

Chronology of AIDS in the Balearic Islands

Exhibition: AIDS. A Silenced History in the Balearic Scene

Dates: from 21st September 2024 to 12th January 2025

Location: Es Baluard Museu. Exhibition Hall B

Curatorship and texts: Jesús Alcaide

1981

On 5th June 1981, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the United States organisation for disease monitoring and prevention, reported a rare form of pneumonia among young homosexual men in California. This was the first alert to AIDS, though the disease lacked a name at that time.

In October 1981 a 35-year-old man was admitted urgently to the Vall d'Hebron hospital in Barcelona. Medical report: persistent headache, purple marks on the skin, adenopathy. He was diagnosed with Kaposi's sarcoma—a type of skin cancer—and a brain infection. He died soon afterwards. This is the first case of AIDS recorded in Spain.

1982

The term AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) was officially adopted by the CDC in 1982. It was translated into Spanish as *sida, síndrome de inmunodeficiencia adquirida*. As Jan Zita Grover wrote, “There is a significant distinction to be made between a syndrome and a disease, a distinction that is not commonly made in the case of AIDS: a syndrome is a pattern of symptoms pointing to a morbid state, which may or may not be caused by infectious agents; a disease, on the other hand, is any deviation from or interruption of the normal structure or function of any part, organ, or system (or combination thereof) of the body that is manifested by a characteristic set of symptoms or signs and whose aetiology, pathology, and prognosis may be known or unknown. In other words, a syndrome points to or signifies the underlying disease process(es), while a disease is constituted in and by those processes”.

1983

In January 1983, the team at the Pasteur Institute in Paris, headed by Françoise Barré-Sinoussi, Jean-Claude Chermann and Luc Montagnier, announced the discovery of the lymphadenopathy-associated virus (LAV). The researchers believed that it “could be involved” in AIDS. A year later, on 23rd April 1984, it was reported that the American specialist Robert Gallo had found the “probable cause” of AIDS: a retrovirus that was christened HTLV-III. LAV and HTLV-III are in fact the same virus, which in 1986 was named HIV, human immunodeficiency virus.

According to the records of the Balearic Islands government health ministry, the first case of HIV/AIDS on the islands was detected in 1983.

From 11th to 28th February 1983, in La Misericòrdia chapel Ocaña staged an adapted version of the exhibition “La Primavera” [Spring], which he had put on in the chapel of the former La Santa Creu hospital in Barcelona. His papier mâché angels, virgins and Nazarene caused a storm in the local press, with headlines like, “For Palma city council, Ocaña is an artist before he is a homosexual,” “Ocaña states that his exhibition is not irreverent,” or “Ocaña stirs things up at La Misericòrdia.” Years later, in 2010, the artist Joan Morey was to use the same venue to present the project *BAREBACK. El poder i la mort* [BAREBACK. Power and Death].

1985

The Balearic band Peor Impossible released through Ariola the maxi single *S.I.D.A.* [AIDS], with an illustration by the artist Steva Terrades on the cover. This was the first Spanish pop song to deal with the issue of AIDS; years later, in 1987, Ana Curra released *Rien de rien* [Nothing At All] with the famous phrase “And the Movida ended with AIDS”, and in 1992 *El fallo positivo* [The Positive Sentence] by the band Mecano received massive airplay all over the country.

The same year saw the death of Rock Hudson, the classic American film star, after living with the illness for two years, becoming the first famous victim to hit the international headlines.

1987

ALAS was set up as the Palma de Mallorca Citizens' Association to Combat AIDS. The association emerged from the initiative of a group of people connected with the medical community who saw the need to establish a new support space for people affected by the illness. From that time onwards ALAS was one of the leading associations in the Balearic Islands, fighting to remove the stigma and taboos around AIDS and to treat it as a sexual health issue.

Thanks to pressure from activists and the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the time taken to approve new drugs to treat AIDS was shortened. On 20th March 1987 AZT, the first antiretroviral drug, was launched. It was an expensive treatment with serious side effects.

1988

On 28th July 1988 *El País* newspaper carried the headline “AIDS sufferer sues landlord for discrimination.” The sufferer was none other than Enrique Naya (Cádiz, 1953 – Badalona, 1989), a member together with Juan José Carrero Galofré (Palma de Mallorca, 1955 – Sitges, 1989) of Costus, one of the most important artistic experiments of the cultural phenomenon known as *Movida madrileña*. This case, the first to be made public in Spain, is a minimal reference to the stigma experienced by many AIDS sufferers in their everyday life.

