

Press Release

Museum Folkwang

Save the Love: Museum Folkwang presents international posters against AIDS

Essen, 20 August 2020 – Between 21 August and 29 November 2020, Museum Folkwang will present the exhibition *Save the Love! International Posters Against AIDS*. Since the discovery of HIV in the 1980s, posters have played a central role in AIDS education and prevention efforts. The show *Save the Love!* will for the first time bring together 180 posters from five continents to illustrate the different ways in which the issue has been addressed over the decades and in different cultural contexts. The exhibition runs parallel to the retrospective of the US artist Keith Haring (1958–1990), who openly addressed his own HIV-positive status and was an early campaigner for awareness about the virus.

According to the WHO, despite worldwide awareness and education campaigns, 1.7 million people contracted HIV in 2018, and 770,000 people died from AIDS-related complications. Posters – either digital or printed on billboards in public spaces – have been used since the 1980s to inform, educate, raise awareness and show solidarity with HIV-positive people. Taking as its starting point the early initiatives of artist collectives such as ACT UP, to which Keith Haring also belonged, and Gran Fury from New York, the *Save the Love!* exhibition illustrates how differently HIV was and is addressed visually and communicatively in different cultural and religious communities. The depictions on the posters range from coy insinuations to shocking explicitness, employing both factual analysis and emotional appeal, humour and sarcasm. The 180 posters from Africa, Europe, America, Asia and Oceania clearly depict the circumstances and symbols of the history of the disease, as well as the history of the activism and cultural significance of AIDS. The posters also reveal how the target groups of the campaigns have changed over the years: while in the 1980s the campaigns were initially aimed primarily at homosexual men, the range of addressees has expanded as knowledge of the disease has become more widely available. Nowadays, young and older people, men, women and transgender people are depicted, as well as couples or families.

Artist collectives such as ACT UP and Gran Fury initiated campaigns in the mid-1980s to raise public awareness about the AIDS crisis. They launched massive — and ultimately successful — attacks on politicians and the pharmaceutical industry to force changes to the way they treated those affected and to demand research into effective therapies. ACT UP member Vincent Gagliostro created a series in which he denounced the homophobia of the church (*Stop the Church*, 1989). Keith Haring's poster *Ignorance = Fear, Silence = Death* (1989), for which he used his three characters "see nothing, hear nothing, say nothing", is still used by ACT UP today. Oliviero Toscani's works for United Colors of Benetton caused a worldwide sensation in the early 1990s, while the icon-like

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photograph of David Kirby on his deathbed – originally taken by Therese Frare – illustrates the horror and suffering experienced by people living with AIDS and their families. In Germany, the *Mach's mit!* campaign, which first appeared on large and small-format posters in the mid-2000s, provoked a great deal of discussion. They showed colourful condoms with light-hearted captions calling for their use. At the end of the 2000s, prominent athletes, musicians and actors in Germany wore the red ribbon to promote World AIDS Day and show solidarity with people living with HIV and AIDS. The focus of these campaigns is the call to action: "Show the ribbon", "Join in" and "Don't give AIDS a chance". Thus, over the decades, the silence of politicians and the moral condemnation of the church have been replaced by a collective campaign against the spread of the virus in solidarity with those affected.

The exhibition, whose title is borrowed from a poster campaign launched in 1987, is supplemented by numerous statistical charts visualising the number of people affected, including new infections and mortality rates right around the world.

The German Poster Museum at Museum Folkwang has a collection of around 2,000 posters on the subject of AIDS. For this show, a selection from the museum's own holdings has been supplemented by additional posters from private and public collections.