to the United States and was shown in Durban, I think it went to Geneva as well possibly?

Yes.

Can you give me an impression of the audience response to the exhibition in those three places?

Well, in Durban it was part of the AIDS conference so it wasn't shown in a gallery or in a museum and there were lots of tensions at the time around the big pharmaceuticals so there were days when stickers were – where the stores were being vandalised – I'm happy to say that none of the artworks were vandalised – but the stall certainly was vandalised with people opposing the kind of amounts that have to be paid and the seemingly, at the time, distant [pause] distance that the pharmaceutical companies held in terms of Africa. So it was quite hot at times.

And that included your exhibition, that is was getting funding from Bristol-Myers Squibb and – oh really? Ok.

It was really not on show for very long in America, it was really focussed on the auction and I have no idea what happened in Geneva, I wasn't part of that, it was Bristol-Myers Squibb that took the collection there. But something – sorry if I can just – something very important came out of the exercise and that was the next phase [pause] yeah, American exercise that I did which was at Wellesley College and that was a direct result of the Harvard AIDS auction; Kyle Kauffman who's an economist at Wellesley College, he approached me and said "Can we do the same there?" They'd organised a big conference at Wellesley on the, more the social impact of the pandemic.

I've read the book that resulted from that conference; it featured a chapter by Jeffrey Sachs, I think, as well.

Ok. So that, again, using Wellesley money we commissioned some artists and – some of the same and some not, some different ones.

Given now there has been two exhibitions in the United States that you've been involved in, can you discern any American influence on the work produced by South Africans? Are you noticing that South African artists are looking at the kind of work that even, you know, Felix Gonzalez-Torres was doing or Nan Golden or Keith Haring or even the ACT-UP graphic design sort of people were doing, and maybe incorporating that aesthetic into their work?

Artists work within this global context so the influences are there. Many artists work with video, so I wouldn't say that there's any specific discernable influence, it's just that the tendency is towards video, photo-based work, installation work.

Felix Gonzalez-Torres has a work which I saw in Chicago that's like a light-bulb installation: its a string of light-bulbs going up to the ceiling and coiling around on the floor, and the light-bulbs sort of go out and it's to represent the souls descending to heaven and it's about memorialising people with AIDS, or that's the way it can be taken. And then you look at Clive van den Berg's work where he uses the light-bulbs as well and he's got a piece that's like a wooden hand and the light-bulbs dripping through the fingers.

Oh, I haven't seen that.



Clive van den Berg, *Leak*, wood, light bulbs, electrical cord, 2000.

It's remarkable, you know, the links that might be made and if you wanted to view that work in an HIV context and this maybe being blood or life force dripping from a hand or leaking from the body; it is very interesting. And I asked Clive about that and he said he was familiar with Felix's work but he said in that particular piece there was no link. I'm interested because in Australia cultural production has been very much influenced by what's happened in America and we of course have experienced a very similar epidemic in that it's a homosexual epidemic, we've been relatively successful at stemming the number of new infections and the political response has been similar in each country and thus the artists have been, you know, directing their attention in a similar kind of way. And just from my observations here, I haven't seen that exchange and that's probably fair enough because you've got a different epidemic, a different government to deal with.

And also it was a homosexual epidemic in the early stages but it's not longer – that's the area in which there's much more control than the heterosexual.

Which do you think, of those two exhibitions you've been involved in, were the most successful or compelling pieces? And the artist – which work do you think really spoke most to you but also to the audiences?

That's very difficult to say because the engagement in Durban was brief, it was a stand, and in Boston it was an auction and I just literally went for the auction. It was very – so it's easier for me to talk about the Wellesley project which was shown in different spaces at the college and certainly made a very important contribution to the conference itself and the work was subsequently shown here, which was for us important; we had the exhibition and, you know, we'd been doing HIV and AIDS exhibitions a lot since 1993, when we had the first 'Positive Lives' exhibition and prior to that we had a candle – we tried in the early days to get some of the quilts from the States – there was not a sponsor in sight, nobody wanted to touch it so we got one quilt from St George's Cathedral and a candle a very long time ago and then really got going with 'Positive Lives'. So when this exhibition was here and Gideon Mendel, we had Gideon's, which was a space where there were memory boxes and he was changing not the images on the walls which now included other African countries, unlike the earlier 'Positive Lives' – the photographs that were threaded in the middle of the room were changed because he engaged with people and photographed them if they agreed with and their story was part of the work, or just a hand or whichever made the person feel comfortable. And people would come here and play their musical instruments – it was open – and we used of course the exhibitions to educate our own staff and to draw in different groups, because without those active engagements, bringing people in, and sharing it through education – which one normally does with an exhibition – it's really rather an empty gesture to put works on a wall that deal with HIV and AIDS and leaving it as that.

