

# Blood Works

Artist's  
Commentary



Plate 1

*Circle of Friends, HIV- Blood on Brown Paper Bag, 23” x 21”, 1999*

This is one of my earliest *Blood Works*. I drew the flowers in a faux naïf style to convey a sense of innocence amidst peril.

This gathering of prickly rose buds represents me and my inner social circle engaged in the usual activities of friendship: pettiness, gossip, backstabbing, hurting one another, etc.

I exaggerated our defense mechanisms to underscore the intent.



Plate 2

*Disarmament, HIV- Blood on Paper, 26” x 22”, 1999*

This is my first blood painting. Obviously, I had not yet worked out the technical problems with the media.

A few days before creating this painting I crafted a crown-of-thorns from a robust vine of Saw Briars. I intended to use it as a visual prop to represent martyrdom, humiliation and suffering. I literally experienced all three when, during transport, it slipped from my fingers and severely lacerated me. In an act of vengeance I removed all of the thorns with a razor blade, as if saying, “you will not hurt me anymore”. It also felt as if I was simultaneously saying it to Christianity.



Plate 3

*Marital Infidel, HIV+ Blood on Paper, 12” x 10”, 1999*

The arteries of an unfaithful heart are barbed and conceal their activities behind the back. Only people who have experienced genuine romantic betrayal can truly understand this visual metaphor.



Plate 4

*The Beloved, HIV+ Blood on Paper, 4" x 5", 2000*

Oval picture frames traditionally have held portraits of loved ones. I placed a locust in the format to remind the viewer that this spreader of pestilence is also someone's loved one. People forget that the spreaders of disease are victims too. The blood source for this picture was infected with HIV from her husband.



Plate 5

*Patient Zero, HIV+ Blood on Paper, 12" x 7", 2000*

This image results from my anger at the ignorance and stupidity of humanity. Like Typhoid Mary, Patient Zero refers to an index case or central patient in an epidemiological investigation. Patient Zero is the name given to the gay Canadian flight attendant who purportedly introduced and unknowingly spread the HIV virus in the USA.

I feel tremendous pity for this innocent man. People were cruel when they should have been compassionate. Prudish paranoiacs vilified him as a mass-murderer for being sexually active. Religious zealots, seeking fulfillment of biblical prophecies, broadcasted him as the personification of the plague.

Religious fanatics are partly to blame for the AIDS epidemic amongst heterosexuals because they spread the idea that HIV was somehow a distinctly homosexual disease. 'God's curse upon the sodomites.' How creepy Old Testament of them!

**Non-Discrimination Policy:**

Despite the wishful thinking of religious zealots, HIV does not discriminate based upon race, creed, color, national origin or ancestry, gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, marital status, parental status, or veteran status with its infectiousness. It is a virus that does not know or care about the particular conditions of your life!



Plate 6

*Queen Bee, Artist's Blood on Paper, 12" X 12", 2008*

This piece was created as a gift of appreciation for an industrious friend who works tirelessly for others.



Plate 7

*Pansy, HIV- Blood on Paper, 12" x 9", 1999*

A cute little flower puckering for our approval, or perhaps an effeminate homosexual puckering for the pleasure of strangers.



Plate 8

*A Litter of Legumes, HIV- Blood on Paper, 10" x 8", 2007*

This piece is from a small series of drawings pertaining to the idea of peas in a pod. In this case the sense of belonging within a multiple birth. An alternate title could be *Womb*.



Plate 9

*Peas in a Pod, HIV- and HIV+ Blood on Paper, 8" x 10", 2007*

Most of the images in this small legume series are simple songs to friendship but a few are drawn with combinations of HIV- and HIV+ blood to address more serious questions regarding relationships involving different HIV statuses.



Plate 10

*Arrangement, HIV- Blood on Paper, 8" x 11", 2005*

We choose to ignore the fact that flowers are the genitals of plants. This simple arrangement of three roses mimics a distinctly male sort of arrangement. Males have arrangement issues on a daily basis.



Plate 11

*Passiflora Incarnata, HIV- Blood on Paper, 26" x 20", 2004*

A straightforward botanical illustration of our beloved southern Passion Flower.

Growing up we loved to chance upon this exotic plant in the woods because we knew that we might find dangling underneath the large leaves some of its wrinkled egg-shaped fruits filled with delicious sweet seed.

*...continued*

During adolescence, when the mind begins to make all sorts of interesting associations, I discerned the sexual structures of the plant. I eventually asked an adult where the plant got its name and they explained that early Spanish missionaries in the Americas discovered the plant and named it for the passion of Christ on the cross.

With a Latin name that means “passion made flesh,” I will always stubbornly believe that the name originally came from the plant’s resemblance to male genitalia. In Japan, the plants are called “clock-faced” flowers, and are a symbol for homosexual youths.



