

November 07, 2006

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Minnesota AIDS Project

**Minnesota AIDS Project and Intermedia Arts
Collaborate on World AIDS Day Observance on December 1**

Minneapolis—Minnesota AIDS Project and Intermedia Arts present a unique event in observance of World AIDS Day on December 1, 2006. Beginning at 6:30 p.m. at Intermedia Arts, 2822 Lyndale Avenue South, Minneapolis, the event is free and open to the public. It begins with a poignant remembrance ceremony honoring the more than 2,700 victims of HIV in Minnesota, followed by comments by Lorraine Teel, Executive Director of Minnesota AIDS Project. Highlighting the event is the premiere of a project by Twin Cities photographer, Justin Thai.

Designed to confront the viewer on perceptions of what people living with HIV look like, “**Am I? Are You?**” is an evocative photographic exhibit featuring fifty portraits that challenge the observer to determine which 25 of the 50 models are HIV positive. Photographer Thai noted, “I wanted to raise awareness that HIV is still impacting us and that the stigma of the disease hurts those infected.”

Thai approached Minnesota AIDS Project about the possibility of partnering to bring his concept to the public. MAP’s *Positive Link*, an empowerment program for people living with HIV, agreed to the collaboration and with the photographer have been working throughout the year to turn “**Am I? Are You?**” into reality.

Andy Ansell, Health Education Coordinator for MAP, called MAP’s involvement with the project a natural partnership. “People don’t always understand the emotional toll that living with the virus causes. Being involved in this project gives us the chance to break some of the stereotypes

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associated with HIV and helps us continue to foster good open dialogue about the disease. We've come a long way in treating HIV, but still have a long way to go in talking about it.”

In addition to Thai's compelling photography, the December 1st event features a panel discussion with the artist and some of his models—both HIV negative and HIV positive. Positive models will talk about their personal experiences of disclosure, with whom they shared their positive status, and why. HIV negative models discuss why they agreed to be photographed for this exhibit, risking the misperception that they are HIV positive because of their participation.

MAP's Executive Director, Lorraine Teel commented, “The combination of stigma and not understanding the experience of living with HIV drives this epidemic forward. We are pleased that Intermedia Arts and MAP can provide an experience and a space where people can come together to talk about HIV and go away, empowered to take action to stop the virus.”

According to estimates of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, there are 38.6 million people living with HIV, including 2.3 million children. 2005 witnessed nearly 4.1 million new infections, with almost half the infections occurring in people under 25. While 95% of people with HIV/AIDS live in developing nations, HIV remains a threat to men, women, and children on all continents of the world.

Minnesota experienced a 50% increase in new HIV infections among gay and bisexual men through the first six months of 2006. HIV infection is also increasing in African American men and women—as well as in African-born Minnesotans—who number over one-fifth of the new HIV infections reported in the state and are among our most vulnerable populations

Started in 1988, World AIDS Day strives to increase awareness, education and fight prejudice. World AIDS Day is an important reminder that HIV has not gone away, and that there are many things still to be done.