And so I believe for that exhibition you had some volunteer HIV positive guides who showed people through or maybe gave talks.

And there was also an exhibition in the annex of Jane Solomon's project where women who are HIV positive or have AIDS worked with partners and they made these life-sized drawings...

The body mapping.

The body mapping. And it was really – and the women gave public talks, those who wished to do so which we organised through our friends of the gallery – and those were very moving and inspiring moments.

So this is in 2001, I think?

End of – no. Bristol-Myers was 2000, this was 2003 to 2004, this one happened.

But the 'Positive Lives' one with Gideon's work here...

Well, there's two – I think the first 'Positive Lives' which included Gideon was in – I stand to be corrected, we can check on it – it started in 1993. But that was essentially – it was a British initiative of which Gideon formed part and then it of course travelled the world, 'Positive Lives', and I'm just trying to see – you can fill that in with Gideon. [Pause] Oh yes, that was 2001, and the first one was '93, yeah, the first 'Positive Lives'.¹



Gideon Mendel, [Samkelisiwe Mkhwanazi (left) is looked after by her mother].

¹ Mendel's photographs of the impact of AIDS in South Africa (collectively titled *A Broken Landscape: Africa*) form part of a larger project called *Positive Lives*, which photographically represent people living with HIV/AIDS throughout the world. The continually expanding exhibition has toured globally since 1993, and has now been seen by more than 2 million people world-world.

I know a little bit about what Gideon was trying to do there and what interests me was the way that he did involve people with AIDS themselves in the compilation, I suppose, of the exhibition and using them as, you know, active participants. [Pause] There's been criticism of some artists who are working with people with HIV/AIDS for the way they possibly exploit them as subjects for their own work and sometimes gain fame or win prizes and things like that because of that. I know Dianne Victor got a little bit of flack – I don't know if that's an Australian term – was criticised for her Smoke Portrait series and the way that, you know, she went into a hospice and photographed HIV positive people and then did their portraits. She gave back their photographs to them and she showed them the portraits and things like that, but I know that some people in Jo-burg were unhappy with the way that those people didn't come to her and ask her to draw them and that it happened the other way around. On the other hand, someone like Churchill Madikida has a family member with HIV/AIDS and he begins work from them sort of saying "Can you speak about what I'm going through and can you leave something, you know, can you make something which is going to be left of me once I die?" which is a different sort of process. Was any of that kind of criticism around when Gideon was doing his work? Did TAC, for example, have a problem with what he was doing, or was there a really good collaboration or involvement with those people?

That was a very good collaboration and involvement because I think the need to work with the pandemic through art is greater than, sort of, academic debates – that's not to say that people must be exploited. It happens very often with photography – the poor, the destitute, the children on the street, so I think dealing with people who are HIV positive or have AIDS are not exceptions and some artists deal with the situations more sensitively and others don't. Somebody like David Goldblatt; I'm sure that Victoria Kobokana did not ask David to take her photograph, but he tells her story and says so much through that image when one reads the label of, you know, none of those beautiful, this beautiful Madonna and her children – that they're alive anymore, so I don't think that they would feel exploited. I think if you take snapshots and run away and exhibit them, that's a different, but I trust that serious artists wouldn't do that.

And I think that's definitely the case with Dianne. I mean, she did go back and gave them photographs which she said they were much more impressed with than the smoke portraits – they didn't think the smoke portraits resembled their likeness very much.

We've in fact bought the smoke portraits.

Well, she showed me – she had two or three there – and they're incredibly fragile, she was saying that to transport them, she can only transport two or three of them at a time on the back seat of the car because if you just touch the surface of them...

We've had to, unlike the way one conserves works on paper by not keeping them framed and keeping them flat, we've had to frame her works in a special way. There's some in the exhibition 'Second to None', so you'll see more.

Do you know if any visitors' comments books have been kept from, say, that 'Positive Lives' exhibition in 2001, or the other exhibitions that you've had around HIV that I might be able to have a look at? Because I'm trying to gain an insight into audience responses and seeing if they are affected by the work or whether this is just an academic exercise where people paint things and it doesn't affect audiences. So I'm looking for evidence, be it personal correspondence or visitors' comments books, comments that they were affected by the work.

I can certainly – we didn't have special visitors' books but I can certainly give you access to our visitors' books. I'll need to find them, you know, because that section is run by our property services division, so I can certainly find them for you.

