

Interview Transcript

Interviewee: Adriana Bertini

Interviewer: David Gere

Portuguese Language Interpreter: Arthur Schott Lopes

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Transcript

David Gere: Hello, everyone. Delighted to be on the screen with you. I'm David Gere. I'm the director of the Art & Global Health Center at UCLA. We are gathered together on the 23rd of June in the year 2026 to have a conversation about Adriana Bertini's fabulous work. I'd like for each of you on the screen with me to self-introduce, if you don't mind, for a moment, to give some context for who we are together. Maybe first you, Arthur, and then to Adriana.

Arthur Schott Lopes: Hi everyone. I'm Arthur Schott Lopes. I'm an incoming assistant professor of Brazilian history at San Diego State University, a joint appointment between the Department of History and the Behner Stiefel Center for Brazilian Studies. I'm here to provide English-Portuguese translation help for the interview.

Adriana Bertini: I'll answer in Portuguese, okay? I am Adriana Bertini. I'm a visual activist, and my research focuses around sexual and reproductive health, the environment, and behavior through the visual arts.

Arthur Schott Lopes: Her name is Adriana Bertini. She's a visual activist, and she works with HIV/AIDS activism and with environmental activism as well, at the intersection of those two fields.

David Gere: So here we are together. Lucky us that we get to have a conversation about your work, Adriana. I've put together a set of questions in English which Arthur is going to help by translating into Portuguese for you. Let's take them top to bottom, if you don't mind.

I actually wanted to start with a question about your childhood art-making, and your first works as an artist. When you were a child, what were some of the earliest artistic projects that you made? Did you draw? Did you make paintings? Did you do soft sculpture? Did you work with clothing? Tell us about your early life as an artist.

Adriana Bertini: When I was a child, I always had a need to work with my hands. Very strongly. I had the opportunity to live with an indigenous tribe in Roraima in my early childhood. So there this began. This artisanal handling, of leaves, of plants, of braiding, of making hats, slippers and baskets, right? I think my engagement with manual crafts was already there. But because my mother is a dentist and was working there, I also had a lot of access to dental materials and would play at sculpting teeth, making other sculptures with these dental materials in my early childhood. If you want to go to break it down into parts, Arthur, I think that might be better so we don't miss anything.

Arthur Schott Lopes: From when she was a young child, she really felt the necessity to work with her hands. What was interesting was that her mom was a dentist. I think she was on assignment to work with an indigenous tribe in the state of Roraima in northern Brazil, and so not only she would employ indigenous techniques and live out with the indigenous community and started incorporating those practices into her art-making, but she would also incorporate odontological products into her sculpting and her art-making, which is really cool.

David Gere: I love that. This leads to my asking for the origin story of the condom couture project. Where did the idea come from for making dresses out of condoms?

Adriana Bertini: In 1992, I was at ECO '92. I was already an environmental activist because since I was 11 years old I was very interested in the agenda of garbage, sustainability, right? And I had one.... I attended a lecture at '92, that the fish were drowning in garbage. Then this question came to me, right? Like, "But what do you mean?" The disposal is incorrect. People have sex and put it in the toilet. How will it stop? These condoms? They end up in the oceans, right? How are you polluting? And how are the fish dying? I think it was the first time I thought about condoms as an object, right? And as an environmental impact.

In '96, I went to volunteer at an HIV/AIDS prevention NGO in the south of Brazil, in Florianópolis. I had many friends dying of AIDS, and I got a box with 144 condoms and from that box came the first play, which was no big deal, which were the necklaces, some objects. And then I taught theater classes where the children painted—children of vertical transmission. From there came a batch with 2,000 condoms that the first piece came up. In '96, I won a carnival costume contest like this. So it came up more or less there. But I think that when I really cultivated the collection, it was with the maturity of the work process for the development of techniques as well. Of materials like that.

Arthur Schott Lopes: She framed the answer by saying that it was really a process. It wasn't something that was born fully formed, and that really joined both strands of her activism—both the environmental activism and the HIV activism. The roots of the project really are in ECO '92 actually, the big environmental conference that happened in Rio in '92, when she attended a lecture about how fish were dying basically suffocating because of condoms in the water. She was wondering how the condoms got there, and why they weren't being disposed of properly.

