

Mini Review

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HIV/AIDS Pandemic and the Art of Mosaic

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Introduction

Year 1981 is generally considered the beginning of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, although the pandemic in reality started way before this year, but was not identified or described. The more than forty-year "official" course of the HIV/AIDS pandemic has left a distinctive mark in culture and arts and its impact on visual arts in its entirety is striking. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is moving through various stages and the last stage so far, i.e. the stage of the HIV/AIDS pandemic during the time of global instability, started with the COVID-19 pandemic. The HIV/AIDS pandemic to a certain extent is under global control owing to significant progress in therapy and prevention but keeping it under control is highly demanding from the financial and organisational perspective [1]. It is safe to say that the HIV/AIDS pandemic is heading towards an unknown terrain. The role of culture and arts will be increasingly important as we seek ways of facing the increasing risks from the spiritual and psychological point of view.

Objective

The art of mosaic is at the starting point of the contemporary forms of visual arts and its close connection with architecture is essential in this. The paper strives to assess how the art of mosaic can reflect the new stage in the HIV/AIDS pandemic development, which may revolve around a very different topic compared to the 1980s and 1990s. During this era, the HIV/AIDS pandemic was associated with sexual and sexological topics, such as the status of

sexual minorities, prostitution or pornography, as well as drug addiction. The aim is to

- assess the presence of the art of mosaic in the reflection of the HIV/AIDS pandemic to date in visual arts and specifically architecture;
- define the historical spiritual and thematic sphere of influence of the art of mosaic in comparison with artistic topics introduced by the HIV/AIDS pandemic;
- point out how specifically the art of mosaic may find its sphere of influence in the artistic expression of further course of the HIV/AIDS pandemic [2].

Methods

The scientific paper is based on the following resources:

- Tomáš Hájek (2025) Research: Utopia of Non-Technological Type and the Topic of Prostitution. Open Access Journal of Addiction and Psychology, DOI: 10.3352/OAJAP.2025.08.000686, Volume 8 - Issue 3, December 2025
- Tomáš Hájek (2025) On the Aesthetics of the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Context of the Impact of Historical Epidemics and Pandemics on Visual Arts, Urbanism, and Architecture. Biomedical Journal of Scientific & Technical Research, E-Book, ISBN 978-1-946628-20-6

c. Tomáš Hájek (2025) HIV/AIDS pandemie ve výtvarném umění, divadle a literatuře. 11. Český kongres o HIV/AIDS s mezinárodní účastí, Primavera Hotel & Congress centre Plzeň 27. - 28.11.2025, Sborník abstraktů přednášek

d. Research entitled "HIV/AIDS Pandemic in Visual Arts, Theatre and Literature, period covered: 1980-2025, languages: Czech, English, German.

e. Long-term membership in the Associazione internazionale mosaicisti contemporanei and the Czech Glass Society [3].

Table 1: Two major visual art catalogues (visual arts should be perceived in the broader sense including photography and architecture) for the entire course of the HIV/AIDS pandemic (1981-2025).

Robert Atkins, Thomas D. Sokolowski (1991) From media to metaphor: art about AIDS – A traveling exhibition organized and circulated by Independent Curators Incorporated, New York. Second edition. New York: Independent Curators Incorporated, pp. 72
Jonathan D. Katz et al. (2015) Art AIDS America. Seattle: Tacoma Art Museum in association with University of Washington Press, pp. 288

Table 2: Identified works of visual art in the context of architecture that may be classified as the art of mosaic or as being close to the art of mosaic for the entire course of the HIV/AIDS pandemic (1981-2025).