And it would be easy enough I think to find critical reviews in the newspapers or the magazines or on the internet.

You can – we have a library with extensive newspaper cuttings so you should be able to find things there. [Pause] Some of our – because International AIDS Day is on the 1st of December and some of the criticism that came from some of our more traditional stakeholders was that “Why have such a depressing exhibition over Christmas?”

Oh really?

Yeah. So people were unhappy and the response is that, you know, this is, you know, we try, if not here, in our other Iziko sites – last year we didn't do anything here but there was an exhibition at the Castle of photographs. So we always try to do something within our museum structure and I'm doing one now with the recent acquisitions for the 1st of December and it'll be a small exhibition, but it's certainly going to stay up until next year.

I'd just find it hard to respond to that kind of criticism. I'd be saying, “Well, of course it's going to be at Christmas time, it's going to be at Easter time, it's going to be in July and this is because it doesn't go away.” [Pause] We've jumped ahead from where I was heading because we've already talked a little about the 'Positive Lives' exhibition, which is fine. During that exhibition, I think there was a closing ceremony in April 2002 and I think there was a launch of Gideon's book, *A Broken Landscape*, which has been described as being almost like a political rally – speeches were made etc. – can you remember what I'm talking about there and are you able to describe what it was like?

Well, Gideon is a very political artist and one of the exciting aspects about this venue is that it is right next door to parliament. Whether all this activity and the people and the ceremony and the publicity had any impact on parliament, I doubt very much, so you know, one can't – for us it was certainly wonderful, we enjoy rituals here, we have some Sangomas at some openings where relevant, when we have beadwork exhibitions we have makers and we have the blessing of the exhibition by the people who participate or whose culture is represented in the exhibitions. So for us and for those who attend, these are very powerful moments and we, this museum, we like to engage politically. What broader effect it has – when I say broader effect I think there are two things: I

think there's on the one hand there are the people who are actively, who are affected and who are active participants in the process and what the body maps or the ceremonies or having their stories on display, what that might mean to them, in a sense of release and empowerment as individuals and acknowledgement. Some of those body maps are so beautiful; the drawing and the use of colour and mark, they're just so – and those women interestingly, as you probably know, there was only one man in the beginning and he kind of disappeared – didn't continue. So, but these women have become known artists for their work and I think that must – so the idea is if one can make small differences – through art, or through this museum or through Gideon's political activism, we're not going to turn the pandemic around, we have to be realistic about that, I don't think we've had any influence on the powers that be next door, but little changes, little interventions, changing people's lives perhaps in a small way and using this great and powerful institution can make a difference. And that's not only about HIV and AIDS, this is something that we really do believe in. So I do believe that everything that we do and did around – they made a difference, big or small.



Gideon Mendel, *Breaking the Silence* [protest demanding access to drug treatments organised by the Treatment Action Campaign], 2000.

Commenting personally about consuming this work yourself, can you highlight instances, or has it been the case, that by experiencing the artwork you've had your own perceptions changed about the epidemic? Has reinforced or changed your own particular attitudes or behaviours or has it maybe even helped with your own grieving process or sense of loss or sense of frustration?

Well, as you know from what I've written, my work and my interest really was, came from personal loss in the first place, not the other way around. So it was a very dear and close family friend; it happened very early, 1992, a person who came from a conservative Afrikaans family and who would not want acknowledgement or public use of his name. So that was a painful and direct experience and, I think, certainly starting

and continuing [my involvement in the area], still is in memory of him, not born of anger. My anger is directed at people in power who're not fulfilling – and a sense of responsibility then to see what one can do through your own work and through active participation and the – so I do it in memory of that person still and will continue to do so because it's still very sore. Ok. [Pause, choking back tears]

How, by viewing works, maybe by viewing Dianne's portraits or walking through Churchill's installation of *Status*, does any of that work help you deal with the sense of loss that, you know, that you are experiencing?

I think that – I have this great belief in what artists, be they visual or music, but particularly visual because that's my field, what artists can achieve and so to have, to see through the projects that I've started with other people and been very fortunate that these opportunities have come to me – I'm very grateful that the opportunities have come to me and the first one, the Bristol-Myers Squibb one, certainly not through reputation, but through the fact that the person, they had to find somebody to do the exhibition, knew my daughter and she thought, "Oh, well Catherine's mother is in the art world, maybe Catherine's mother can do it?" and of course that's kind of a divine intervention. And just to see the extraordinary work that artists have produced and that the, yeah, the way that more and more artists are working with the pandemic and that the work that we've done is acknowledged by a special grant from the Department. I feel that one is achieving, that something is happening and of course it helps to – not to deal with it with a sense of personal loss I wouldn't say, I think that's a very, that's a very hard thing, but just to continue to honour this person and others who have followed and who hopefully will not follow very soon to somehow make – my disappointment really has been in the new generation of people whom I know who have not taken precautions and have not got tested in time or early enough – that I can't understand, there's an incomprehension about that, people who have everything at their disposal. But you know, we can't – it's not judgemental, it's just through lack of understanding. So I will continue to do this work because I do get a lot of – my sense of responsibility and wanting to contribute to society through the museum and personally is inspired and satisfied at the same time through the work.