Plate 12

*Encounters, HIV+ and HIV- Blood on Paper, 28” x 23, 2002*

“All is fair in love and war”: a proverb/cliché frequently used to justify lying, cheating, betrayal, spying, stalking, kidnapping, rape, murder/suicide, etc.

Some people seem to have the words ‘Reproductive Desperation’ tattooed on their foreheads. They are willing to engage in all sorts of insane behavior to locate and secure a partner. They are like kamikaze bees dive-bombing from one blossom encounter to the next.

We live in an over-populated, hyper-reproductive society driven by popular culture. Most of our advertisements, movies, and music are geared toward that one animal act. There is an aspect of tyranny in all of this. Love songs can be viewed as a form of propaganda.

Plate 13

*Ain’t Love Grand?, HIV- Blood on Paper, 12” x 15”, 2005*



There is more than a bit of irony in the fact that the female Praying Mantis bites off the head of her male partner. Yet another example of the cruel tricks nature plays upon men—sexual cannibalism as a matter of reverse predation. At the point where the male feels most in control he is shown the value of his contribution to the relationship. Observers say that his final performance is actually improved with the removal of his head.



Plate 14

*The Birds and the Bees, HIV+ and HIV- Blood on Paper, 18" x 15", 2006*

A pretty picture about some of the ugly aspects of nature: sexual infidelity, indiscriminate pollination, self-destructive sexuality, etc.

Like humans, the birds and bees promiscuously hop from one lovely little point of interest to the next. The birds seem caught in a love triangle and the bees engage in a sort of kamikaze sexuality.

A world of itches that must be scratched. A world where everyone is interested in someone other than the person they are currently with.



Plate 15

*Love Nest, HIV+ and HIV- Blood on Paper, 13" x 16", 2005*

Without failure, during every Blood Works exhibition someone will claim that they know which one of the little rabbits is painted in HIV+ blood. How absurd! One cannot detect HIV infection in the appearance of blood nor in the physical appearance of people.

I once lost about fifteen pounds on a low-carb diet. Everyone secretly thought I had AIDS and stopped flirting with me. Meanwhile, a handsome, athletic acquaintance of mine infected several of my other friends with the virus.



Plate 16

*Stigmata #2, HIV+ Blood on Paper, 18" x 19", 2000*

Christian martyrs purportedly developed bodily markings (stigmata) corresponding to the crucifixion wounds of Christ. Stigmata can also mean any identifying marks of shame or discredit or diagnostic signs of a disease.

*...continued*

The stigma of being HIV+ and the subsequent discrimination frequently creates an unusual sort of martyrdom. Several of my friends with AIDS have spoken of themselves as “fallen comrades on the battlefield of love.”

The stigma of being HIV- can also create an unusual sort of martyrdom. As a direct result of my own survivor’s guilt for not being infected while my friends died around me, I developed sympathetic symptoms of the disease for many years.



Plate 17

*Protect Yourself from Pricks, HIV- Blood on Paper, 12” x 10”, 2001*

A well-dressed gentleman warning us about the dangers of unprotected sewing, thus the thimble. Obviously, the title and subject of this piece function on many different levels.



Plate 18

*Mehndi Stigmata #1, HIV- and HIV+ Blood on Paper, 12” x 9”, 2001*

The ornate designs used to create henna tattoos for brides in India. I frequent Indian grocery stores and collect the joyful decorative patterns.

In India and several other countries, if a bride’s HIV+ status is discovered she is stigmatized, ostracized and sometimes murdered. In many instances, the groom infected the bride during pre-marital sex. The HIV/AIDS statistics for countries like India and Africa are alarming.



Plate 19

*Chastising Beauty, HIV- Blood on Paper, 17” x 21”, 2004*

I found this sporty fellow in pinstripes on an office memo pad with the words “Remember This” written alongside him. In my picture his accusatory finger chastises beauty—it is bandaged, evidence of a previous encounter with the pretty thing.

He is everyone who has behaved foolishly in the face of beauty. He is everyone who has granted privileges based upon physical attraction. He is everyone who ignores the idiom, “Pretty is as pretty does.” He is everyone who has allowed them to be hurt and then blamed the rose for the injury. He is every one of us! Meanwhile, beauty recoils for its next strike.

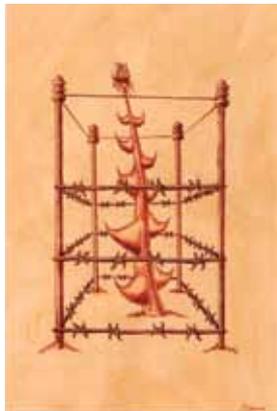


Plate 20

*Daddy's Little Girl, HIV- Blood on Paper, 32” x 25”, 2001*

Because I frequently deal with the “Mommy’s Little Boy” character with my pyrographic drawings, I chose to deal with its opposite in this piece. There is very little difference in the psychosexual makeup of the Oedipus and Electra Complexes.

