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Into the Light

Dozens of people gathered at the Bronx Museum to see “Into the Light,” a performance on AIDS awareness.

Hunter Reynolds, 57, and Babirye Leilah, 30, the two performers, entered the colorful room where they were met with silence.

Reynolds, who has been using photography and performance to express his experience as an HIV positive gay man, had his naked body painted in rainbow colors. Leilah, a specialist in abstract sculpture and painting, was cloaked in black. Both Reynolds and Leilah held long sticks and had their faces masked. As Reynolds sat on a handmade chair adorned with multiple colors, Leilah stood next to him. They faced the public. No words, no gestures.

“The magnet that brings us together here is HIV,” said Sur Rodney Sur, 62, who is an activist, writer and curator. He is also known for his fight to raise awareness about the AIDS crisis.

Leilah, whose mother passed away few years ago, was a victim of HIV in Uganda, Africa. She said the black costumes represent a ritual to mourn those who died. “Reynolds almost died as he went through a surgery,” Leilah said.

The two artists were then joined by two others, who also wore black costumes. They took the stairs down to the first floor to start a tour. Behind were people who carried the chair covered with ritual objects.

Much like a funeral procession, they got outside the museum, walked slowly, and came into the Art AIDS America galleries through another entrance.

“The tour is to protest the marginalization of people of color and women in AIDS activism,” Sur said. “There are more than 100 activist artists, only four are people of color and five women.”

Lola Flash, 57, a photographer and high school teacher from Brooklyn, said, “It is a systematic problem that has been there for years.”

After New York, the show that has begun in Seattle and Atlanta will move to Chicago.