

Exhibition

The art of immunisation

Given their life-saving potential, vaccines are widely regarded as one of medicine's most groundbreaking innovations. Nevertheless, their success has done little to diminish the controversies that have marked the long history of immunisation. To this day, efforts to promote the global uptake of vaccines are hindered by issues such as vaccine hesitancy, misinformation, and localised sociocultural dynamics that continue to perplex policy makers. Such challenges are in need of creative solutions.

<Immune Nations> is the product of a 3-year collaboration between artists, scientists, and academics, described by curator Natalie Loveless as the first of its kind to "specifically address the issue of vaccines from a collaborative, interdisciplinary perspective, attentive to the arts and its many roles for advocacy and political intervention". Installed at UNAIDS headquarters in Geneva, the eight artworks in this exhibition demonstrate how to engage productively and provocatively with policy makers and the public.

Central to <Immune Nations> is a desire to capture the perspectives of people often sidelined by high-level political discussions. Artist Jesper Alvær, in collaboration with Norwegian scientist Johan Holst, Sinaré/Kàboré Thérèse of Burkina Faso's Ministry of Health, and Mozambican Chief Medical Officer Ramos Mboane, focuses on health workers. In *Upstream the Cold Chain*, Alvær takes as a starting point poetic reflections from local health-care professionals and scientists at the point of vaccine delivery in Mozambique and Burkina Faso. Very different views are conveyed by Kaisu Koski, again working with Holst, whose *Conversations with Vaccine-Critical Parents* illustrates the inherent value of dialogue as rich interview footage is used to explore the health beliefs of vaccine-critical parents in Finland and the Netherlands.

Perception is the focus of *Anatomy Table* by Sean Caulfield, printmaker and University of Alberta professor of art, in another collaboration with Holst and Canada Research Chair in Health Law and Policy Timothy Caulfield. Caulfield superimposes "imagined and nonsensical" drawings, inspired by scientific descriptions and images

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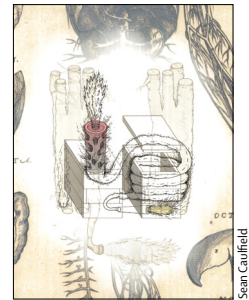
of viruses, over famous anatomical illustrations by 16th-century anatomist Andreas Vesalius. These striking silkscreen and digital prints encourage the viewer to contemplate the co-existence of multiple interpretations of the body, while highlighting what Caulfield describes as a gap "between empirical/scientific representations, and more emotional and culturally charged expressions of the body".

Of the remaining contributions, one of the most engaging is *Shadowpox: The Antibody Politic*, developed by

Alison Humphrey, Caitlin Fisher, Steven J Hoffman, and LaLaine Ulit-Destajo. This interactive installation quite literally renders visible the invisible, as participants must choose whether or not to be vaccinated against the "shadowpox" pathogen, before having the opportunity to trace the impact of their decision as an animated population is exposed to the threat of infection. On completion, participants are able to view their "infection collection" or "protection collection", as the population is transformed from an aggregate statistic with a series of detailed individual stories. This is undoubtedly one of the most powerful and playful ways to illustrate both the individual and population-level implications of community immunity.

Occupying the open atrium of the UNAIDS headquarters and situated beside UN paraphernalia and some rather uninspiring WHO online search directories, <Immune Nations> highlights the potential of collaborative artistic expression to provoke fresh questions of some of global health's most enduring challenges.

James Smith



<Immune Nations> UNAIDS, Geneva, Switzerland, until June 30, 2017 http://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/featurestories/2017/may/20170523_immune-nations

An associated book, *The Vaccine Picture*, is forthcoming in 2017 for more information see <http://www.thevaccineproject.com/>



Jesper Alvær, *Upstream the Cold Chain* single channel video 2017 Crossing Lake Niassa during vaccination session, video still by the artist