Rattlesnake in a Moving Car: Life with HIV

A Multimedia Exhibition by Rob Anderson

October 30 to December 24, 2006

Rob Anderson, artist and internationally-known HIV spokesperson, presents the faces and positive voices of longtime HIV survivors, communicating a message of hope and survival. The exhibition presented here is a work in progress, and represents a selection of the portraits, recordings, and sculptures from the project. When complete, it will be a room environment with an audio system playing excerpts from participants’ interviews.

Opening Events:
Wednesday, Nov. 1
Artist Lecture by Rob Anderson
3–4 p.m., Maraschi Room, Fromm Hall

Reception
4–6 p.m., Thacher Gallery, Gleeson Library | Geschke Center

Artist Rob Anderson on Rattlesnake in a Moving Car: Life with HIV

Rattlesnake in a Moving Car: Life with HIV gives a human face and a heartfelt voice to the circumstances of being a longtime HIV-positive. The title is inspired by one project participant who compares living with HIV to driving with a rattlesnake in the car. The challenge is to keep it in the passenger seat where it won’t cause harm. In this exhibition, I present the stories of 20 men and women who have been keeping the rattlesnake at bay. As I draw each portrait, I also record their oral histories.

I seek to give the viewer as many possible ways to enter into the participants’ persona as possible, to experience who they are, what they think, how they feel. The audio provides a voice unique to each one, not only in its sound, but also in its experience of life and living with HIV. The sculpture is subtler, more meditative, presenting the subtext to the portrait drawings, and is literally and figuratively meant to support them. As an abstraction, it symbolically links the participants in their common journey. Each sculpture segment is unique to the participant whose portrait it surrounds and supports, underscoring the individual path each has taken in response to the potential of HIV to rule his or her life.

In the final version of the installation, there will be an empty frame hanging in the room—the 21st “portrait” of Everyman and Everywoman through which viewers will both see and be seen by other viewers, a reminder that everyone is potentially at risk for HIV.

Rattlesnake in a Moving Car was conceived in 1996. The project stems from The Clinic Study, a 20-year San Francisco Department of Public Health research study of long-term HIV+ individuals, and the Women’s Interagency HIV Study which conducts a nationwide program investigating the impact of HIV infection on women. Data from these studies has led to major advances in the understanding and treatment of HIV.

The twenty portrait/interviews are finished and seven of the sculpture segments are completed or in production. Preliminary editing of the audio program has begun. Our goal is to complete the project in 2007, putting it on the road to major national and international venues. Rattlesnake in a Moving Car: Life with HIV serves as a timely reminder, an opportunity for reflection on life with and without AIDS.

For more information on Rattlesnake in a Moving Car, call 415.596.7608 or write to me at P.O. Box 883623, San Francisco, CA 94188-3623. You can also visit our website.

Rattlesnake in a Moving Car is a project of the San Francisco Public Health Foundation, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) foundation, and Picture Room Productions. The exhibition has been co-sponsored by USF’s Performing Arts Department and is part of 25 Years: Artists Respond to AIDS.

Download or listen to four sample oral histories

**Liza** (0:35)
"It was like driving down the street...with a rattlesnake in the passenger seat..."

**Bob** (3:45)
"I didn't think anybody really could understand that once you come in terms with your own mortality and get comfortable with that, that it is a really hard thing to live again."

**Andrea** (3:10)
"Pretty much everybody saying you're crazy not to do these meds, my rebelliousness helped me to stick to my guns and say hey, I've done my research, I'm not going to accept the status quo..."

**Emile** (4:29)
"San Francisco today is not for me. It had become a different place and it's kind of a painful place too..."