You've been working in this area for quite a long time now and you're aware of different issues and you've seen a lot of work which has obviously inspired you and affected you; do you become blasé when you see a new work, say by Churchill or Dianne or – are they still able to bring something new and fresh to you and make you see things in a new way?

Indeed, and they, the artists inspired me to make applications for this grant from the Department of Arts and Culture because without the work I wouldn't have, you know, I wouldn't have just gone – I knew that there was a body of work, and significant work, and the different ways in which artists express themselves – Churchill, and I was privileged to be taken through his exhibition when he had it at Michael Stevenson by Churchill to explain and to understand better and feel that sense of personal loss.

What about hope? We know from research done in the United States and Australia that communities and people who can't envisage the end of the epidemic or an end to their own sense of loss and grief and suffering, that those are the people

most likely to become infected, they develop a kind of fatalism, a despair, “What’s the point in keeping on going if our community is dying anyway?” What way can artists intervene in that process and inspire hope, and can you think of any particular works or even exhibitions that give you a sense of hope?

Well I think there one works more directly, I think more directly of people like Kim Berman who goes way beyond her own work with her projects, somebody like Gideon Mendel, somebody like Andries Botha who made a work for Wellesley but who, to my knowledge, hasn’t produced any other work, but who worked with a group of women in KwaZulu-Natal where they could tell their stories in embroidery. So I think at – they’re South African artists are so wonderful, those who do engage that way and I think that those are the projects that are going to really make the difference and provide the hope, or at least give people the sense that they’re leaving something behind if they are dying. And I think if each one of us – I’m an optimist by nature – if we all begin to develop the feeling and the want, the desire, the real desire for this pandemic to end, at metaphysical levels it can happen and it will happen because all catastrophes get to a point where they turn around. It’s just awful for the children who – the AIDS orphans and the little ones who have to take this extraordinary responsibility of the old people.

This new category of the child-headed household is pretty awful.

And there’s not enough being done now that we cannot do through art. Art has a role and I firmly believe in that role but the role is first of all that of government supported by NGOs and the private sector, but the leadership has to come from government.

Do you know anyone who is writing on this kind of history, the history of South African responses to AIDS in artworks – graduate students or...?

No. I occasionally get an email from somebody but I think Cal at UCT, I think there’s – what is it? She was part of the Wellesley [pause] seminar as well and the body maps came through that unit at the University of Cape Town. That there’s more writing being done, I don’t think that there’s many postgraduates, certainly not that have come my way, much postgraduate work in the visual arts that occasionally I get an enquiry and I direct people but I think the work, the writing is being done elsewhere.

That is interesting because in American universities and American art magazines there’s a proliferation of writing about AIDS related art and yet here it seems there’s an even more impressive body of work to deal with yet there hasn’t been a response from academics. But it’s possible that historians, and it’s generally art historians who would engage in this kind of work, that this is still too recent for them, they’re used to looking into the distant past.

Yes, and even our art historians are quite engaged in what happens in South African art but somehow, you’re quite right, I think it’s too difficult still and it’s – really the problem lies with government because, you know, people in the art world are mostly progressive people and it’s not politically correct and fashionable to engage or to oppose government policies, particularly not as a white person. Of course, the outstanding example is Pieter-Dirk Uys who opened this exhibition and who wrote the little

foreword for it, through his plays and also through his performances and somebody like Shapiro, they're just role models.

Instead of applying to the Department of Art and Culture for funding, what is the chance of applying to the Department of Health for funding and framing art as sort of public health intervention, rather than culture? What's the likelihood of an application like that being successful?

Well, HIV and AIDS is supposed to be a national priority and the Department of Arts and Culture likes to see itself as participating in that national priority, so for me that and the way that the money is being used [it made sense in applying to the Department of Arts and Culture]. I think if one were to have an organised – and this is something that still needs to be done – a big exhibition of South African work dealing with HIV and AIDS, one could perhaps go to the Department of Health. One could certainly go to the National Lottery and I think that application would be successful. How long it would take to get the money is another question.

