

# AIDS ADAGIO:

## WES KENNEDY — ALBERT WINN

December 13, 2012 – February 14, 2013

The public is invited to a conversation with Albert Winn, the artist; Simon Zalkind, the exhibition curator; and Tess Jones, Director of The Arts and Humanities in Healthcare Program at the Gossard Forum in the Fulginiti Pavilion for Bioethics and Humanities. The event is free.

Thursday, January 31, 2013  
From 4:00-5:00 PM.

Visit [www.coloradobioethics.org](http://www.coloradobioethics.org)  
for event information and parking map.

### Opening Reception

Thursday, December 13, 2012, 5:00 - 8:00pm  
Beverages and light hors d'oeuvres will be served

### The Art Gallery

Fulginiti Pavilion for Bioethics and Humanities, University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus  
13080 East 19th Avenue  
Aurora, Colorado 80045  
303.724.3994

### Gallery Hours

Monday - Friday, 9:00am - 5:00pm  
Free and open to the public

### Cover image:

Wes Kennedy  
*Cheating Death*, 1986  
photograph  
Collection of Michael Murray

**Driving Directions:** Visitors are advised to enter the Anschutz Medical Campus via Montview Boulevard to access easily visitor parking sites. The Fulginiti Pavilion is located on East 19th Avenue between Uvalda Court (east) and Racine Street (west). From the west, enter campus from Peoria Street on Montview, and turn south on Uvalda Court. From the east, enter campus from Fitzsimons Parkway on Montview, and turn south on Uvalda Court. The Georgetown Visitor Parking Lot is on the southeastern corner of Uvalda Court and East 19th Avenue.



University of Colorado  
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The Fulginiti Pavilion for Bioethics and Humanities

13080 East 19th Avenue • Aurora, Colorado 80045





# AIDS ADAGIO:

Since the mid-1980's photography has played a critical role in shaping public perception of AIDS. Many of the photographs from the early years of the epidemic were widely criticized for the way their subjects – usually white gay men with AIDS – were represented and for the lack of any social or political context from which to consider them. Too many of those early pictures simply reiterated what people had already been told or shown about people with AIDS – that it is the almost exclusive concern of gay men, that they are wasted, hollow-eyed, disfigured, and hopelessly resigned to the death that most certainly awaits them. A number of critics decried the stereotyping of those images, others found them to be empathically and compassionately resonant. One of the photographers at the center of that critical storm was Nicholas Nixon who first exhibited his pictures of people with AIDS at the Museum of Modern Art in 1988 and subsequently published a book of those images called *People With AIDS*. Reaction to the project from the AIDS community was swift and harsh. Nixon's images, it was claimed, discarded his subjects' individuality and humanity rendering them instead as interchangeable examples of existing stereotypes. Ironically, Albert Winn, one of the two photographers in this exhibition was Nixon's student. Winn's images can be seen alternately as reflecting or rejecting the influence of his teacher and mentor. The essential point – now as then – is that AIDS-related images are complex, often troubling representations that can either reinforce existing hierarchical divides – infected/uninfected, healthy/diseased, perverse/normal – or subvert them.

Although both artists work within the precincts of the art world and its systems, Wes Kennedy and Albert Winn are very different from each other. Kennedy died in 1993, and Winn is alive and thriving. Kennedy's work is rooted in photographic fantasies and manipulations – in archetypal, dream-like images that are alternately erotic, grotesque, transcendent and surreal. Winn's work is linked more obviously to photo-journalistic traditions and to the kind of art that takes the artist's daily routines and quotidian

experiences as its primary source. However, what most significantly divides these two artists is the time period during which each was diagnosed with and began living with AIDS. It is a vast, unbreachable divide, and one that barely registers in the collective memory of younger people in this country – particularly if they have access to health care and are no longer suffocating in the closets of shame. Wes was diagnosed with AIDS in 1987. He was thirty years old. He died in 1993. Albert Winn was forty-two in 1989 when he received his diagnoses. In 1999 he became one of the first generation of people with AIDS to receive what came to be popularly referred to as the AIDS “cocktail” – an extremely potent combination of retro-viral drugs. It soon became the standard medical protocol for treating people with AIDS. The cocktail's effects were immediate and extraordinary. It was dubbed “the Lazurus effect” for its almost miraculous ability to quickly revive and restore to relative health, people whose condition had been considered hopeless. Fortunately, Albert Winn lived long enough to have access to this amazingly transformative concoction. Wes Kennedy did not.