MIT Press published *AIDS. Cultural Analysis. Cultural Activism*, edited by the American critic Douglas Crimp, a prominent member of October magazine. This reader offers a first theoretical approach to the links between AIDS and contemporary art, with texts that have become landmarks, such as “AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification” (Paula A. Treichler), “AIDS: Keywords” (Jan Zita Grover) and “Is the Rectum a Grave?” (Leo Bersani).

1989

1989 was a key year in Pepe Espaliú's career as an artist. This was when he exhibited at the Van Krimpen gallery in Amsterdam and the Brooke Alexander Gallery in New York. During his stay in New York, he discovered the ways and means HIV carriers and people living with AIDS were using to organise themselves in the face of neglect by the healthcare system and a lack of support from the government.

Friends and family, primarily in the Latin and Black communities, seemed to him to use the same word, notwithstanding the pronunciation, for to care and to carry, leading Espaliú to use the title Carrying for his sculptures and actions in 1992.

This is also the time when images of turtles appeared in his drawings, sculptures and writing. "Es un caparazón el que a tu cuerpo abraza / como una muerte en pequeño / que mirar te prohibiera / el dentro del afuera," or as in his well-known poem from 1992, "Hoy estoy perdido, como esas tortugas / que no vuelven al mar, tras desovar / y se adentran / en dirección opuesta, / para morir cansadas / en un punto cualquiera del horizonte."

Espaliú, Pepe. La imposible verdad. Textos 1987-1993 [The Impossible Truth: Texts 1987-1993]. Jesús Alcaide (ed.). Madrid: La Bella Varsovia, 2018.

English translation of the poetry:

It's a shell that clings to your body / Like a death in miniature / That would stop you looking / In from outside.

Today I'm lost, like those turtles that don't return to the sea after laying their eggs / And head inland / In the opposite direction / To die exhausted / At some point on the horizon.

1992

On 1st December 1992, World AIDS Day, the artist Pepe Espaliú staged the *Carrying* event in Madrid. The product of performances held in summer 1992 at Arteleku as part of the workshop “La voluntad residual. Parábolas del desenlace” [Residual Will: Parables of the Ending], the first version of *Carrying* was staged in San Sebastián in September 1992, leading to the creation of the group The Carrying Society; the second, better known, was in December 1992 in Madrid, with a major media impact. *Carrying* is both a symbolic action and a political act. *Carrying* is a mixture of to carry and to care, actions witnessed by the artist around 1990 in New York, where he saw how Black and Latin communities organised themselves to look after HIV/AIDS sufferers.

While on the morning of 1st December Pepe Espaliú was physically carried by pairs of people through the street of Madrid to the Museo Reina Sofía, in the evening, at the Sala Morocco club, the band Fangoria, together with a group of friends including Pep Noguera (Diabéticas Aceleradas), gave the occasion a festive touch by throwing a party to raise funds with the famous collecting box with Liz Taylor’s face (Toni Socías), featuring a version of the famous Tony Ronald song Help, which took on a new meaning in this context.

1994

The Siloé association was set up to meet a social need identified in the prison in Palma de Mallorca, where many inmates with AIDS were doomed to die in jail, despite the article in the Spanish criminal code providing for the release of such people when they are in a terminal phase of their illness.

Initially, a refuge to house six users was arranged in El Jonquet neighbourhood, in Palma. The purpose of this house was to provide palliative care for the people living there, so that they could live and die with dignity. The statutes of the Siloé association were approved by the local office of the Spanish government in the Balearic Islands on 8th august 1994.

1996

1995 and 1996 saw the appearance of new kinds of medication. New antiretrovirals were added to treatments: Abacavir, Nelfinavir, Delavirdina and Efavirenz. This was the beginning of the combinations of different drugs, tritherapy or cocktails, which proved to be highly effective. The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) was set up. Since then, this has led and inspired innovation and collaboration at global, national and local level in response to HIV/AIDS.

2000

Siloé moved its refuge from El Jonquet to Santa Eugènia, increasing its capacity to ten residents.

In 2000 UNAIDS signed an agreement with five major laboratories to distribute treatments at affordable prices in poor countries, and in November 2001 a commitment was signed to allow developing countries to manufacture generic medicines.

The Mallorcan writer Maria Antònia Oliver published the novel *Tallats de lluna*, one of the few stories written by a woman which tells the story of a gay couple who suffer the death of one of them from complications arising from AIDS. A story of love and death, published some years after the author underwent a heart transplant, and after the death of her partner, the writer Jaume Fuster, and of her mother.

