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Mapping Stigma: An Archive of the Contracting an Issue Project

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Leedy-Voulkos Art Center / 2020 Baltimore, Kansas City, MO. 64108
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Mapping Stigma: An Archive of the Contracting an Issue Project presents archival and new works from GK Callahan's ongoing, decade-long study of the social issues surrounding HIV/AIDS. This work springs from real life voices in the communities of San Francisco, Kansas City, Tampa and Tanzania, Africa. The layered visual works will also be accompanied by educational workshops and panel discussions to occur once a month during the exhibition's three-month run.

Curated by Kansas City art critic and curator Blair Schulman, this work calls attention to the cultural responses concerning criminalization, representation, and stigmatization of HIV/AIDS. Comprising photography, video, painting, installation and works on paper, the exhibition is broken out into four distinct sections of the gallery space and includes work from the Zekana women of Tanzania, Africa, Bruce Burstert and many other collaborators.

The primary documentation of *Contracting An Issue* is shown through looped videos of performances that derived from interviews around HIV in a modern context. These dialogues were transcribed and read by actors to amplify exposure and ensure anonymity.

Criminalization education and advocacy that has not kept pace with public policy are presented as a reading space in the gallery. This open source library on HIV criminalization will also include free handouts and safe sex items. The issue of criminalization will be discussed with LGBTQ, law and healthcare communities from Kansas City, Columbia, Missouri, Jefferson City and New York City as one of the exhibition's panel discussion modules.

Mimi ni/I am (literally meaning I am/I am) concerns the Zekana women of Arusha, Tanzania, a self-supporting community of HIV-positive women who face stigmatization at home for their health status. Callahan requested and received permission from them to share their story to illustrate how healthcare education in other parts of the globe are as stagnant and oppressive as it was in the West thirty years earlier when less was known about HIV/AIDS. Callahan was also interested in how HIV is perceived globally. Callahan believes that in America HIV/AIDS is still regarded as a "gay issue," but In Africa women alone, regardless of sexual orientation, bear the brunt of the blame.

Callahan presents the women and their work as an homage to their unwavering strength and a gesture of respect.

Generations of survivors are represented in this exhibition by a shrine (an original artwork by Bruce Burstert) and a collaborative painting between Callahan and Burstert, representing the generations of survivors. The painting pays homage to Burstert's late partner, illuminating for us how having survived this crisis does not put an end to the grieving period. It does, however, provide a source of knowledge for why continuing education does not begin and end with treatment alone.

About the artist and curator

GK Callahan creates cultural change through social engagement. As an art administrator, artist, and community engagement professional, GK has over ten years' experience working in the community arts field. He earned his MFA in social practice at California College of the Arts and his BFA in painting at the San Francisco Art Institute. Currently, GK works as a Community Arts and County Engagement Specialist for the University of Missouri Extension, focusing on economic and community development in Missouri.

Blair Schulman is an art writer, critic and curator. He is Managing Editor of Informalityblog.com, an online artist-run publication documenting contemporary art in Kansas City. His writing appears in *Art in America*, *Ceramics: Art & Perception*, *Huffpost*, *Juxtapoz*, *the Kansas City Star*, *Temporary Art Review*, *Vice*, *Whitehot* and was a longtime contributor to the late *Review* magazine. Curated exhibitions in Kansas City include *Select Username and Password* at Front/Space and *Traces & Trajectories* at La Esquina.

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Allison Webber