And then, that tied in with her work with children with HIV in the south of Brazil in 1996 when she got her first supply of condoms and then started making pieces out of it. She eventually won a carnival contest for best costume with the first condom dress, and then the process got started there.

David Gere: This is a question I didn't intend to ask, but now as a follow up. Adriana, could you describe that very first dress? The dress that you made for the carnival exhibition or for that competition. I'd love to imagine the color of it, the techniques you used to make it, and what it looked like.

Adriana Bertini: I made the first piece with condoms that came from China. It was colorful. It was pink and green. I only had these two colors. I had no idea of dyeing yet, right? And then I made a dress all glued with PVC with hard plastic. I was very rudimentary like that. It was a non-usable structure, but then I was able to make it usable. But the first thing, the first idea that came to me was the glueing of condoms on plastic, which was the kind of construction I thought was possible at that moment. So it was like a long dress, all pink with a green hem. I have a very old photo of this. I can send it. I won third place. It wasn't the first, no, it has to be. The first. But like, I won, right?

Arthur Schott Lopes: She actually got third place. Clarification. But she was on the podium. She didn't know how to color the condoms at that point yet, how to dye them. It was condoms that came from China, and they were already colored. They were pink and green. It was a long dress, and it was not usable, actually. She basically glued the condoms on to PVC plastic. You couldn't actually wear the dress, but it was long, it was pink, and it had a green hem.

Adriana Bertini: In this process, it was very interesting, because that's how I discovered, at that time, the buried condoms in Brazil were from five sources of condoms. I think this is very important. We had five sources of condoms that expired because public health authorities wouldn't hand them out. So, there is a very serious problem of political management, you know, of non-distribution of this I product.

The second source is smuggling, because at that time in Brazil, there were a lot of condoms that entered through the Paraguay Free Trade Zone. So, we had a lot, a lot of sex shops at that time, so it came from smuggling. It was not tested by INMETRO and it was going to be incinerated. There were some condoms that expired before they were distributed, and others that were already expired by the time they were imported. So that's different, right? It is one thing to lose its validity due to non-distribution, the other thing is an expired product that was already imported, expired in the country and those smuggled in. Thus, Brazil buried these materials at the time. So totally politically wrong. This is because it is a material that does not decompose.

When you think of a buried material, you have to think about all the packaging until you get to the product. So we were talking about plastic, aluminum, cardboard and rubber, latex, so it would never decompose. I participated in all this policy over the years, along with material, with

the Ministry of Health, with the Ministry of the Environment, with all instances, because I was filing preliminary injunctions to change this policy. Nowadays, we barely have any smuggling, and the few condoms that expire are reused by the shoe and automotive industries, and nowadays we don't have this waste in Brazil, because it is politically committed to 100% clean recycling. Why is incineration still not clean in Brazil? It releases a lot of CO₂. So there's this whole very political issue, of having changed the context of the story to be able to get to the art object.

Arthur Schott Lopes: She's emphasizing the environmental question behind this. When she started this project, most unused condoms in Brazil.... There were a series of reasons of why they would have been unused, including contraband, including expiration problems. They were buried. It was terrible for the environment. Adriana has been very instrumental, through the law, by activating the judicial system and changing the Brazilian government's entire policy around recycling condoms over the years.

David Gere: There are many reactions that people could have to your dresses, both from the fashion perspective, but also from the environmental perspective. I wonder if you could share with us some of the most memorable reactions that people have had to your dresses during the span of time that you've been making them.

Adriana Bertini: I think there are several types of reactions like this. In the beginning of my work, I did a lot more TV. I gave a lot of interviews. That's a lot of media. The first reaction is this: the media skyrocketed. In '97, '98 I had a lot, a lot, a lot of mania for people to know me on the street because I did a lot more TV.

Once, I was on the subway and a lady hit me with an umbrella. I was using a condom bag every time I had it. She took the umbrella and hit me. That's a little shame, right? I think that the issue is Brazil is a very Catholic country. It has a lot of taboo. It generated a lot of controversy in the dialogue when it was seen, especially because people, in their ignorance, thought that the condoms were used. "She used it for...." "Where do you get that from?" Because there is no scope to think about public policy, right? Anyway. This was one of the reactions, but it is controversial, right? Like, fine, that's it.

