

ARTISTS
SPACE

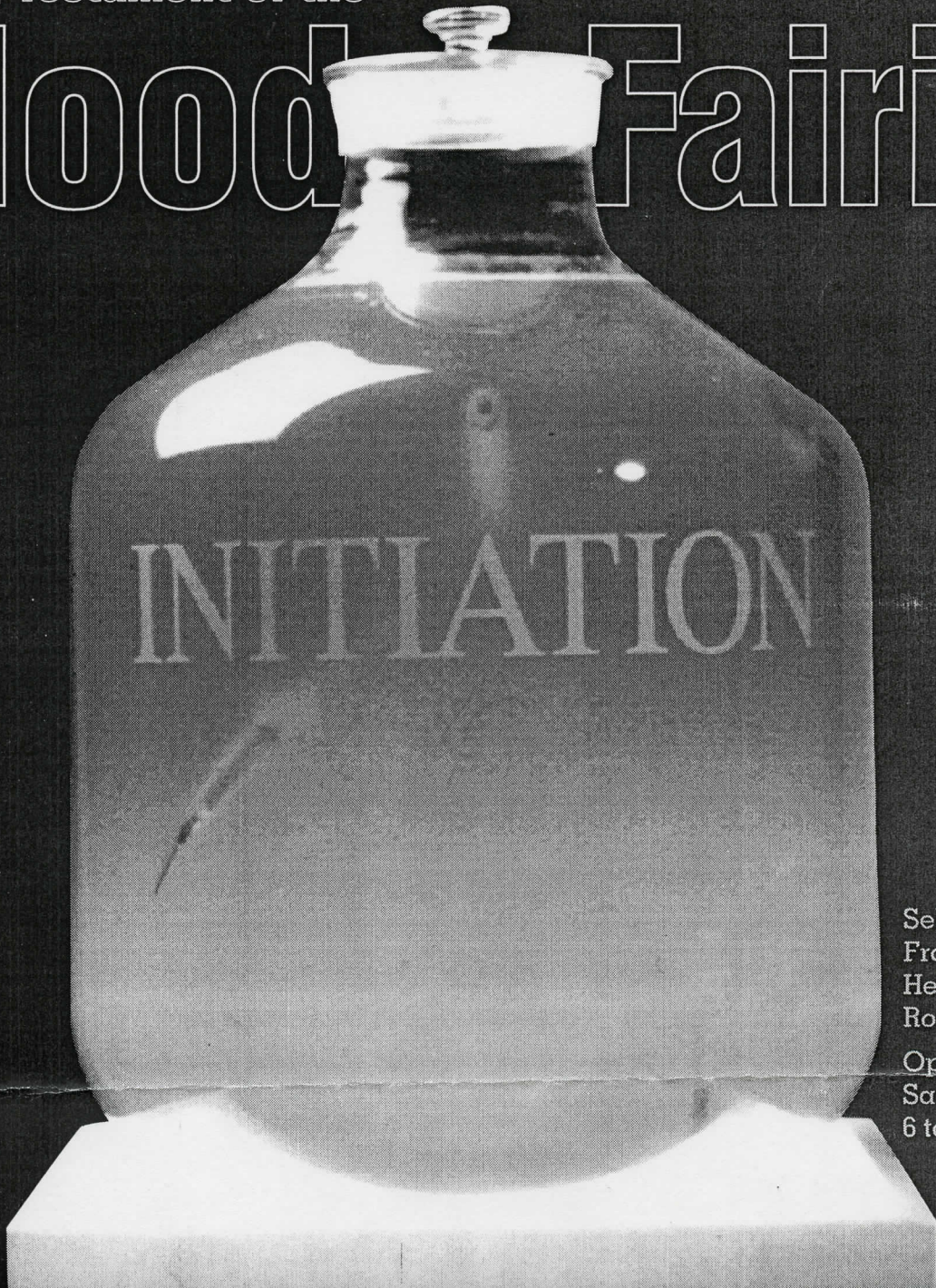
PROJECTSPACE

Jeff Francis

Selected by
Cindy Sherman

A Living Testament of the

Blood Fairies



Selected by
Frank Moore, Geoff
Hendricks, and Sur
Rodney (Sur)

Opening reception:
Saturday, Nov. 9,
6 to 8 p.m.

liott Linwood, *Initiation*, 1993. 200 lbs of honey, syringes, and sandblasted glass

A Living Testament

In the Main Gallery, Artists Space presents "A Living Testament of the Blood Fairies." Selected by Frank Moore, Geoff Hendricks, and Sur Rodney (Sur), the show includes works by ten artists who are living with HIV/AIDS and two PWA artists who have passed away. Artists in the exhibition include: Copy Berg, Robert Blanchon, Brian Buczak, Valerie Caris, Joe De Hoyos, Robert Farber, Rebecca Guberman, Elliott Linwood, David Nelson, Mike Parker, Jorge Veras, Martin Wong.