Agustí Villaronga made a film adaptation of the novel *El mar* [The Sea] by Blai Bonet. The plot and its setting in different sanatoriums for tuberculosis patients have been seen by some as a submerged narrative of the other illness, AIDS, in a metaphor that acts and is reshaped in different historical contexts, as Susan Sontag argued in her famous text *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (1989), as well as in the piece that preceded it, *Illness as Metaphor* (1978).

2002

The authorities took an interest in the issue and in the service offered by Siloé, subsidising half the places. This was the first time the authorities had funded care of this kind for HIV/AIDS sufferers in the Balearic Islands.

2003

The Can Gazá project was set up by Jaume Santandreu—together with Jaume Mateu, among other people—on a property in the countryside in el Secar de la Real. This catered for homeless men with no means of support, with debilitating illnesses resulting from drug addiction. An article published by the Mallorca newspaper *Ultima Hora* said, “AIDS carriers also live at Can Gazá.” Once again, the language used by the media fed the stigma and the epidemic of signification.

2006

After renovating the house in El Jonquet, Siloé reopened it as a protected flat to host five more people; this service was also funded by the authorities and aimed at the same group of beneficiaries. In 2008 it obtained funding for five more places in the protected flat, so that all the places are now funded by the Institut Mallorquí d'Afers Socials.

2007

ALAS celebrated its 20th anniversary as an association struggling against AIDS. To commemorate this, a documentary was made with the title *Alas, 20 años de lucha antisida 1987-2007* [Alas, 20 Years Fighting AIDS 1987–2007], in which testimony of those who have been members of the association is used to construct a collective narrative about the history of AIDS in the Balearic Islands. A history of struggle, commitment and solidarity that lives on today.

2009

Between 13th March and 17th May 2009, coinciding with the 20th anniversary of the death of Robert Mapplethorpe, Es Baluard Museu presented for the first time in the Balearic Islands a major retrospective exhibition of 87 works from the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation, created between 1975 and 1989 and representing the main topics worked on by the artist.

The body of work by Mapplethorpe, who died as a result of AIDS-related complications, ties in with the history of the illness itself, not only because of what his pictures showed, but also because of what many people saw in them. “The Perfect Moment” opened a few months before his death, a retrospective exhibition of his work that was strongly criticised by the conservative American Family Association, forcing the closure of the exhibition on 12th June 1989 on the grounds of indecency. On 30th June, activists and artists protested against this by projecting slides of Mapplethorpe’s pictures on the front of the museum.

This led to a debate over funding by the National Endowment for the Arts and a dispute with the senator Jesse Helms, in one of the bitterest clashes in the so-called culture wars in the United States.

2010

BAREBACK. El poder i la mort [BAREBACK, Power and Death] was a project conceived by the artist Joan Morey for a specific venue, the chapel in the former orphanage of La Misericòrdia, a charity institution founded by the Jesuits and built at different times between 1677 and 1884, today an arts centre.

Bareback included five coffin/displays, sound and performance, relating religious and sexual practices through shared “perversions” and extreme cults characterising both of them. Its title is the common way of referring to anal sex between men without the use of a condom, a practice fetishised or stigmatised for ignoring the risk of transmitting HIV.

The five displays presented a collection of objects, devices, books and pictures suggesting an ethnographic museum devoted to ritual, taboo, suffering and cruelty. They were still lifes, partly educational, but also cryptic, evoking something of the baroque as a historical style, but also a contemporary approach in their use of all the associations of the term with excess, exuberance, extreme contrasts and coded allegories.

In the altar area hung a black sculpture in the shape of an inverted Latin cross, symbol of humility in Catholic iconography, as tradition has it that Saint Peter was crucified in this way; though it is also used as a Satanic motif, especially in horror films. The room was filled with a pre-recorded reading of a portentous, prayer-like text: *LETANÍA APÓRIMA* [APORETIC LITANY] (2009). Performances were staged in the chapel without prior notice every Friday and featured dramatised soliloquies. Scripts, topics and sources were all encoded in the contents of the displays. The exhibition ended with the performance/reading *Fenomenología de la comunión* [Phenomenology of Communion].

2013

INVIHSIBLE was created as a joint project between ALAS and the teaching and education team at Es Baluard, a proposal for therapeutic thought and action with ALAS users, featuring people like Sebastià Mascaró, Sonia Justo and the artist Carlos Gispert, setting up different workshops and installations.