But there's a reaction that is very interesting. which is when parents say, "I was able to talk about sex with my son." That's how it ends. It ended up being a tool for dialogue. So the dress, it ceases to be the dress. It becomes an agent. It becomes a tool for discussion, whether positive or negative. It creates a rupture in the dialogue. I believe that in art, it is very difficult to have a work of art that creates rupture. There are few artists in the world who create this transposition of dialogue. We see it like this, like Vik immunizes Romero Britto, both Brazilians, right? Or Basquiat, in short. Few artists manage to create this continuous dialogue after the work creates this rupture. So it served a lot as a tool and this reaction, the reaction that interests me as an artist, as a researcher of this theme, is multi-multidisciplinary, multi-sectoral. Because when I'm talking about my art, I'm not talking about sex itself and not just about HIV, but I'm talking

about politics, the environment, education, culture, behavior, economics, right? This multiplicity of subjects is what interests me in the artistic discourse.

Arthur Schott Lopes: To give you a sense, she gave me one negative and one positive reaction. First, the negative was.... When she started, she would actually do a lot of TV show appearances and so she would be recognized in the street. There was one time she was on the subway with a purse made out of condoms. An old lady actually came up to her, and hit her with an umbrella and said, basically, “You are so shameless!” Adriana was discussing Brazil, at that point, was a very Catholic country. Now we lean more evangelical. But there was a religious conservatism that pervaded society, and so a lot of the negative reactions were about that. A positive reaction that she would have is parents coming up to her and saying, “I was finally able to talk about sex with my children.” She was talking about the way the dress would become an agent and a tool to have these conversations and to create rupture. She was emphasizing the very few artists are actually able to use their art to create that kind of rupture, and highlighting that her art is so much more than just about HIV/AIDS. It is about the environment. It’s about the economy. It’s about education. It’s about culture. It’s about behavior. It is this multifaceted project and this multifaceted approach to impact.

David Gere: I think you’ve already opened up this territory, but I wondered if you could talk a little bit about an argument I’ve heard you make about condom dresses being a way to overcome stigma associated with condom use. I myself have been thinking about this over the years as I’ve seen your work. Condoms are often thought of as being clinical or medicinal. Something that prevents pleasure. But you actually present condoms as something that’s stylish, and very sexy, and pleasure-oriented. I wondered if you could talk a little bit about your theory of how your project works to reduce stigma, and whether something like a dress, a condom dress, can actually overcome the stigma associated with condoms.

Adriana Bertini: I think that when we talk about stigma, when we are talking about sex, we are talking about stigma, taboo, discrimination. One thing is not said to be associated with the other. When you put an art object that talks about all this at the same time, you are provoking a reaction and several reflections around it. Because art speaks to itself. It also creates the political discourse of the narrative itself, doesn’t it? It’s a work that I don’t need to explain. Where it is present, it already creates its own narrative. At the same time, it doesn’t talk to itself because it doesn’t make all these reflections. Stigma, prejudice, and discrimination are the biggest problems we have found so far in HIV. HIV still kills. We have not yet been able to mediate the size of the prejudice, of the stigma directed at people living with HIV and AIDS. When you have a work that helps them, it is also a tool to speak out against stigma. Not that it solves it, but that it collaborates to talk about this platform from deeper research.

But at the same time, it doesn’t work alone. It still needs education to be able to speak. I see today, Brazil, July 23rd. I work in a community called Heliópolis, which is the largest favela in São Paulo. That’s 240,000 families. It is where many places still do not have running water. It’s a

landfill, in short. There are all the problems of poverty in Brazil. Super aggravating, right? People's reaction when they see a work of art to this day is to laugh. But why do they laugh? It is loaded with taboo and stigma. Condoms are not just HIV either, it's sex itself, isn't it? I think this is a very political context. That art helps, in the same way that other artistic platforms have created stigma. Like, if we went to see the cinema of the 80s, the 90s talking about HIV. The structure of the scenery, of color, of palette, of colors, that white, pale thing. Disease here was also responsible for creating stigma and prejudice around HIV. But how do we deconstruct this stigma? So you think this dialogue about stigma is very interesting, and I think it yields many hours of reflection. Because, in the same way that we try to end stigma, we also created it. Art was responsible for it because of this narrative.

