

Memorial Art Gallery and River Campus Libraries to Present Collaborative Exhibition, *Up Against the Wall: Art, Activism, and the AIDS Poster*

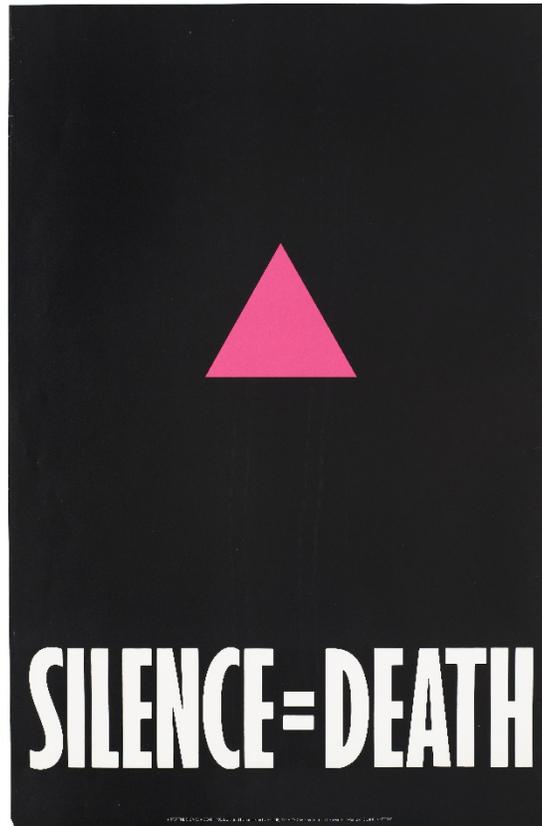


Image: ©1987 THE SILENCE= DEATH PROJECT. USED BY PERMISSION BY ACT UP, THE AIDS COALITION TO UNLEASH POWER, 135 WEST 29TH ST., #10, NYC 10001

ROCHESTER, NY, February 8, 2022— The Memorial Art Gallery (MAG) and the River Campus Libraries (RCL) at the University of Rochester are pleased to announce the upcoming exhibition [*Up Against the Wall: Art, Activism, and the AIDS Poster*](#). On view at the Memorial Art Gallery from March 6–June 19, 2022, *Up Against the Wall* is the first major exhibition devoted to the University of Rochester’s vast collection of HIV/AIDS-related posters.

The exhibition features 165 of the most visually arresting and thought-provoking posters from the over 8,000 acquired by collector, physician, and medical historian Dr. Edward C. Atwater. Donated to the University by Dr. Atwater in 2007 and housed in the Department of Rare Books, Special Collections, and Preservation, River Campus Libraries, the collection is one of the largest of its kind in the world. Illustrating the wide range of strategies used to educate, inform, and inspire around this devastating and ongoing global epidemic, the exhibition underscores how beauty and creativity have grown out of the tragedy and destruction of the deadly virus.

The posters inspire people to protect themselves, protect others, and change their own behaviors through a broad range of creative expression. Spanning from 1982 to the present, they show how social, religious, civic, activist, and medical organizations have addressed the controversial, often contested terrain of the HIV/AIDS epidemic within the public realm. The posters themselves reflect the need for varying messages and methods to share information based upon audiences, cultural norms, and behaviors.

Organized by New York-based curator and historian Donald Albrecht, *Up Against the Wall* will fill MAG's 5,000-square-foot Docent Gallery and explore the messages and methods used to educate, inform, and provoke audiences worldwide. These materials, originally appearing "in the wild" on bus stops, subway cars, bulletin boards, and light poles, offer insights into the ways that health organizations, grassroots activists, and artists have responded to HIV/AIDS.

"The greatest challenge I faced in organizing the show," notes curator Donald Albrecht, "was selecting some 200 posters from a collection numbering 8,000. I strove to express, in condensed form, the visual, social, and cultural richness of the archive as well as its transnational scope. It is my hope that these posters from the past provide models for action today."

Up Against the Wall is organized into two primary thematic sections. "Raising Awareness" comprises posters that have provided accurate information and corrected myths and misinformation about HIV/AIDS, while "Acting Up" brings together posters that have advocated personal responsibility and action, aiming to persuade people to change their attitudes and their behaviors. Secondary exhibition sections explore the formation of the University's collection and how HIV/AIDS poster sponsors and designers, in their search for iconography, found inspiration in historical public health examples. Throughout the exhibition, audio recordings and films offer personal commentary on HIV/AIDS from an international range of scholars, doctors, and artists, as well as local Rochester residents, among others.

With their international scope and myriad visual languages—from simple hand drawings to slick advertising graphics—the exhibition's HIV/AIDS posters demonstrate the revival of the genre of the public health poster and represent one of the most significant chapters in the more than 150-year history of poster art.