Author, year, artwork title, description of artwork	Notes
Arch Connelly (1987) Blurry Self Portrait; sequins; 20 x 16 inches; Collection of Roberto Juarez and David Freiberg	
The AIDS NAMES Project Foundation (1987) The AIDS Memorial Quilt; Quilt panels and digital display, Dimensions variable; Courtesy of The NAMES, Project Foundation, Atlanta, Georgia	The topic of quilt will be discussed further. At this point, it is mentioned in the form appearing in the image part of the catalogue Jonathan D. Katz et al. (2015) Art AIDS America. Seattle: Tacoma Art Museum in association with University of Washington Press, pp. 288
Rod Rhodes (1988) Stations of the Cross X, Stripping of Christ; wood, glass and felt; 26 x 26 x 6, 75 inches	
Felix Gonzales-Torres (1995) Untitled (Water); strands of beads and hanging device; dimensions vary with installation; The Baltimore Museum of Art	
Mark Carter (2000) Meet Dorothy Dandridge; mixed media; 18 x 13 inches; Courtesy of the Estate of Mark Carter	
Wolfgang Tillmans (2002) AIDS Memorial; a monolithic stele in blue colour presenting information on the HIV/AIDS pandemic; Sendlinger Tor, München	The author of this text would like to point out that in his opinion, this is a striking architectural concept using a high-contrast method of installation of an artefact close to a monument.
Warren Chapman, Jeff Byrne-Daniels (2006) Beacon of Hope; AIDS Memorial Stele; light sculpture as a spiralling stainless-steel column rising from a mosaic plinth; Sackville Gardens, Manchester, UK	This article would like to mention the Circle of Friends under the National AIDS Memorial Grove in San Francisco as a certain parallel to the noteworthy L'Artère, le jardin des dessins; however, the Circle of Friends was created before L'Artère, le jardin des dessins. While the Circle of Friends comes close to the memorial function of the AIDS Memorial Quilt, it is a physical artwork in park architecture created in 1996.
Fabrice Hyber (2006) L'Artère, le jardin des dessins; work of garden and park architecture, ceramic tiles with the author's original paintings to commemorate victims of AIDS and to honour those who dedicated their efforts to the struggle against this epidemic; Parc de la Villette, Paris	The AIDS Memorial Quilt developed into a global phenomenon and continues to provide inspiration in architecture as a whole. This article points out specifically the project entitled Namen und Steine, which was initiated by Tom Fecht and the German AIDS Foundation at the beginning of the 1990s. This project is based on the same concept as the Stolpersteine project initiated a little later by Günter Demnig as a project commemorating the victims of Nazi terror. From the architectural and technical point of view, these are inscriptions on paving stones.

Results

General identification of any artwork clearly having the character of mosaic or at least an artwork with characteristics close to the art of mosaic was carried out in two major visual arts catalogues for the entire course of the HIV/AIDS pandemic (1981-2025) and in other available resources detected through research. This closeness may be represented, for example, in the use of the structure of tesserae in the media mix, or in a three-dimensional character of artwork designed in a broader mosaic structure.

Table 3: Definition of historical spiritual and thematic sphere of influence of the art of mosaic in comparison with topics introduced by the HIV/AIDS pandemic (1981-2025) in visual arts in the context of architecture [3] .

Examples of motif background of the art of mosaic [3]	Examples of motif background inspired by the HIV/AIDS pandemic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ancient Roman floor mosaics serve decorative function and depict for example animal motifs. - Descriptions of the history of prostitution state that archaeologists working on the Pompeii excavations in the 18th century were shocked by the extent of erotic or even pornographic scenes decorating buildings, with the art of mosaic being one of the techniques used in these decorations. - Byzantine and early Christian mosaics use monumental, expressive and symbolic means to depict key elements of Christian iconography with an emphasis on archetypal eternity. - Complicated development of medieval mosaic stemming from the dynamics of mosaic development in the Byzantium, motifs including the Christ, his mother, biblical prophets, bishops, priests and deacons. - Florentine mosaic (Comesso in pietre dure) as a combination of opus sectile (used to decorate floors) and inlay techniques is used to decorate small items for example with genre images typical for Renaissance. - Mosaico minuto (Vatican mosaic studios) turns to applied and decorative arts in response to the spiritual dynamism and verticality of Baroque: motifs include landscape, romantic ruins, genre scenes. - Boom of the mosaic technique in the 19th century taking place against the backdrop of historicism and development of monument care and the subsequent Art Nouveau (Jugendstil, Art Nouveau) furnishes public buildings, churches, chapels and cemeteries with copies of motifs from the early Christian and Byzantine mosaics. - In the 20th century, the art of mosaic develops under artistic avantgarde into an autonomous art and develops dynamically, using motifs associated with avantgarde objectives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gay and lesbian homosexuality in a symbolic artistic form. - Gay and lesbian homosexuality in specific artistic and documentary details. - Prostitution and pornography in a symbolic artistic form. - Prostitution and pornography in specific artistic and documentary details. - Hospital environment, loneliness, suffering and death in a symbolic artistic form. - Hospital environment, loneliness, suffering and death in specific artistic and documentary details. - Art presenting portraits and self-portraits of the ill and dying. - Political activism aimed against concealing the severity of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and against stigmatisation of victims of the pandemic in a symbolic artistic form. - Political activism aimed against concealing the severity of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and against stigmatisation of victims of the pandemic in specific artistic and documentary details. - Demonstration of truly significant effects of combined therapy with antiretroviral drugs (HAART) on underprivileged residents of the global South in specific artistic and documentary details. - Pre-exposure prophylaxis with antiretroviral drugs presented nearly as a cure, as an effective substitute for vaccination. It displaces sexual abstinence and fight against prostitution and pornography from the strategies applied in the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic and this is depicted in specific artistic and documentary details. - Preventive measures against the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic (such as condoms) in a symbolic artistic form. - Preventive measures against the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic (such as condoms) in specific artistic and documentary details. - Topic of drug use in a symbolic artistic form. - Topic of drug use in specific artistic and documentary details. - Commemorative function of art in a symbolic artistic form. - Commemorative function of art in specific artistic and documentary details.

