

MAY 11-17, 2006

VENICE ART WALK & AUCTIONS 2006 in the MIRROR

27

SPECIAL ARTWALK EXHIBIT: The House is Small, But the Welcome is Big

Special to the Mirror

The birth of a baby to an HIV-positive mother. A newborn receiving its first dose of AZT. An AIDS Treatment Advocacy march in the township of Khayelitsha. Men socializing at a local Shabbeen (bar). Portraits of family, friends, and neighbors. Shack life without electricity or running water. These and other extraordinary photographs tell a story of life in the impoverished townships of Cape Town, South Africa. They were taken not by professional photographers but, rather, by 15 South African women who are living with HIV. Their work comprises the exhibit *The House is Small, But the Welcome is Big*.

The seeds for *The House is Small* were planted several years ago when television producer and physician, Neal Baer, along with pioneering documentary photographer, Jim Hubbard, began discussing ways to raise awareness about global medical issues through photography. It seemed to both that Hubbard's method of teaching traditionally marginalized people how to use the camera to document their own lives would prove an effective and powerful way to tell the stories of people managing serious health concerns on a daily basis.

In 2005, they began to develop their first project, focusing on women living with HIV/AIDS in South Africa. Their South African partner in the project was the highly-lauded Mothers' Programmes, providing "moms and moms-to-be" with peer-based prevention, education, and treatment access services to help HIV-infected women live positively and to prevent mother-to-child transmission.

In February 2006, a crew of Venice Arts' photographers, led by Hubbard, traveled to Cape Town to lead an intensive photo documentary program with the women. In a workshop format, the women learned the fundamentals of photography, with an emphasis on composition and visual storytelling. To help them understand the power and possibility of the personal documentary method, they were shown books of work by homeless and Native American youth affiliated with Hubbard's Shooting Back program and by low-income and refugee youth involved at Venice Arts. Group meetings also offered an opportunity to review work-in-progress and share their lives. In addition to group meetings, photographers were assigned to closely mentor the women individually and in small groups, giving them hands-on, in-the-field training.

The result: A beautiful body of photography that gives a human face to the continuing global AIDS crisis and its impact on the lives of women and children. And, as an unanticipated result, two of the women, Funeka Neeke and Caroline Kompe, are now pursuing photography as a vocation with support from The Mothers' Programmes.

Committed to raising awareness about HIV positive women in South Africa, the project leaders are working to provide maximum exposure to their photography through exhibitions, a book, and a video, being produced by a South African filmmaker who followed the project. The work will be exhibited during Spring 2006 in Los Angeles at the Track 16 Gallery and at the



At Pumla's Grandmother's Grave by Danielle Gana, Gugulethu, Cape Town, South Africa

Venice Art Walk. An abstract has been submitted for the exhibit to be included at the International AIDS Conference in Toronto in August 2006, plans are being made for another Los Angeles exhibit in Fall 2006 connected to World AIDS Day and for a show in 2007 at the United Nations.

The Doctor's In—Television

Special to the Mirror

Special Victims Unit producer Neal Baer brings two different worlds together: medicine and the media. He draws on medical stories that have moved him, angered him, or alarmed him and fashions them into stories for SVU. For example, he's worried about the 40% of Los Angeles County children (28% in California) who are obese so he's taken the issue, drawn on patients he's treated and made a show for SVU that focuses on this problem.

SVU often presents shows with medical storylines. Just this year, SVU has aired episodes about violence as an infectious disease (based on a recent study in *Science* showing that children exposed to actual gunfire are two to three times more likely to commit a violent crime themselves in the next two years); genetically engineering designer babies; withdrawing life support; adolescents who stop taking medication for psychiatric disorders; teen access to abortion.

Neal is inspired by patients' stories and uses them as a means for promoting social change by telling them on television. But that's not enough for him. He is always looking for other avenues to tell stories. One is through photography. He met former AP photographer Jim Hubbard several years ago and immediately wanted to do a project with him.

They raised money and went to Cape Town and there Jim taught women with HIV how to document their lives—how to

visually tell their own stories—through photography. They gave each participant a camera, and after she was trained in the basics of photography, she took photographs of her life. The photos are a compelling documentation of the struggles millions of HIV+ women in Africa face every day. They can be seen in their first public showing at the Venice Family Clinic's Venice Art Walk & Auctions May 21.

Neal Baer, MD, did his residency at



Kids with Doll by Funeka Neeke, Gugulethu, Cape Town, South Africa

Venice Family Clinic and sits on the Board of Directors.

Jim Hubbard is a two-time Pulitzer-nominated photographer and the creative director for Venice Arts—a non-profit that introduces the arts to poor children. He created the famous "shooting back" concept where homeless children in D.C. were given cameras and took pictures of their own lives rather than be photographed by someone else.