

Humumentism: Bridging HIV Narratives and *A Humument*  
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## Introduction

While browsing through *A Humument* by Tom Phillips, it is clear that the artistic style presents a new way of thinking and observing art. Phillips is able to present new ideas unrelated to the original piece in a way that both interests and provokes discussion from viewers. As Mavin Sackner has said, *A Humument* provides “artistic creativity carried out in parallel styles and themes outside the popular conception of serial artistic presentations” (Humumentism). By utilizing this same technique, our global health course has attempted to bring a new perspective on HIV/AIDS intended to garner discussion and appreciation not only for the Humument technique but for narratives of HIV as well. In this paper, a student piece will be analyzed and critiqued in order to gain a fuller understanding on how and why the art piece came to be.

## The Development and Critique of an Art Piece

For the Humument workshop, Luisa Bigal decided to work with a document which talked about reproductive technologies and violence against women (Maria de Bruyn Papers Box 12 Folder 2). The original document is quite interesting, and touches upon differences in reproductive technologies amongst the developing world as well as violence women face. However, the manuscript is very technical. The artist chose this piece in hopes of transforming it in a way that both highlights the struggles faced by women as well as that the narratives of this struggle are able to call to bring about change.

Bigal’s finished art work is strikingly different from the original document in various ways. The entire artwork is black, apart from the selected words and the crying Venus symbol. The color black being chosen for the background is fitting. Black is a dark color, often associated with topics such as death and sorrow. When the viewer reads the selected words, it is easy to see the association between the color’s connotations to the chosen topic: violence against women.

The highlighted words in the piece were carefully chosen by the artist. By selecting the words “violence against women”, the artist sets the tone for the piece as well as captures the attention of the viewer. The following words, “harassment, abortion, violated, control, and painful”, all seek to demonstrate those struggles and continue to set a somber tone as they constitute painful events often experienced. **Not enough evidence.** These words lead the viewer down the page where the phrase “misused and abused” can be seen. This phrase is simple and powerful and can be applied to both specific and general situations. The artist points not only at how women can be misused and abused in their own relationships, but also at how women throughout history have been and continue to be misused and abused in terms of unequal pay, gender stereotypes, and so on. **Not enough evidence** The final highlighted phrase, “women’s struggles”, ends the piece in a powerful manner that ties together the preceding words and summarizes what violence against women truly constitutes. By selecting these

words, Bigal not only successfully highlights the struggles women face, but also seeks to call for change by leaving viewers saddened yet thinking of what the reality of life is for women and what can be done to change this.

The final aspect of the piece is the crying Venus symbol. The symbol as well as the tears below it, have been done in red. The artist has chosen red for two reasons. Red is often associated with pain and wounds, something that can be seen in the highlighted words. The second reason for the chosen color is seen in its relation to blood. The artist creates a sense of ambiguity over the drops as well as an ode to the original reproductive topic of the document. The Venus symbol is crying over the centuries of violence that has been experienced by women. ***Not enough evidence***

Overall, the artist successfully uses the somber tones and connotations of the color black in addition to the pain that is associated with the color red to highlight the selected words. By having the Venus symbol cry for these “women’s struggles” we can clearly see the message Bigal is seeking to transmit: women continuously experience a wide range of violence, something that is painful but must be used as a call to action.

## **Conclusion**

According to Mavin Sackner, “‘humumentism’ is an art form that integrates humanistic activities through individual creative thought that falls outside the current popular conception of artistic presentations” (Humumentism). Through her artwork, Bigal has done just that. By applying the Humument technique to the humanistic topic of “violence against women”, Bigal was able to present an original and somber piece that stemmed from a technical document regarding reproductive techniques. Her use of bold yet meaningful colors went well with the selected words and presented a sad tone to a topic that must no longer be ignored.

### Works Cited

Gupta, Jyotsna A. "New Reproductive Technologies and Violence against Women."

Maria de Bruyn Papers, Rubenstein Library at Duke U, Durham, Box 12 Folder 2.

Typescript.

Sackner, Mavin. "Tom Phillips: 'Humumentism' the Works and Ideas of Tom Phillips."

*Tom Phillips*, [www.tomphillips.co.uk/hument/essays/item/5867-humentism-the-works-and-ideas-of-tom-phillips-by-marvin-sackner](http://www.tomphillips.co.uk/hument/essays/item/5867-humentism-the-works-and-ideas-of-tom-phillips-by-marvin-sackner).