The exhibition challenges beliefs about HIV/AIDS and who is affected by the disease, breaking down stigma and stereotype through evocative imagery, bold text, and creative humor, and offers keen insight into the tragedy and destruction of communities caused by this virus. By using scare tactics, simple scientific explanations, sexual imagery, and even humor, the posters challenge misinformation about HIV/AIDS and convey their life-saving messages. The posters offer audiences a deeper understanding of how both the pandemic and reactions to it have shifted over time. Beyond serving as public health communiqués, these posters have helped forge identity and community among AIDS activists all over the world.

"River Campus Libraries has used the posters to support teaching, research, and creative endeavors across disciplines," said Jessica Lacher-Feldman, exhibitions and special projects manager for the River Campus Libraries Department of Rare Books, Special Collections, and Preservation, and the curator of the AIDS Education Poster collection. "This exhibition is a culmination of years of planning, collaboration, and is a key opportunity to share the power of the HIV/AIDS poster as a mechanism for saving lives, changing minds, and invoking action around the world."

Throughout the run of the exhibition, MAG will offer a broad range of public programs and community engagement opportunities that explore the intersection of art, design, advocacy, and health to continue the conversation surrounding the HIV/AIDS pandemic and create opportunities to learn more about its past, present, and future prevention. A full list of programming can be found [HERE](#).

The exhibition is accompanied by an illustrated book, co-edited by Albrecht, Lacher-Feldman, and Dr. William Valenti, published by [RIT Press](#). It is available for purchase at [THE STORE @ MAG](#).

###

This collaborative exhibition and all related activities are made possible through the vision and generosity of donor, collector, physician, and medical historian Dr. Edward C. Atwater, and his family, whose [AIDS Education Posters Collection](#) is part of the River Campus Libraries' Department of Rare Books, Special Collections, and Preservation at the University of Rochester.

The exhibition is sponsored by Vicki and Richard Schwartz, the Rochester Area Community Foundation's Lloyd E. Klos Fund, Friends of the University of Rochester Libraries, DKT International, the Gleason Family Foundation, Trillium Health, and Dr. Bill Valenti and James Wolk. Additional support has been provided by Janet S. Reed, Rochester Picture Framing, the Family of Dr. Edward C. Atwater, Helen H. Berkeley, Canandaigua National Bank and Trust, the Gallery Council of the Memorial Art Gallery, the Anthony J. Mascioli Trust, Suzanne M. Spencer, Rochester Victory Alliance, Dr. Stephen Dewhurst, Dr. Michael S. Gottlieb, Tamar Carroll and Lars Schumann, and two anonymous donors.

Funding is also provided by the Thomas and Marion Hawks Memorial Fund, the Robert L. and Mary L. Sproull Fund, and the Nancy R. Turner Fund for Special Exhibitions.

The exhibition is supported in part by awards from the New York State Education Department made possible by Assemblymember Harry B. Bronson, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Institute of Museum and Library Services MA-245369-OMS-20. The views, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this exhibition do not necessarily represent those of the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

The book that complements the exhibition is published by RIT Press and made possible by William M. Valenti, M.D.

Community Sponsor:



About the Curator

Guest curator Donald Albrecht has curated numerous exhibitions that explore cultural trends, including *Gay Gotham: Art and Underground Culture in New York* for the Museum of the City of New York, as well as shows focusing on major designers and design houses, such as *The Work of Charles and Ray Eames* for the Library of Congress and Vitra Design Museum, and *Eero Saarinen: Shaping the Future* for the Finnish Cultural Institute in New York, National Building Museum, and Yale University.

Mr. Albrecht also develops and edits exhibition catalogs, contributing major essays and working with other writers to provide fresh critical perspectives. His catalogs have garnered numerous awards, including the Society of Architectural Historians' Best Exhibition Catalogue for the Eero Saarinen and the Eames catalogs. Mr. Albrecht lectures frequently about architecture and design. He is a Fellow of the American Academy in Rome.

About River Campus Libraries

With more than 3.5 million volumes, extensive digital resources, and world-renowned collections of rare and unique materials, River Campus Libraries forms the intellectual foundation of learning and research at the University of Rochester. The Libraries' strategic plan for 2018–2025 focuses on making its collections accessible for all, designing spaces that serve their users' needs, enriching educational experiences, supporting scholarly research at the University, and engaging communities on and off campus.



About Memorial Art Gallery

The Memorial Art Gallery showcases visual art from antiquity to the present day, including the outdoor public Centennial Sculpture Park. In addition to its permanent collection, MAG offers a year-round schedule of special exhibitions, lectures, concerts, tours, after-hours social events, and family activities.

Hours: Wednesday–Sunday 11 am to 5 pm, and until 9 pm on Thursdays and select Fridays. Closed Mondays and Tuesdays.

Admission: \$20; senior citizens, \$17; college students with ID and children 6–18, \$11. Always free to members, University of Rochester faculty/staff and students, and children 5 and under. Half-price general admission Thursdays from 5–9 pm is made possible by Monroe County, with additional support from FULLMEA5URE.

For more information, call 585.276.8900 or visit mag.rochester.edu.

Press contact: Rachael Brown, Director of Marketing and Engagement: (585) 276-8937 / rbrown@mag.rochester.edu