

# COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

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## *Columbia groups deal with epidemic*

**By Henry Tam, Jr.**

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In recognition of the vast number of people worldwide, and especially those in the arts, who have died of AIDS, members of the Columbia community observed "A Day Without Art" as part of World AIDS Day yesterday.

Along with approximately 5,300 cultural organizations around the world that participated in the draping over or removing of various works of art in recognition of the devastating effect AIDS has had on the artistic community, members of the Columbia community draped several works of art around campus yesterday.

A wreath was placed in front of Alma Mater at 10 a.m. yesterday morning, while about 20 observers watched.

Columbia's "A Day Without Art," which was modeled after the national project, was organized by Gay, Bisexual, and Lesbian Supporters (GABLES-CU), and headed by Stephen Davis, assistant director of Library Systems, with support from the Lesbian Bi-

sexual Gay Coalition (LBGC), and the Gay Health Advocates Program (GHAP).

Members of the organizations

also placed a wreath in the lobby of Kent Hall. Objects that were draped in black included the painting of Athena in the main lobby of Butler Library, a photo exhibit in Wallach Hall, and paintings in 301 Philosophy Hall.

“People need to be aware of this disease, which many have become inured to because it’s been around for a while now,” Davis said.

AIDS, the number one killer of American men aged 25 to 44, and the eighth-largest killer of the United States population, has prompted concern among many in the gay community.

Laura Pinsky, director of GHAP, said homosexual men run the highest risk of contracting AIDS.

“We usually try to target our program toward this high risk-group,” Pinsky said. “But our greater goal is to reach out to the whole community.”

More than 30,000 Americans have been diagnosed with full-blown AIDS and 204,390 Americans have died of AIDS as of Sept. 30, according to the center.

Connor Kennedy Ryan, CC ’96, co-chair of LBGC, said he was disappointed by the lack of concern that the Columbia community in general has shown about the disease, pointing to the low turnout at the memorial service Tuesday night for those who have died of AIDS.

“It’s depressing that everyone doesn’t see AIDS as a problem facing them,” Ryan said, adding that the incidence of AIDS among homosexuals has decreased at the same time that it has dramatically increased among heterosexuals.

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The Columbia community has not escaped the statistics, Davis said.

More than 65 Columbia alumni and administrators have died of AIDS since 1992, according to an informal list compiled by Davis, who said Pinsky is working on maintaining a permanent list.

"A Day Without Art," originated by Visual Aids, a nonprofit group of art professionals, which was originally intended to increase awareness of AIDS by covering works of art that were created by artists who have died of AIDS, has become symbolic to many members of the artistic community about the effect AIDS has had on their lives.

"AIDS tends to fade away from people's consciousness," said Dr. Richard Carlson, director of Columbia University Health Services. "Remembering those who have passed away reminds us of the deadly effects of AIDS."

Carlson said he currently works with approximately 20 HIV infected students who meet with him at least once a week for counseling and testing.

The infected students are often quite focused in educating other students and the Columbia community about AIDS, Carlson said.

Carlson said he estimates the number of unreported students with HIV on campus to be a little more than 0.2 percent of the student population, stating that being in New York City, "the epicenter of the epidemic," increases the risk.

A University administrator who has been infected with HIV since 1985 and who wished to remain

anonymous said he feels Columbia has been very supportive in helping him deal with the disease.

“It’s a time to remember a lot of wonderful people who are not here anymore,” the administrator said.

White House lights were dimmed in recognition of the observance of the epidemic for the first time in the five-year history between 7:45 p.m. and 8 p.m. last night.

The Clinton administration announced on Tuesday that it will recruit top AIDS experts from government, industry, and academia for a new effort to speed the discovery of drugs to combat AIDS.

Many activists, however, feel President Bill Clinton’s attempt to fight the epidemic seems more symbolic than anything else.

“We don’t know if Clinton is taking a real commitment on this issue,” Davis said.