I've been reading about the gross delays in...

I applied to the Lottery for acquisitions because our own budget, just acquisitions, our own budget, well, not just acquisitions, they're very clearly motivated for in detail, but we have found that that is a better way than to apply for an exhibition because the exhibition could come and go and you don't have the funding whereas with acquisitions you may lose some of the works, but if they're major expensive works, they're likely to still be there two years, three years later. Otherwise one can always find other works that are similar, so that's really the route that we've gone successfully, whereas with the Department of Arts and Culture this, what they call transformation money, is usually unspent money that then has to be spent before the end of the financial year, the 31st of March, so one is quite sure that the money will come early in April.

Are you aware of the exhibition that was held in Australia in the mid-1990s, it was curated by Ted Gott at the National Gallery of Australia and it was called 'Don't Leave Me This Way: Art in the Age of AIDS'?

No.

There's a wonderful catalogue, it has essays and everything and it was a very early exhibition in Australia's National Gallery. It was financed by the Department of Health rather than our Department of Arts, and the National Gallery got \$250,000. The exhibition consisted mainly of Australian art and American art and British art at that stage, I don't think any African art at that point; it was 1994-95 but they started getting it together earlier than that of course. And it's just interesting that it was funded through the Health Department as a public health intervention. It was an expression of the government sort of saying that AIDS needs to be fought on different fronts, not just health and not just by doctors but by cultural workers as well. And it's in our National Gallery, which is in Canberra; hardly anyone lives there, but a lot of people travelled to the exhibition and they had, I think, about 140,000 people go through the exhibition. It was one of their most successful contemporary exhibitions that they'd had. And I was speaking

about this to people in America when I went there, and I've interviewed art professionals and artists in America, and they were staggered that an exhibition like that could've been held with government funding – it was very sexually explicit, very confronting, critical of government and they said in their country there would be no chance of that sort of happening, particularly in the premier arts institution in the country. So you should definitely try to find the catalogue. Unfortunately I don't have one with me at the moment.

Maybe there's a web address or something that you look up?

It'll be on Amazon.com as well, you'd be able to get one through there or even contacting Ted Gott directly – he's now at the National Gallery of Victoria. It was a fascinating show.

I think you're very lucky; your Department of Health is very different from ours because I don't think that with our current Minister, you know, that's [possible] – and with Zuma suing ... I have to say that in this selection of works [recently purchased by SANG], particularly Shapiro's cartoons, we didn't [worry about] what government might think; we will display the works and take whatever consequences there are. I'm not surprised that an American institution wouldn't do similar because America is not a democratic country and people lose their jobs, you know. I mean, I've done extraordinary things here and I'm still here, [even] with the previous government and with this one, and I got into trouble but you still have a job and you still carry on and you still don't do as your told and we're funded by central government so... But that bigger exhibition [I hope will happen here] I'm glad, because one needs to sometimes be reminded of what still needs to be done, and I say still needs to be done because I'm still here for just over two years, so even if one starts things, that we still have to do a big...

What happens after two years? You're heading off into the sunset?

No, I have lots to do. I like to write and so I will be writing. I can perhaps do some art reviews again and art criticism that I'm not able to do in my current position. I used to do that before I came. [Pause] Well no, I can think of lots to do.

And you lectured in architecture before, in your past life; do you still retain an interest in that? Do you ever get an opportunity to teach?

Yes, that's one of my great frustrations from time to time. I'm an architectural historian, not an architect, but as my head of Department at Wits said, I'm an architect by osmosis because I spent almost ten years there – he was a firm believer that architects should know about the history of art and history of architecture so we actually had a full five year course of history of art and architecture that I started with two of my colleagues and that was a fascinating. By the time the students handed in their sixth year dissertations, of course they knew a lot more about architecture – the making of architecture – than I did; it really was an osmosis of history and practice. But, yeah, the profession remembers me, they invited me to open their exhibition of paintings at the Association for Visual Art last week. I don't know that they're going to be inviting me again. [Laughs]

Oh God, didn't go well?

It's not a good exhibition, it's not a good art exhibition. One also begins to wonder – I didn't say it but I implied – one begins to wonder about the quality of architecture in South Africa, which is mostly appalling. So – but my heart certainly is very much still there; I love buildings and to look at them – I've just been to the opening of the Musee du Quai Branly, so it's a privilege to see the new Jean Nouvel building and I will write about it, but in a different form, so I can – and there's very few people writing on architecture in South Africa. So, yes.

Good. Well thank you very much; I'll turn this off.

[End of interview]

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