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15 mothers. 15 cameras. 15 stories of courage.

"The House is Small but the Welcome is Big"

Internationally Celebrated Photography Exhibit By HIV Positive South African Women To Open at Venice Arts Gallery November 4th

"I want to be alive when the cure comes. Whatsoever there is that tries to stop me I will jump over it. Nothing can stop me." --Nozandulela Samela, (an HIV Positive South African woman, whose photographs are included in this exhibit.)

Venice, CA -- (October 25, 2006) -- On November 4th, the Venice Arts Gallery will proudly host the opening for "The House is Small but the Welcome is Big," a photography exhibit featuring images taken by 15 HIV positive South African women (all mothers or mothers-to-be in the townships of Cape Town). The women were taught how to document their lives photographically by a team of photographers from Los Angeles-based Venice Arts.

"The House is Small but the Welcome is Big" debuted at the Venice Art Walk in May 2006 and was showcased at the International Aids Conference in Toronto in August. Most recently, in September, it was featured at the Clinton Global Aid Initiative Conference in New York, and introduced by First Lady Laura Bush.

For sample images, please visit:

<http://www.venice-arts.org/studentWork/socialart/ilivehere/ilivehere.html>

****Print-quality images are available upon request.****

The women's photos are beautifully rendered and compelling: The birth of a baby to an HIV-positive mother. A newborn receiving its first dose of AZT. Colorful, cozy shacks, without electricity or running water. Men socializing at a local Shabeen (bar). An AIDS Treatment Advocacy march in Khayelitsha township against "AIDS denialism." A gravedigger opening an old grave to accommodate a third body. Children playing on dusty streets.

Commenting on the photos, Venice Arts' Creative Director Jim Hubbard says, "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."

Created by physician and producer/show runner for "Law and Order: SVU" Neal Baer, Venice Arts Co-Founder/Executive Director Lynn Warshafsky and Creative Director Jim Hubbard, "The House Is Small" is a breakthrough in teaching and educating under privileged people how to document their life/struggles through the arts.

Neal Baer, the project's Co-Creator and Venice Arts' Board member comments: "As a writer and Executive Producer of 'ER' and 'Law & Order: Special Victims Unit,' I've had the privilege of telling stories that personally move me. 'The House Is Small, but the Welcome Is Big' gives mothers living with HIV in Capetown, South Africa a powerful tool to tell their own stories: photographically. Their stunning and vivid pictures document their struggles and victories in ways no outsider can hope to achieve."

Adds Lynn Warshafsky: "We cannot underestimate the power of images in shaping our understanding of the world around us. Documentary photography can be particularly compelling not only in storytelling, but in advocating for social change -- think of early images by Dorthea Lange or Arthur Rothstein from the FSA (Farm Services Administration) or the work of Lewis Hine documenting child labor. Venice Arts has been running participant-created photography projects for nearly 15 years and the power of it - - for both the participants telling their stories and the audiences who eventually see their images -- always astounds."

According to Warshafsky, Venice Arts' next major international initiatives over the next several years will focus on the intersection between poverty and critical public health issues, including HIV/AIDS and environmental degradation. "Our hope is to create a body of photography that, through exhibition, books, and other means, will contribute to understanding, dialogue, and the development of humane policies in the U.S. and abroad," she concludes.

This project, "The House is Small But the Welcome Big," is supported by the Kaiser Family Foundation, Dick Wolf/Wolf Films, Inc., Paradigm, Canon, USA, and Entertainment to Empowerment Foundation, among others; and is the first in a series of international projects by Venice Arts designed to raise awareness about global health issues.

Venice Arts has been running innovative programs in photography, filmmaking, and digital arts, primarily for low-income children and teens, for 13 years. It has implemented national and international photo documentary projects since 1998. For more about Venice Arts, go to <http://www.venice-arts.org>