The intent of this piece is to show how weakened, bloated, overly rooted, atrophied, awkward, tyrannical and perverse people can become when they are a protected species. Their status may insulate them from some of life’s harsh realities but it also imprisons them.

Since the parent is trying to protect the child’s innocence, the child must frequently offer proof that they are still innocent (immature) and therefore in-need-of-parental-protection. They become a bratty sort of innocence-on-display, like an impetuous porcelain doll in a glass box.



Plate 21

***One-liners, HIV- Blood on Paper, 18” x 15”, 2003***

The difficulties of dating in a meat market. A sweet little daisy is trying to traverse an array of the usual one-liners men use to pickup women.

The piece could also be interpreted as the spiritual struggle to overcome obstacles, to seek the light.



Plate 22

***Compatibles, HIV- Blood on Paper, 25” x 19”, 2002***

A sexist interpretation would be that the organic female rose is encircling the rigid, man-made barbed wire. However, the intent of this image is to depict the attraction of equals, a climbing rose recognizes and embraces its thorned equivalent. A love story wherein the partners are equally matched. This image has nothing to do with sexual orientation or gender; truly strong people embrace equality, regardless of plumbing. Gender becomes meaningless.



Plate 23

***Confirmed Bachelor, HIV- Blood on Paper, 33” x 21”, 2001***

A person loaded with so many defense mechanisms: booby traps, body armor, land mines, and emotional baggage that one must seriously ask, “Is it really worth the treacherous climb to get to know this person?” And what of the bloody evidence of others’ past attempts that one discovers along the way?

What little bit of beauty he may have once had to offer has atrophied through the years of his overwrought defensiveness.



Plate 24

*Barrier, HIV- Blood on Paper, 11” x 8” oval, 2000*

This piece poses only questions.

How can we protect ourselves from a penetrative beauty?

Harnesses, safety nets, parachutes, life jackets, insulation, condoms, barricades, etc—at what point are we no longer really experiencing an experience?

We live in a world of vicarious existence: arm chair gladiators, amusement parks, vacation/adventures, virtual sex, controlled chaos, etc. Wouldn't it be better to actually experience some cuts and bruises?



Plate 25

*Nuptial Knot, HIV- Red Wine on Paper, 7 1/4” x 5 1/4”, 2003*

A prototype for a wedding gift card. Through the years, I have been commissioned to create several different versions of this piece. Usually, the partners have me collect blood from each of them and then combine it into an artwork. Sometimes I mix the blood together into one substance and then create the drawing. Sometimes the partners want me to use their separate bloods to create individual flowers intertwining. With both methods the intent is the same, they want me to combine their individual essences into a whole expression. This is sympathetic magic.

Oftentimes, on the back of the wedding card I will write some cutesy expression like this:

Here's a little sanguine drawing  
wishing you a lifetime of  
growth and intertwining  
and perhaps even a few sprouts.



Plate 26

*Nuptial Not, HIV- Blood on Paper, 33” x 25”, 2002*

A relationship destined for failure because its primary means of expression is sexual. Or better yet, a relationship based solely upon passionate intensity that chokes itself to death.

They say that the brightest stars burn out the quickest. That could also be said about the hottest lovers. I have known many people who apparently have nothing more to offer than their skills at fornication. Some people make love, others engage in a pornographic performance.



Plate 27

*Sweet William, HIV+ and HIV- Blood on Paper, 25” x 19”, 2004*

Sweet Williams are among my favorite flowers. Growing up I loved to help my grandmother gather flowers for her splendid arrangements. I will always remember hearing her say, “Now, honey, cut down the most beautiful ones first.”

Since there is a correlation between HIV transmission and sexual attraction, it could be said that AIDS also “cuts down the most beautiful ones first.”

The bouquet gatherer is a grim reaper, of sorts. The Billys, Bills, Willies, Wills can't help that they are beautiful. Too many Williams dead!



Plate 28

*Ex Stasis, HIV- Blood on Paper, 27” x 18”, 2006*

The word ecstasy comes from the Greek words *ex stasis*, which mean ‘to stand outside of one’s self.’ This is true of all ecstasy whether sexually, chemically or spiritually induced.

For this image I wanted to focus on the more lurid aspects of ex stasis: the glistening, tumescent, secreting, pendulous, drooping in a state of satiated bliss. For we mere mortals, the only kind of ecstasy we will ever experience will probably involve some sort of exchange of fluids.



Plate 29

*Whore, HIV+ Blood on Paper, 8" x 11" oval, 2009*

This piece was created as a study for *Bride Stripped Bare*. Its creation involved the performance of an act of brutality. Read the final paragraph of commentary for the piece for all of the lurid details.