EXAMINATION

"A Living Testament of the Blood Fairies" is a view from within. To present this view, the works draw upon fairy tales, cartoons, myths, rituals, and incantations. AIDS is referred to only obliquely or in coded terms. All of the works include text, and at times only the text or the title of a work allows the viewer to make the connection to AIDS. Also included are some text-based works that do not refer to AIDS, since all of the artists included here have interests that extend beyond the disease.

BLOOD TYPE

The text-based works presented here broaden the public discourse on AIDS through their tenderness, humor, poignancy, and personal intensity. They stand in sharp contrast to much of the work created by seronegative artists or seromixed art collectives like Gran Fury, General Idea, or Group Material, all of whom have produced equally intense work using polemical, propagandistic, didactic, and analytical discourse. Taken together, these two approaches yield a remarkable portrait of a human catastrophe.

FINGER PRICK

"A Living Testament of the Blood Fairies" represents a small sampling of the artists who have been served by the Archive Project of Visual AIDS. This project, started in 1994, provides professional services to artists with HIV/AIDS. All three curators of this exhibition are on the board of Visual AIDS and are members of the Archive Project.

In Robert Blanchon's work, text decodes messages, compelling us to reframe our understanding of his metaphors. The fabric fiber labels photographed on the napes of necks reference the Act of 1648, which governs laws of burial (Repealed in 1814). The Act states, "No corpse of any person (except those who shall die of the plague) shall be buried in any shirt, shift, sheet, or shroud, or anything whatsoever made or mingled with flax, hemp, silk, hair, gold, or silver or any material or thing other than what is made of sheep's wool."

Brian Buczak (1954-1987) In his painting *Trompe l'Oeil*, Death has a drawing of a skull (without jaw bone) on a folded piece of paper. The word "death" is written underneath, and the paper is attached to the cover of a ledger book/journal by a red pushpin. Does the ledger book allude to the larger record-keeping of births and deaths? The red pushpin, blood? The folds, an implied cross? The absence of jaw bone, the stilling of the voice? The copy book is closed. Is all written? Nothing more to write? No longer able to write? The icon of the journal sealed by death?

Valerie Caris in *Poses* presents photographs of herself as a burlesque queen, contrasting these images with vivid entries from a dream journal, and clinical notes in which her doctors assess the state of her HIV infection. All three perspectives involve extremes of personal exposure. This directness and vulnerability engages the viewer in a deeply human self-portrait of a woman with AIDS struggling to be understood. The garments she fabricates, incorporating similar text, seduce us with their delicacy and poignancy by the absence of the body they were meant to clothe.

Joe De Hoyos constructs variations on words from carefully selected magazine pages (ideally the Sunday *New York Times Magazine*), which are razor-cut then layered to form a word or group of words. Within the meticulously constructed shapes the interpretive letters are concealed waiting to be discovered. While in other collages, this task is less complicated, the intentions become the word itself. When the letters forming the word are obvious their meaning is subverted.

Robert Farber (1948-1995) links texts from antiquity to contemporary statements about AIDS, conveying a sense that AIDS has historical precedents and is an aspect of the human condition. The testament of John Clyn of Kilkenny reproduced in *Western Blot #19* bears witness to the Black Death and can be seen as a literary antecedent of Farber's pictorial achievement. Farber's images are constructed from many disparate elements; however the text, which may start on one panel and continue onto another, and connect conceptually with other texts, unifies the overall work. The texts provide a model for how AIDS can break through compartmentalized thought, demanding a reorganization of categories and priorities on both a personal and societal level.

Copy Berg was the first person to successfully fight a dishonorable discharge from the Navy for being gay. As a lifelong cartoonist he has learned about compressing ideas, simplifying line, combining text with image, using panels in series, and how to play with the double meaning of words. His comic strips also deal with grief and our deepest feelings.

