

HALF A LIFE

STEPHANIE WILDE: HALF A LIFE
DRAWINGS AND ETCHINGS



In January of 2007, artist Stephanie Wilde wrote of her work: "For 23 years, I have investigated the social impact of the AIDS epidemic. In 1982 my son was born with a rare blood disorder. The parallels between the complications of his disease and AIDS propelled an unplanned journey. In November 2006, my exhibition "Half a Life" at Stewart Gallery in Boise, Idaho, featured historical excerpts of my study and a series of new mixed media works. My first body of work, "Plague Series" (1982-1987), explored the relationship between AIDS and the Black Plague. The Black Plague, also known as the Black Death, was a devastating pandemic that first struck Europe in the mid-late-14th century (1347-1351), killing between a third and two-third of Europe's population. Research and travel to Gambia, West Africa, led to a second series "AIDs in Africa" (15

drawings 1987-1990). In phase three of my studies, I created four 4-color plate etchings (limited editions of 30) entitled "SLIM" completed in 1993. During the intervening twelve years, the subject matter and imagery of those original explorations has been revisited. This reinvestigation and my growing commitment to the AIDS epidemic compelled me to expand the existing work."

The Fresno Art Museum's installation of Stephanie Wilde's visual epic encompasses the universal themes of life and death. The artist has documented with exquisite elegance the staggering human toll of AIDS in this deeply layered and challenging body of work. Included within the exhibition are six works from *The Plague series* completed between 1994 and 2008. Four small works measuring 8" x 8" from the series titled *Enemies of Love*, 2005-2006 using ink, acrylic and gold leaf on museum board are intricate, detailed and precise works reminiscent of Medieval or Renaissance scenes. *Death's Harvest* is a series of 13 panels

that references the number of deaths from AIDS in Africa. This study inspired Wilde to travel to Gambi, West Africa in 1990. After returning, she began a three-year-long project titled "SLIM," made up of four color plates. Reinvestigation of this topic has compelled Wilde to develop two new bodies of work: original drawings and a portfolio of etchings that reflect the same theme. Using copper plates, her recent portfolio *AIDS Forms the Tally*, 2008 includes four etchings and aquatints entitled *Wave of Men on the Sea of Hopelessness*, *The Juliana Cloth*, *The Chaos in the House*, and *Five to Fifteen*. It has been made into a limited edition of 30.

This is an art exhibition about human suffering in an indifferent world that has the means to eradicate disease and misery. It is a dark vision that is virtually medieval in both its intensity and its iconography. Since she first began exploring the AIDS epidemic in her art in the early 1980s, Stephanie Wilde has used the analogy of the Black Death, the bubonic plague that devastated 14th century Europe. In the responses and repercussions that shook pre-modern European society, Wilde finds parallels in the underdeveloped countries dealing with AIDS today.

Stephanie Wilde has developed an aesthetic opposed to late 20th century disavowals of suffering. She has accomplished this neither by embracing cynical posturing nor by blind faith and optimism, but by a rigorous and honest search for authentic hope and beauty within the confines of human disaster.



Stephanie Wilde, *Umsuspecting*, 1994-2007. Ink and acrylic on museum board, Image 12 inches x 12 inches, Framed 26 inches x 26.5 inches