2017

Casal Solleric opened the first retrospective exhibition of the work of Pepe Miralles, entitled “Still Here: Over 20 Years of Presence of HIV and AIDS in the work of Pepe Miralles”. The exhibition had a prominent presence in public space in the city of Palma, taking up advertising spaces on bus shelters with the message “Frightened, misunderstood, excluded, unprotected, rejected. Simply pushed aside. This is how many people live with HIV,” and using other graphic messages on the shelves of public libraries in Palma including Son Sardina, Son Ferriol, El Rafal Vell and Ramon Llull.

Between 1st September and 10th December 2017, as part of the Box 27 project curated by Tolo Cañellas for Casal Solleric, an intervention was staged by the artist Andrés Senra, who in *Rosa Winkel* [Pink Triangle] uses this triangular pink neon light to invite us to think about the polysemy and resignification of this symbol, from Nazi concentration camps to its place in activist struggles linked to AIDS by ACT UP and projects like *Silence = Death*. A triangle that is still being re-signified today in LGTBQ+ struggles.

Within the framework of the exhibition “1,000 m2 of Desire: Architecture and Sexuality” at the CCCB in Barcelona, Mallorcan artist Joan Morey developed the project *TOUR DE FORCE*. Constructed as a site-specific performance on the history of AIDS, the project was structured as a prologue and five acts involving a restricted number of spectators. The prologue took place in the Pati de les Dones and the Mirador of the CCCB and, subsequently, the five acts, related to various concepts linked to AIDS (uncertainty, transmission, illness, the utopian body and theory), were performed on five tours of the city of Barcelona aboard five black limousines as mobile stages. During the journey, the performers carried out different actions marked by the theme and the route of each vehicle.

2018

Argentinian publishing house Caja Negra translated *Modern Nature*, a selection of the diaries of filmmaker, artist and activist Derek Jarman, into Spanish. Originally published in 1991, the book comprises a series of entries and texts from 1989 to 1991, three years before he died from AIDS-related complications in 1994, soon after producing works such as *Blue* and *The Garden*. This series of diaries complements the publication *Derek Jarman's Garden*, featuring photographs by Howard Sooley and published in 1995, in which we see the construction of the artist's personal garden (Prospect Cottage) in Dungeness. "I walk in this garden holding the hands of dead friends."

Following the deaths of some of the people who lived in the Siloé care homes, a symbolic act is carried out by planting a tree in memory of names such as María Jesús, Paquita, Rafael and all those who were part of the immense garden that made up the association.

2021

Winner of the public call put out by the Institut d'Estudis Baleàrics for the stand at the ARCO 2021 art fair, Mallorcan artist Joan Morey presented *Replica: TOUR DE FORCE*. Curated by Jesús Alcaide, it was a re-reading of the project *TOUR DE FORCE* and the history of HIV/AIDS in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis. "Viruses mutate, get altered, replicate. When faced with any threat, their configuration gets updated. A virus is an abstract and invisible sign. An epidemic of signification that spreads among our bodies. A narrative that re-signifies itself, alerting us to the idea that an immune world is just an impossible fiction."

2023

Galería Pelaires inaugurated the exhibition “Being in Touch” by Mallorcan artist Gori Mora, a selection of his latest pictorial works that dealt with the idea of touch at a key moment, following the restrictions and problematics of COVID-19, when the homosexual community was once again trying to find a way of living together in the face of a new reality that was hidden and silenced: the issue of chemsex. Dealing with its problematics is one of the new lines of work many associations such as ALAS are practising through strategies of support and care, avoiding stigmatisation and addressing it as another sexual health issue.

2024

While issues such as PrEP and chemsex started to appear on the agendas of the numerous associations dedicated to the fight against AIDS, the word *AIDS* itself began to disappear in some of their nomenclatures and identifications, as is the case of Stop AIDS (Barcelona), which is now simply called Stop.

Writer Pol Guasch published *Ofert a les mans, el paradís crema* [In One's Hands, Paradise Burns], a novel about the power of friendship, in which AIDS appears as a background disease, without ever being named or identified: "With that poison burning his veins, the damned bug navigating through his blood . . . He did not make it beyond the era of the needle, of the unruly body."

Writer Camila Sosa Villada published *Tesis sobre una domesticación* [Thesis on a Domestication], the story of an actress whose adopted son lives with the disease as undetectable. In one of its passages, and in the face of an attack by one of their relatives, the novel contains one of the most straightforward fragments through which to explain the reality of AIDS today:

"What's the difference between AIDS and HIV?"

"AIDS is the disease you catch when you don't take the medication and HIV is the virus that you can have your whole life, but as long as you take the medication you won't die."

"We looked at your latest test numbers. What was it they said about your viral load?"

"Undetectable," the boy replies, and corrects himself as he shakes his head and laughs: "Un-de-tect-a-ble!"