



## HIV(E)

franchise | Johannesburg

**Left:** View of Greg Streak's compost bin and Jena McCarthy's vegetable garden at Gozololo, KwaMashu  
**Right:** Details of gallery installation at franchise, showing (left) Ade Darmawan's swings and (right) Greg Streak's filtration device

The HIV epidemic in South Africa is a constantly shifting field, sequentially affecting different population groups, ages and sexes over the past 20 years. A strategy of key responses is to exert an unambiguous influence, as dictated by specific postcolonial situations, within an increasingly globalised context. A cross-field network involving a range of players seems an appropriate response.

Greg Streak, in his *HIV(E)* project, does this in his blurring of the distinction between socially addressed art and art for a gallery. Turning to interactivity by locating themselves within a social realm, Streak and his artist collaborators are attempting to imbue their work with greater agency. Do their interventions succeed in developing the method of the artist as agent of communication between fields?

The gallery version of the project – at Franchise in Johannesburg – is a minimalist set of works that represents the artist-intervention layer at Gozololo, an orphanage in KwaMashu near Durban.

Visually, the exhibition is stunning. The installation seems to have been teleported from Gozololo to the gallery; deconstructed and reconstructed – beamed from its home site into the space at the trendy Millpark development. This version, however, functions only as a reconstructed documentary. Accompanying the show is a printed text and photographic report of the real artwork. In a method that seems to engage more than just a furthering of the ego, Streak constructed a compost bin that straddles the fenced divide between Gozololo and the surrounding community. Jena McCarthy planted a vegetable garden. Paul Edmunds installed shade against the sun and José Ferreira planted trees and constructed chairs and storage bags. Argentinian Sofia Garciavieyra converted a jungle gym into a resting place, and Indonesian Ade Darmawan assembled old chairs into swings.

On a practical level Gozololo, where site and situation merge, became for the artists a direct relocation of two traditional views: the studio (where the work was constructed) and the gallery (where the original work is installed). Further, all the works are sculptural installations that themselves interact with the Gozololo community of caregivers and children.

The project uses its simplicity and pared-down aesthetic as a thread to weave through a course of physical and social sculpture. Aesthetic in this case refers to the concept of the simplified system the artists use.

Providing opportunities for shade and rest and health is a way of interacting with individual human systems. In this way, Streak's sensitivity to the human participation in his sculpture references the thinking of Joseph Beuys in that "aesthetics is the human being in itself".

To quote the Walker Art Center's Beuys website,<sup>1</sup> the artist further "hoped to apply the artistic principle of creativity directly to society ... objects are to be seen as stimulants for the transformation of the idea of sculpture ... or of art in general. They should provoke thoughts about what sculpture can be and how the concept of sculpting can be extended to the invisible materials used by everyone". This tangible intangibility Beuys talks about seem to be referenced in the *HIV(E)* interventions: simultaneously poetry and practice.

Beuys worked according to a process of epistemological, interactive effect. The Walker website describes his thinking forms (how we mould our thoughts) working with spoken forms (how we shape our thoughts into words) working with social sculpture (how we mould and shape the world in which we live). Sculpture becomes an evolutionary process.

This extends the responsibility of artistic intervention to the Gozololo community themselves. In participating, they are both part of the artists' sculptures, and also creators of the repercussive effect.

Yet the mere fact that artistic intervention happens in response to social situations means that – as written about Beuys's "total artwork" goal – "Life must be renewed by the lessons of art in order to be sustained."

At a deeper core lies the setting of artistic practice firmly within the realm of collective, social development. M Miles in his *Art Space and the City* sees this re-placement of agency as a "reaction against the commoditisation of art by its markets and institutions, a rejection of the self-contained aesthetic of modernism, and reflects a critical realism derived from Marxism, feminism and ecology which implies that artists act for and with others in reclaiming responsibility for their futures".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.walkerart.org/beuys>

<sup>2</sup> M Miles, *Art Space and the City* (London, 1997)