Conclusion

The sphere of influence of the art of mosaic in the current stage of the HIV/AIDS pandemic stems mainly from artistic participation in the creation of commemorative architectural memorials as part of garden and park architecture, public space in residential premises or open landscape; in funeral architecture; in artistic participation in the visual art and architectural genre of guilt, if it is to be developed. Naturally, the art of mosaic may enter its traditional

realm and create two-dimensional mosaic images or three-dimensional mosaic creations and contribute to interior floor mosaics or creation of murals. Participation of the art of mosaic in the cultural and artistic reflection of the development of the HIV/AIDS pandemic will probably lead to deviation from the artistic and visual representation of the HIV/AIDS pandemic typical for the 1980s and 1990s. The previously frequent sexual and sexological topics, themes of illness, suffering and death, or themes of political activism of the 1980s and 1990s will no longer be used to such a major

extent. Spiritual, religious, intellectual and social themes will appear more frequently. The art of mosaic will focus on expressing the topics inherent to this art: time, eternity, eschatology, justice,

sense of history. The art of mosaic may further develop the method creatively initiated in the AIDS Memorial, Sendlinger Tor, München, or L'Artère, le jardin des dessins in Paris.

Table 4: Selected individual creations in the visual arts and architectural genre of quilt

Time of creation	Description of quilt implementation and its characteristics
1985	Cleve Jones created the first quilt panel in memory of Marvin Feldman; panel dimensions 0.9 x 1.8 m. Jones and his friends formally establish the NAMES Project Memorial Quilt.
1987	Lesbian and Gay Pride Parade, San Francisco; quilt dimensions 3.8m x 3.8m
1987	Second National March for Lesbian and Gay Rights, Washington D.C., National Mall; AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power and AIDS Memorial Quilt initiated implementation of the quilt with 240 panels.
1992	8th International AIDS Conference, Amsterdam, Beurs van Berlage; three-dimensional architectural structure.
Permanent quilt	Grace Cathedral, San Francisco; St George Cathedral, Cape Town

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Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest.

References

1. Tomáš Hájek (2019) Několik poznámek ke souvztažnosti sociálních otřesů a nestability s rozvojem HIV pandemie. 6. Mezinárodní symposium ke Světovému dni AIDS, CONGRESS CENTRE Primavera Plzeň, 21.-22.11.2019, Sborník abstraktů přednášek
2. Jörn Wolters (2020) AIDS memorials from obituaries to artworks – a photo essay. Science Museum Group Journal, Special Issue: Curating Medicine.
3. Magdalena Kracík Štorkánová, Jana Fořtová-Tornošová, Petra Bauerová, Veronika Vicherková, Tomáš Hájek a kol. (2015) Opus musivum, mozaika ve výtvarném umění. katalog k výstavě, která se koná od 20.11.2015 do 1.5.2016 ve Středočeském muzeu v Roztokách u Prahy, ART&CRAFT Mozaika, pp. 71.