

The Museum of Modern Art

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PROJECTS: OLIVER HERRING/LEONILSON

January 18 - March 12, 1996

Works that commemorate loss and mortality in the era of AIDS by artists Oliver Herring (b. 1964) and Leonilson (1957-1993) are the subject of the next **PROJECTS** exhibition, on view at The Museum of Modern Art from January 18 through March 12, 1996. Organized by Starr Figura, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Prints and Illustrated Books, **PROJECTS: OLIVER HERRING/LEONILSON** presents ethereal, elegiac knitted and embroidered works created from such mundane materials as Mylar and fabric. While both artists are indebted to the formal inventions of Minimalist, Conceptual, and Process art, their works arise from highly personal, emotional impulses rarely manifested in those earlier movements.

Herring, who was born in Germany and lives in New York, knits nonwearable clothes and sculptural objects from transparent tape, silver Mylar, or paper. Part of an ongoing series he calls *A Flower for Ethyl Eichelberger*, these knitted works originated as a response to the death of Eichelberger, a performance artist who committed suicide in 1990, after suffering from the advanced stages of AIDS. Herring's figures, knitted coats, and panels, many of which are on view for the first time, suggest desire, disintegration, and mourning.

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The artist has said, "Although the project is a personal meditation on the death of someone I admired, by continuously adding pieces over time, that meaning is transformed into a metaphor for AIDS in general. And since each piece is made through the cumulative process of knitting, every stitch is (like the overall project) a measure of both commitment and time."

Brazilian artist Leonilson (born José Leonilson Bezerra Dias), who died of AIDS in 1993, began to embroider cloth panels with personally symbolic imagery and words after his illness forced him to give up painting. Generally intimate in scale and content, the works were created as private meditations and were sometimes made from pieces of his own clothing. With these poignant and soulful embroideries, some of which are on view for the first time in this country, the artist crystallized themes that preoccupied him throughout his artistic life, including abandonment, the expression of love, and the fragility of the human body.

Ms. Figura has stated, "In making these delicate, crudely stitched panels Leonilson was influenced not only by the conceptual investigations of such twentieth-century artists as his fellow countryman Hélio Oiticica and Eva Hesse, but also by the obsessive impulses of such outsider artists as Arthur Bispo de Rosário and by the tradition of nineteenth-century American fabric samplers."

The **PROJECTS** series is made possible by generous grants from the Lannan Foundation and from The Contemporary Arts Council and The Junior Associates of The Museum of Modern Art.

The next exhibition in the series is **PROJECTS: HIRSCH PERLMAN**, on view from March 28 through May 21, 1995.

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