Plate 30

*The Usual Suspects, HIV+ and HIV- Blood on Paper, 34" x 28", 2002*

“Urge and urge and urge... Always the procreant urge of the world...”  
—Walt Whitman

For many years, I have maintained a substantial visual resource file of floral structures that resemble human structures. The similarities between floral and human reproductive organs are particularly fascinating when one considers that we don't even belong to the same division of the natural kingdom!

At some point I began to envision a large composition similar to the resplendent Dutch floral paintings seen in museums. Using photocopies and cut-and-paste collage techniques I composed the most over-the-top blood painting I have ever created. Its scale and complexity required that I divide the picture and my time into practicable studio sessions. Each session involved hand rendering, calculated drying and then precise varnishing to prevent oxidation. It took me eight grueling days on this tight production schedule to finish the piece. I hope I never create another piece as demanding as this one.

The final result is a veritable orgy of flowers. Since the theme deals with promiscuity I decided to add in a few locusts as a matter of vanitas.



Plate 31

***Bride Stripped Bare, HIV– Blood on Paper, 26” x 20”, 2006***

On the street I found a glossy postcard from an organization called the *Abstinence Outlet*. On one side it had a schmaltzy photograph of a rose, on the other it had this peculiar poem, “You are like a beautiful rose. Each time you engage in premarital sex, a precious petal is stripped away. Don’t leave your future husband holding a barren stem. Abstain.”

The ideas within this postcard presentation were a ready-made for my work. Clearly, the intention of the poem is to strike fear between the genders. I found the prudish, Victorian symbol of women as fragile blooms to be particularly anachronistic in our Post-Feminist age. The idea that this organization’s insipid photography and verse will discourage young people from sexual experimentation is laughable.

To amplify the sexual threat within the poem, I chose the Greek Lekythos vase because it was used to store the oils that athletes rubbed on their nude bodies before performances. I decorated the sides of the vessel with cracks and warriors passing the laurel wreath of victory from one to another. The wreath, with its broken foliage interior, represents the used female being tossed from one user to the next like some trophy of their conquests.

For the main character of this floral drama, I picked a virginal white rose and brutalized it in a fashion similar to the ruffians in the poem. I manhandled her and tore off all of her petals and all but one of her leaves. I then carelessly strew her petals around the base of the vase and in a final act of debauchery I took a bite from the remaining leaf. The resulting picture represents a defloration, both literally and figuratively.



Plate 32

***Sapphic Couplet, HIV– Blood on Paper, 26” x 20”, 2006***

Two lascivious orchids embracing in a Grecian vase decorated with an image of the poet Sappho playing a lyre and reciting her verse.

*...continued*

My grandmother, a very strong woman with a wild past, was a flapper in the 1920s, bore a child out of wedlock and entertained all sorts of interesting notions about social decorum. During my teenage years I witnessed a mean-spirited, homophobic aunt trying to corner my grandmother on the subject of lesbianism. The aunt said, "Why, Mother, surely you must know what those women do with each other." My grandmother smiled at me and replied, "Yes, darling, they comb each other's hair and read poetry."

Yes, the blood source for this picture is a lesbian couple.



Plate 33

*Trojan Bouquet, HIV- Blood on Paper, 27" x 20", 2006*

A safe sex bouquet for circuit party boys, a piece about personal protection.

Initially, I was playing with the simple association of the brand name of Trojan® condoms with the ancient Trojans.

The idea became more sophisticated when I realized that the Trojans were destroyed because they let down their guard and allowed a magnificent animal with hidden dangers to penetrate their safety.

The scene of reclining circuit party boys with their phallic-shaped pillows is an exact copy from an actual Greek vase!



Plate 34

*Narcissus (Self-portrait), HIV- Blood on Paper, 18" x 8", 2007*

A self-portrait painted in my own blood, a reminder to keep things in perspective. I created with the swirling water patterns with my new toy Adobe Photoshop®.

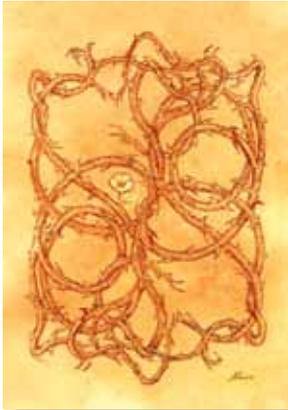


Plate 35

*Chastity, HIV- Blood on Paper, 26" x 20", 2007*

A convoluted system of defense mechanisms designed to protect your final remaining morsel of innocence.



Plate 36

*Late Bloomer, HIV- Blood on Paper, 26" x 20", 2007*

In the center of a weathered bed of daisies a small late-bloomer raises its fresh face toward the sun. It is surrounded by the worn, mutilated, dying and decaying early-bloomers. Cutting worms and other predators are consuming their weakened bodies. The blood source for this picture was a bright-eyed youth.

