

The GRID Project

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This project explores the relics of a lost future through painting. The word GRID was used as an acronym for Gay Related Immune Deficiency, the term used to refer to AIDS in the early days of the disease, inferring that gay men were the source of the disease as well as its sole target. Although the term was only used between 1981 and 1982, it prefigured the political use of hate and prejudice against homosexuals in the process of urban and social gentrification that followed the riots of the previous decades.

A grid is also a visual device which helps controlling the reproduction of an image by dividing it into smaller squares. This idea of control, and the double reading of the same word seemed to suit very well both the fear-prompting miscommunication about AIDS, and the tradition among gay people to use secret languages and signs to convey covert meanings to each other safely – tradition that was rejected by gay activists in the fight to get political recognition and funding to find a cure for the disease.

The lost future I refer to is the one that seemed to be promised by the sexual revolution and the global village, a place and time of possibilities, experimentation, and empowerment through community that was unpopular among conservatives – who found in AIDS a good opportunity to ignite fear and get more control.

As a gay man myself, growing up meant having to leave my small town and explore the world in search of a community and a place to belong to, but I soon realised that the world I had anticipated joining had disappeared. With a feeling of being late to the party, my practice enables me to consider the resulting sense of loss and dislocation as I wander among images from a past I was never part of, mixed with obscure domestic environments from the present that I cannot bring myself to call home. These separate moments in time share in common their being dark times in which communication is mere talk and the public realm cannot be trusted.

Focussing on the miscommunication and scary metaphors and myths about AIDS I explore how these have shaped people's interactions and relations with each other – particularly with each other's body. Although being nothing more than relics archived in unfashionable corners of the internet, such words and images (taken from old documentaries, movies, advertisements and newspapers) have nurtured the collectivity's need to monitor and control the feared *others*, the ones who do not adhere to a mainstream (Catholic) code of conduct, and to rid the city centres of them. The impact of the recent, much less deadly virus, COVID-19 (and its own metaphors and miscommunication) has triggered in me the belief that the AIDS crisis was a model example of political use of fear as a means of control.