

Archives

The C Word

Artists, Scientists, and Patients Respond to Cancer



MAX DEAN, *The Gross Clinic*, 2016. Image courtesy of Max Dean.

After being diagnosed with prostate cancer on his sixty-second birthday, Canadian multidisciplinary artist Max Dean began to explore his prognosis through his art practice. Striving to visualize the physical and psychological manifestations of his disease, Dean employed the help of animatronic figures from the Wilderness Adventure Ride at Ontario Place, an abandoned theme park in Toronto. Deeply inspired since college by Thomas Eakins's 1875

painting *Portrait of Dr. Samuel D. Gross* (*The Gross Clinic*), which depicts Gross performing surgery on a patient's thigh, Dean staged an operation on the ride's moose—exploring the interrelated themes of time, aging, and illness. His process was documented by filmmaker Katherine Knight in *Still Max*, which premiered at the Hot Docs film festival in 2021.

A clip from the documentary is included in the exhibition *The C Word: Artists, Scientists, and Patients Respond to Cancer*, which provides a

platform for discussing the role of art in negotiating and reimagining humanity's complicated relationship with cancer and the process of healing. The exhibit, which opened at 850 Phoenix Biomedical Campus on April 21, 2022, is curated by Pamela Winfrey. It represents the first five years of the Arizona Cancer Evolution Center's Art Program, a residency program that embeds artists in research labs within Arizona State University's Biodesign Institute.