Wes Kennedy's pictures offer themselves as religious objects in quest of an enigmatic faith to represent. He mines to great effect the rich stores of classical mythic and Catholic imagery – simultaneously lachrymose, erotic and sentimental. Those images enshrine in aesthetic and visual terms experiences of martyrdom, affliction, and suffering. While his art draws from this spiritualized lexicon of imagery, it is brazen and defiantly beautiful. Many works are also obviously sexual, and they speak to the artist's experience as a gay man living in a time of personal and communal crisis intimately identified with gay sexuality. I'm not sure that Kennedy consciously sought to produce AIDS-related pictures, but I do believe that he was describing and representing his intimate experience using uniquely personal strategies that are infused with both art-historical and philosophical meanings – surrealism, symbolism the sublime and the grotesque.

## WES KENNEDY

During the mid-1980's Wes showed and sold his pictures at Josh Hassel's periodical shop/gallery called The Newstand on 13th and Grant St. in Denver. I thought Kennedy's pictures were terrific when I first saw them – strikingly original, beautifully made, conceptually rich and emotionally piercing. Preparing for this exhibition was an opportunity to reacquaint myself with them and to be freshly astonished by them, by their traumatic beauty. Some weeks (days?) before Wes Kennedy died his friend, photographer Eric Havelock-Baillie, took a series of photographs of him. Wes was aware of the fact that he didn't have much longer to live and the portraits are suffused with a sepulchral radiance. Wes' sweetness, bravery, and intelligence shine through them with unflinching clarity. When I saw them again recently I knew that I wanted to include them in this exhibition.

I can't remember how I was originally led to Albert Winn's website, but whatever the circumstances were that led me there, what I saw was memorable and I remembered it. Winn's photographs are both ruthlessly confrontational and domestically tender. The trauma culture, the chaos and menace that produced much AIDS-related art in the earlier years of the epidemic and that was structured around the immediacy of oblivion, is no longer the only position from which artists address HIV/AIDS. For a generation of gay artists who are living with AIDS rather than dying from it, the “management” of the illness – the restructuring and the regimentation of all aspects of personal and social life around the requirements of staying alive provides the context from which they document and witness to life with AIDS.

Winn's powerful series *Band-Aids* challenges the common perception that with the relative efficacy of the new drug treatments people with AIDS have been “restored” to health. The photographs resemble medical documents – the graphs and measurements through which clinicians record and determine a patient's condition. Using band-aids as “signifiers,” they catalogue and make visible the invisible scars

of AIDS, tracking the manifestations of the virus that still lurks in Winn's body. They also reference the motion studies of Eadweard Muybridge and the iconic centrality of the grid in modern and contemporary art.