Rebecca Guberman explores human nature on a microscopic level while examining her blood as a life force. Her work acts as a portal into the deeper thoughts who we are. It provokes the viewer to peel back layers of mind and spirit to explore the intensities that dwell within. Why am I here? Who am I? What can I know? What is it to hold my hands above my head and scream as if it were the last chance I had to feel? Who would I be without the comfort of a home? What am I compared to the tiny ants that I step on? How different am I from a dying old man or a deceased rabbit?

the Blood Fairies

Elliott Linwood's works offer gentle suggestions which often conceal pointed metaphors. In *Initiation* the sensual allure of an apothecary jar filled with honey is sharply dispelled when the viewer perceives floating syringes. Linwood may be suggesting that it is worth putting up with the sting to obtain the product. The word "INITIATION" sandblasted onto the jar evokes rites of passage which entail pain to facilitate progress to greater awareness. Linwood implies that AIDS, or any serious illness, can be regarded as a rite of passage. In a similar way, the texts in the works *Citizen Pan* and *Resistance* enhance our tactile perception of the work rather than overpower it.

David Nelson creates a meditation on time. The barely legible text in *If Ida Knowd* is a verse retained from his childhood which expresses regret about an encounter between friends which could have, but did not, occur. In this context it evokes a communication by friends or lovers separated by death (Nelson's lover died three years ago). Nelson wrote the text by snapping hourglass timers at their point of constriction and depositing the line of falling sand on photographic paper. The length of time each hourglass lasted is recorded under the deposited text and the hourglass itself, carefully enshrouded in rice paper, is hung from the drawing at the point where it "died".

Mike Parker, better known for his post pop SURFREALISM paintings that investigate his experience and passion for the world of surfing ocean waves, also paints canvasses that explore hopes, dreams, and desires off the beach. These paintings carry text and logos that announce themselves in wonderful and surprising ways. *Bambi Reflects* and *This Town Needs an Enema* provide backdrops to remind us that we may still imagine, as children, though now adults.

Jorge Veras says "I use the camera to sketch life . . . people, things as they are, as I see them, there and then. Other times I stage an event . . ." These large photos with texts were first displayed like posters on the wall of a subway station. Waiting, one observes the flow of life and speculates about the lives of others. "Now I feel the slow beat of my heart. Blue heart. Reminding me of my solitude. Trying to think of a saying." "Turn me out into ginger heaven. Sugar stone smile."

Martin Wong's Chinese heritage, the graffiti on brick walls of tenement buildings, and the Spanish of his neighbors on the Lower East Side have provided him linguistic options. The many clock faces in *Time Out For Love* suggest options for love: firemen, policemen, prisoners, guys on the street, Cupcake and Paco. Time passes, but for a moment it may be stopped. "I really like the way firemen smell when they get off work. It's like hickory smoked rubber and B.O. After he showers and throws on the Old Spice I always lose interest. He thinks I'm only into him for his uniform — in reality I'm only into him for the smell."

This exhibition is made possible, in part, by a generous donation from Carlo Traglio.

BLOOD SAMPLE—OBSERVATIONS

The texts in this exhibition are printed, painted, sandblasted, silk-screened, collaged, photographed, drawn, projected, or formed by sand falling from a broken hourglass. These tactile, sensual processes fuse text with image in a deliberate and poetic way.

DIAGNOSIS

Recognizing the beauty, quality, and cultural value of this work underscores the need to document it and support the artists who continue to reflect on the meaning of this historic event despite daunting obstacles and handicaps.

PRESCRIPTIVES

Search for the significance of this disease in the unique responses of creative individuals who are living with AIDS.

Confront our bodies and our mortality, realizing now intensely and fully the dreams and fantasies dormant within. Reawaken our childhood, unfolding the fairy tales we have gestating within us.

Balance the politics of AIDS, the statistics, the social imperatives, the cloak of tragedy, with this new awareness and vulnerability.

--Frank Moore, Geoffrey Hendricks, Sur Rodney (Sur)

PART I: "A Living Testament of the Blood Fairies" at Artists Space, November 9 to January 4, 1997

PART II: Artists Books at Printed Matter, 77 Wooster Street, January 7 to March 1, 1997