

Daily life with HIV documented by African women via Venice Arts

BY RAHNE PISTOR

Visitors to Venice Arts Gallery can see images of daily life and daily hardships in South Africa through the eyes of some of those who have it the hardest — women living with HIV.

A photography project orchestrated by local nonprofit Venice Arts in Neighborhoods put cameras in the hands of 15 HIV positive South African mothers or mothers-to-be in the townships of Cape Town. The women were taught how to use the photographic equipment by a team of photographers from Venice Arts.

The resulting *The House is Small but the Welcome is Big* exhibit debuted at the Venice Art Walk in May and then was showcased at the International AIDS Conference in Toronto in August. In September, it was featured at the Clinton Global Aid Initiative Conference in New York and now it has arrived back in Venice for a homecoming exhibit that will be on view through Sunday, December 3rd, at Venice Arts Gallery, 1809 Lincoln Blvd., Venice. Admission is free.

The women's camera lenses captured the burden that the AIDS pandemic has caused on daily lives of the South African population. Images show the birth of a baby to an HIV-positive woman; a newborn receiving its first dose of the drug AZT (an

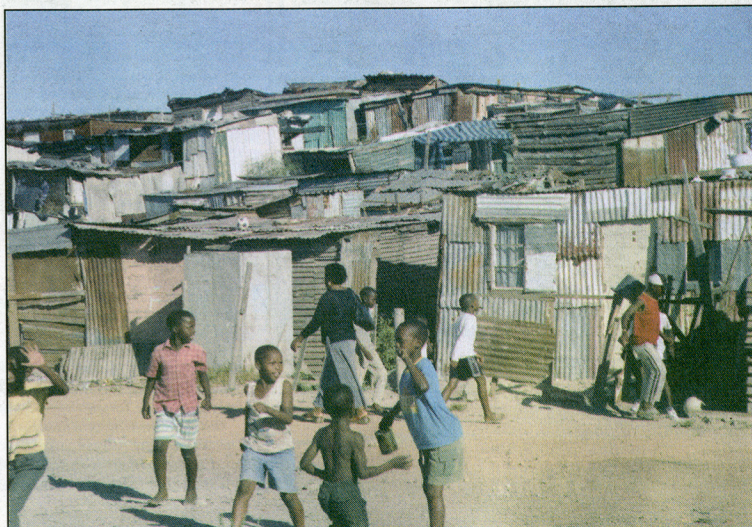
antiretroviral often used to try to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV), colorful shacks and shantytowns most often without electricity or running water; men socializing at a local *shabean* (bar); children playing on dusty streets; an AIDS treatment advocacy march against AIDS "denialism" in the township of Khayelitsha; and a gravedigger opening an old grave to accommodate yet a third body in the small space.

But through the suffering and dismay, the will of people to help each other and enjoy life is evident.

"There are images of loss, certainly, but also of love and support; of AIDS discrimination but also of activism and pride; of dead children, parents and partners, but also of hope for the future," says Venice Arts creative director Jim Hubbard.

The project was created by Hubbard; physician and producer for *Law and Order: SVU* Neal Baer; and Venice Arts cofounder/executive director Lynn Warshafsky as a new concept for teaching underprivileged people how to document the struggles in their lives through the arts.

Baer believes the personal touch is what separates the project's images from what a photojournalist or news crew would be able to capture and he says the



CAPE TOWN SHANTYTOWN — An image by Funeka Nceke shows the poor living conditions in the region.

women capture slices of life and struggle in ways "no outsider can hope to achieve."

Venice Arts plans to continue its efforts to empower Africans afflicted with poverty and disease through photography and awareness in Mozambique and Kenya this coming springtime.

In Kenya, Venice Arts will be coordinating with Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Dr. Wangari Maathai, founder of Kenya's Green Belt Movement. Women in the Green Belt Movement will document their personal impact on the burgeoning ecological movement in Africa.

In Mozambique, assisted by the Office of First Lady Laura Bush and a local non-governmental organization, Venice Arts will work on a photography project with children who are now heading their own households, having lost both parents to AIDS. Information, (310) 822-8533.