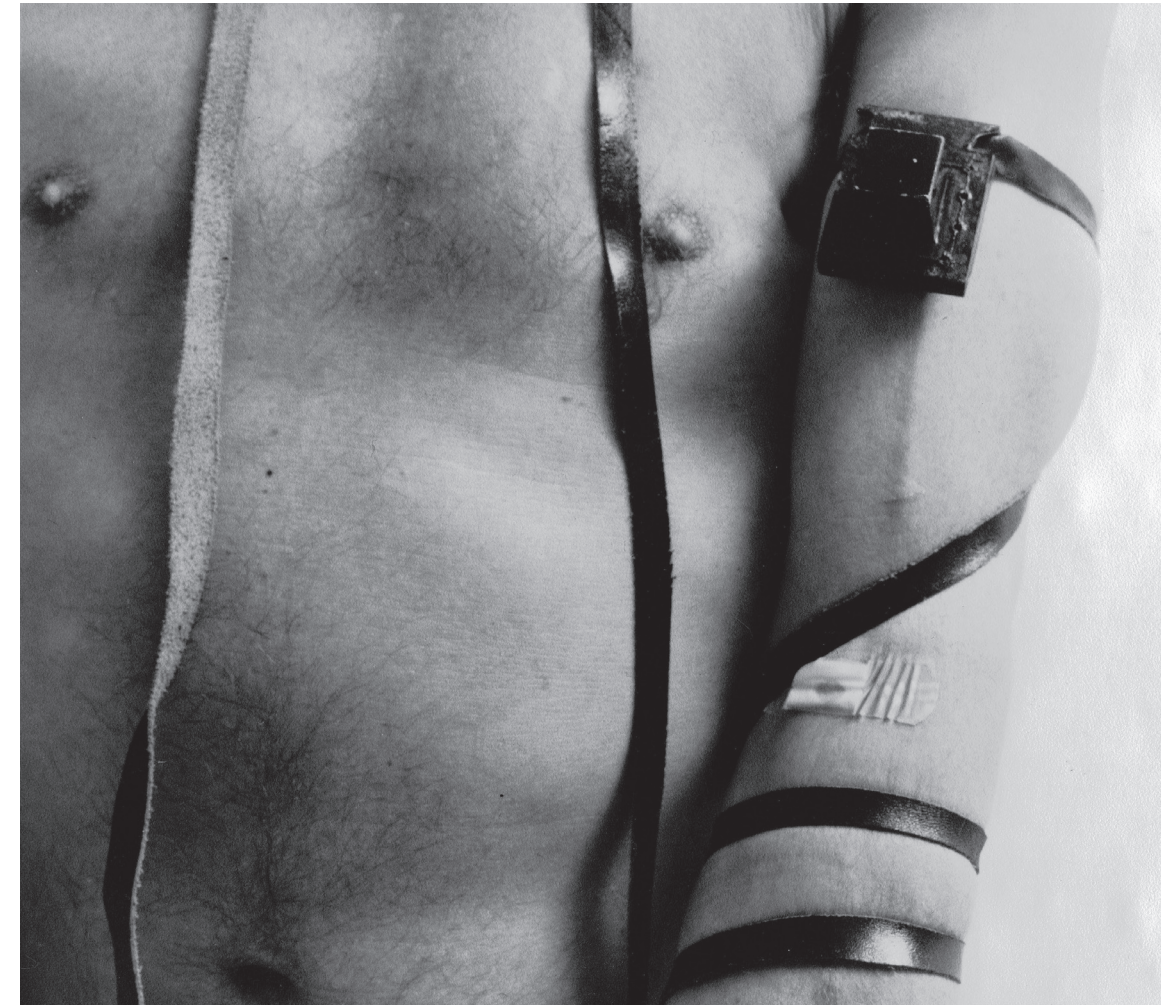
Winn's ongoing series *My Life Until Now...* was begun in 1990. Propelled by the urgency of his situation, Winn determined to demonstrate that his illness did not represent the sum total of his life. The pictures are uncompromising in their capacity to directly confront the viewer's gaze. At the same time they up-end our expectations of a life defined and circumscribed by disease. In them AIDS becomes only one of a number of “conditions” that Winn inhabits. He has a companion, parents, pets and friends. He is Jewish and references to his Jewishness – the symbolic and ritual objects associated with the events of Jewish life – appear frequently in the background and foreground of the domestic life that Winn chronicles. He is a whole, singular, multidimensional human being. Why should that surprise us?

I'm grateful and honored to have had the opportunity to introduce this important work to a new audience. I'm reminded as well of the importance of engaging the artistic production of artists who, because of illness or disability are often marginalized, ignored or mawkishly patronized. The work of artists with AIDS has the subversive potential to confront and transform how we inhabit our own humanity.

Many thanks to Albert Winn, Mike Murray, John Canney, Tim Fuente, Robin Rule, Suzanne Farver, Dr. Dean Prina, Eric Havelock-Baillie and The Estate of Dale Chisman for generously lending the works in this exhibition. I'm grateful to all of them.

Simon Zalkind, Curator

## ALBERT WINN



Albert Winn  
*Akedah*, 1995  
Photograph  
Collection of the Artist