

Cherry Smyth previews three films which have Aids taped

## Video Voices

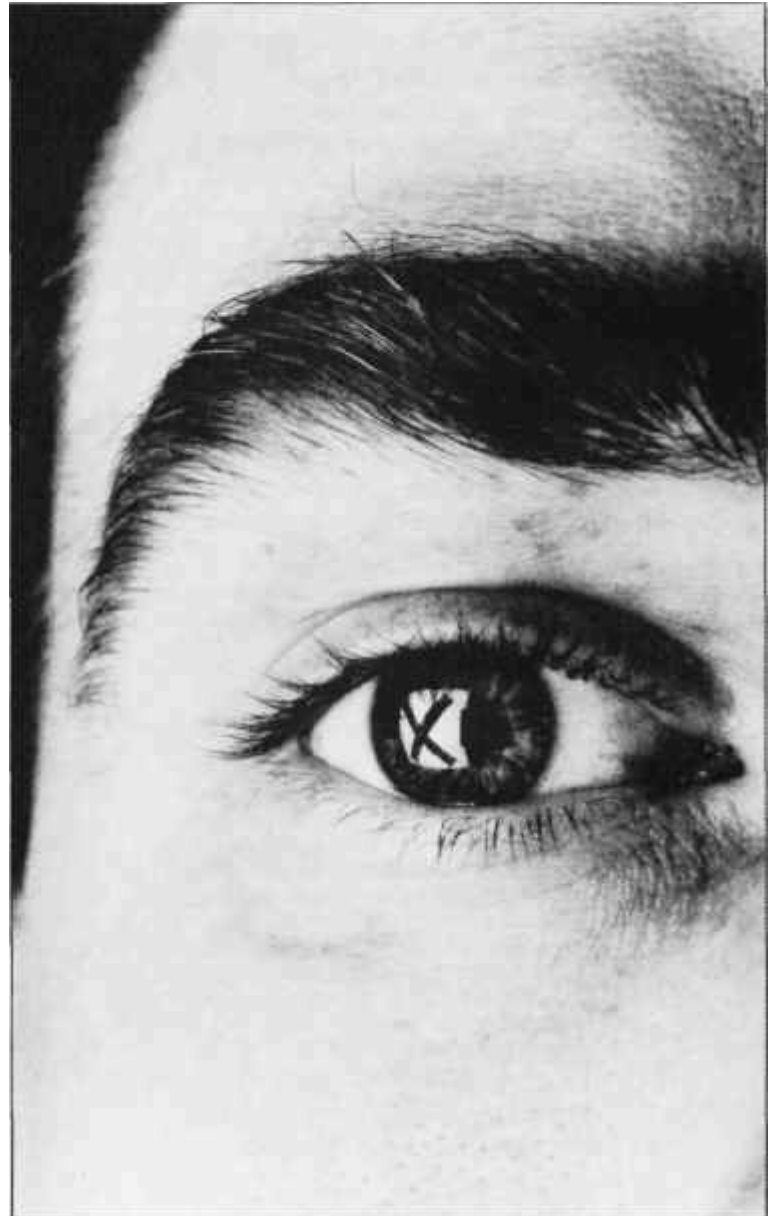
To coincide with World Aids Day, the ICA is presenting a special programme of Aids activist tapes which includes work by women. Most of the women and Aids images to date have presented women as carers or prostitutes and although there are women in the recent quilt project film, *Common Threads*, none of those who are closely commemorated in the film were women. So it is encouraging to see three US tapes which celebrate women as fighters in Aids activism.

The first, *Safe Sex Slut*, is a three-minute pop promo, whose title promises more than it can give. 'In a movie, in a car, in the bathroom, in a bar...safe sex...dan nan na...safe sex...', belts out the large, raucous Scarlet Harlot, apparently 'a tireless advocate of safer sex for prostitutes'. This is hardly self-evident as she blows up a condom and romps through another sloppy and uninformative verse.

*Cori, A Struggle for Life*, by contrast, is a mother's testimony to the death of her first child from Aids, contracted from a blood transfusion in 1982, when she was six months old. Originally diagnosed as suffering from cerebral palsy, the baby was given extensive neurological tests until Aids was confirmed. 'Where are the specialists: I'll take her to the best', declares the mother, only to learn that nothing can be done.

The mother, Nina Sobell, addresses the camera directly in a tough and unemotive fashion. Home movies of Cori and contemporary news footage tell of the pain and isolation of mother and daughter as fear and ignorance mount. The tape also recounts Nina's own anger and blame towards gay men, and her eventual support from Gay Men's Health Crisis, who provide her with a volunteer and the information she fails to find elsewhere. The intrusive voice-over of a concerned narrator and looseness of the editing do not detract from the powerful simplicity of this account.

Hot from the San Francisco Lesbian and Gay Festival comes *DiAna's Hair Ego* - a sheer delight. In among the shampoo, curlers, hot tongs, wax and gel, lie several thousand



Crossed Eye: The Aids crisis through a camera lens

gift-wrapped condoms. Deep from the heart of the black community in Bible-belted South Carolina, DiAna sent off for information about Aids which she spread out in her beauty salon. The customers began to talk, and listen.

DiAna went on to found the South Carolina Aids Education Network (SCAEN) which held fundraisers in churches and video screenings in colleges. She also established safe-sex parties in her parlour and an office in her living room.

These are the real Steel Magnolias. Unlike the dry, anatomical local Health Education lectures, DiAna launched sex talks which involve team-

games and hands-on experimentation how many uses are there for a condom without the penis?

Run by volunteers, SCAEN has now trained over 8,000 people about Aids-related issues and no doubt enlivened many a sex life in the process. It is refreshing to see articulate, working-class black women making space to break taboos and taking credit for their courage. The thrill of *DiAna's Hair Ego* comes from the energy and inventiveness of their education campaigns. At a time of moral backlash against sex education, it is heartening that grass roots networks are still thriving regardless.