AIDS TAKES ITS TOLL ON PHOTOGRAPHY
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For many in the arts, AIDS is a highly personal and immediate concern. The photography world is no exception. Since the early 1980s we’ve witnessed a steady stream of losses from AIDS—a disease that has robbed the field of many innovative talents and left a lasting sadness among the survivors. In 1993, we decided that it was time to take stock and remember those who had died.

When we started, none of us on the staff quite realized the extent to which photography had been devastated by this modern plague. We began our research by making phone calls, asking a wide range of people who they knew of who’d died of AIDS. Quickly, our list grew to more than 100 names. Every area of photography, it turned out, had been affected by the disease.

There were art photographers Robert Mapplethorpe, David Wojnarowicz, Jimmy DeSana, Hervé Guibert, Daniel Boudinot, and Peter Hujar, and fashion photographers Barry Mckinley and Bill Connors. There were collectors and curators: Sam Wagstaff, John Kobal, and Jack Boulton. There was photography editor Robert Hayes and the art directors Donald Sterzin and Kenneth Kendrick. The list grew and grew and soon encompassed models, gallery owners, photo stylists, hairdressers, makeup artists, critics, art consultants, photo book editors, photographers’ assistants, and agents, all of the people who help make photographs look the way they do and who get them out into the world once they are finished. We also looked at the range of photography that’s been made about AIDS, some of it by artists who were themselves ill with the disease or who had lost friends and lovers to it.

Because magazine publishing is a process of editing unwieldy amounts of information into readable form, we decided to focus on 24 of the people on our list of those who had died; these 24 represented a range of those who had been lost. Then we enlisted their friends and colleagues to write memorials to them.

What we got back was an outpouring of fond remembrance, of laughter and appreciation, that was saddening but also heartening. How cherished these people were and how greatly they would be missed was tempered by what they had contributed, some in only a short time. We had set out to commemorate their loss, and we achieved that. In the process, we learned a life-affirming lesson of fortitude, struggle, and love.