

## Thinking Globally, Artists on AIDS

By WILLIAM ZIMMER

**E**VER since there has been an AIDS epidemic there has been art about it. At first artists were trying to make sense of the mysterious virus, and to build a sense of community and shared grief.

Many years on, art about AIDS has a different character. Much of it is personal commentary on individual struggles made by artists who are H.I.V. positive or have AIDS. Some of it is rueful or sardonic commentary about the global nature of the phenomenon and the political and other, often unforeseen, consequences of the disease. Art dealing with a little understood epidemic is also novel or strange on purely formal grounds.

These ruminations are prompted by the exhibition now in the capacious galleries at Real Art Ways in Hartford.

"Bodies of Resistance" features 16 artists, some of whom are H.I.V. positive or have AIDS. All were asked by the curator, Barbara Hunt, to make pieces dealing with the illness especially for the exhibition. In July the show will travel to Durban, South Africa, to coincide with the 13th International AIDS Conference there.

A reminder that AIDS is no longer just watching people one knows, or knows about, being cut down but rather an international conundrum is furnished by Oladélé Ajiboyé Bamgboyé who has set up a chat room on a Web site that specializes in video conferencing. The potential worldwide audience changes the imagery, which is scrambled, streaky and luridly colored with occasional flashes of body parts.

International ramifications are the theme of Skowmon Hastanan's "Red Fever." Ms. Hastanan makes a

visual analogy between the packed holds of historical slave ships and the seating arrangements of modern aircraft. The piece includes timetables of various airlines that travel to South Asia. Ms. Hastanan's message is that many flights cater to the international sex trade, and children are desirable because they are thought of as disease-free. Ms. Hastanan sees this as a new form of slavery.

The particular problems of India, where AIDS is frequently contracted



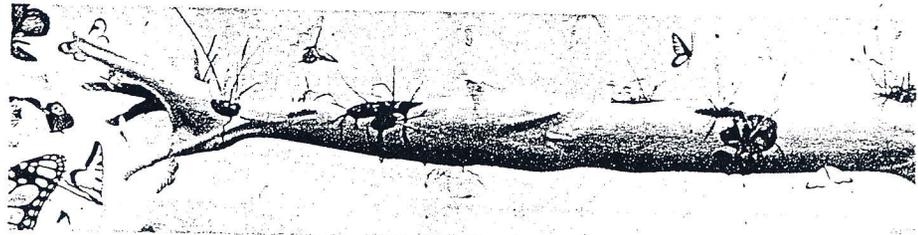
Among works in the Real Art Ways exhibition on the impact of AIDS are, clockwise from left, Charles LeDray's fabric "Patrick," Rina Banerjee's mixed-media "The Nature of Illness," and Frank Moore's "Release," oil on canvas on board.

picture of avoidance. People with AIDS in India avoid dealing with it, and the traditional folk cures are of little avail.

Another wave of color across a wall is Chuck Nanney's "Germs." It's a sprawling, amorphous pattern of 1,500 variously colored paper disks fixed by push pins. The pattern, perhaps unintentionally, takes roughly the form of a dinosaur. It is tempting to try to discern some logic, to find significance in occurrences of certain colors. There is none, as befits a disease that no one yet has a firm handle on. If Mr. Nanney's piece is a vision of dispersal, Kendell Geers's is the opposite. "Untitled (T.W. Virus)" is an enormous cube, wrapped in red and white tape indicating caution. A wall label refers to this as a



Real Art Ways, Hartford



"huge Third World Shipment."

Ken Chu's "Remnants of Desire" consists of three small carpets. They are referred to as "domestic rugs" and they would be found in the homes of three different economic classes. But all are covered with a layer of soil and on top of this are placed cracked plates that Mr. Chu found in New York's Chinatown. The plates are another reference to domesticity though it is home life shattered.

Along with the sweeping political and cultural statements made by the artists are works more personal and poignant. Frank Moore is widely known as a realist painter in oils with an excellent command of his medium. His own experiences with AIDS

have been a major subject, and because he paints so well, his content is all the more strong. The image on his rather small horizontal painting "Release" is an extended arm that takes on the weight and meaning of the earth itself. On the arm all sorts of natural, cyclical activity is occurring, and the individual body in the course of an illness mimics these changes.

Charles LeDray's "Patrick" is attention grabbing because it is a small piece occupying a whole wall of its own. A miniature jacket handmade by the artist, then shredded at the bottom, hangs on an appropriately small hanger. Like workers' uniforms in the larger world it bears a

chest patch with the name "Patrick" on it. Wall information tells viewer to think of Patrick as an "every man" and to ponder his ragged life.

Opposit in scale from Mr. LeDray's contribution is Ernesto Pujol's "Gulliver's Dream." This diptych consisting of two large ink-jet prints features pairs of enormous feet bound at the ankles, the predicament of Swift's hero. Mr. Pujol's is an effectively terse metaphor of the torment of a disease that operates on the molecular level.

The show called "Bodies of Resistance" is at Real Art Ways in Hartford through Jan. 30.