Arthur Schott Lopes: The way Adriana sees stigma is not only pertaining to HIV and AIDS, but to sex itself, especially in a place like Brazil where she was describing her work with a poor community—a favela in São Paulo—and how people's first reaction when they see her art is still to laugh. This idea that there's still this discomfort not only around HIV/AIDS and HIV/AIDS prevention, but around sex itself. She was then later talking about the way art in the 80s and 90s in Brazil, Brazilian cinema in the 80s and 90s also helped create stigma around HIV through the way it would portray people with HIV, especially through the color palette. She highlighted the pallor and the gauntness of people on the screen. The other thing that she said is that her art is intended as a provocation. At the same time that it speaks for itself, it doesn't need Adriana there. Adriana needs to be there to provide the education behind the art. The art, in a way, starts the conversation, but then you have to have the education and the support of that.

Adriana, if you think I'm missing something.... I'm writing everything down, but if you think there's something else.

Adriana Bertini: It's just the issue that I think still keeps insisting, right? Because I see it working on a daily basis, right? It lives in the community.

Arthur Schott Lopes: Yeah. She's just highlighting the fact that the stigma continues both around HIV and around sex.

Adriana Bertini: Especially with an LGBT population too, right? Then, when we go to the gender [layer] and the race color [layer], then it will happen. There are layers that multiply, right?

Arthur Schott Lopes: And then she's talking about, especially around the LGBT population in Brazil, and then, stigma gets compounded also based on race and gender.

David Gere: Very much related to that, I've heard you say, and you've been quoted over decades as saying that, "Condoms must become as basic as a pair of jeans and as necessary as a great love." I'd love to hear you talk about that sentence, and what that sentence means to you.

Adriana Bertini: Jeans are something that everyone has, right? So, I wanted the condom to have this thing of its use, you know? There are even some here. Like, I'm at my desk. Delight is as common as jeans, but at the same time as necessary as a love of mine. Because that's what I think everyone wants, right? To have a great love to be loved. A nice relationship. So I think it's as necessary as a pair of jeans. It is as necessary as a great love. That, I think, is the common dream among all people in the world is to have a great love.

Arthur Schott Lopes: She's highlighting the necessity of the jeans, and the fact that everyone has one. But when it comes to love, it's not only a necessity, but also what everyone wants. It's kind of everyone's dream to have a great love and a relationship that supports you and nurtures you. So a condom should be like that as well.

David Gere: There's so much discussion in all the communities that I'm a part of as to whether condoms feel good or don't feel good. Forgive me if this question is too personal. Over the years of your life, of your adult life, have you used condoms yourself? How do you overcome the feelings we all have about condoms reducing pleasure?

Adriana Bertini: I use condoms. I like them. I'm in love with condoms. I think they are objects of desire. I also try to pass this on in my community work with young people. How can condoms be pleasurable? What is it like today?

Currently I'm on PrEP. I use PrEP, but I use condoms too. I'm single. I broke up after 24 years of marriage. It doesn't cost me to take PrEP and use a condom. I think that condoms, they are a form of pleasure. For example, putting on a condom with your mouth is extremely delicious. I think it's a challenge too, right? And today we have perceptions with color, when they arrive with aroma.

I'm particularly passionate and I feel super comfortable talking about sexuality and sexual practice, because I think that's what everyone does, and I think we have to have this naturalness to say, "I'm a bisexual woman." I think that the pleasure that condoms, fantasy, fetishes give, why not use condoms in this context? I think it's easier to fall in love with single Brazilians and have a healthier, safer relationship, without the risk of contracting HIV other than times without. For example, PrEP only prevents HIV. And the other STIs? No. Anyway. So I have no problem talking about it like that. And I also try to encourage people to use condoms as a practice of seduction.

Arthur Schott Lopes: She says she has no trouble talking about this kind of stuff. She is a bisexual woman. She thinks that it is very important to talk about sexual practices, also as a way to destigmatize them. She likes to think about condoms as an object of desire and as a form of pleasure. There are ways to use condoms during sex that render them almost like in a fetishistic way, and in a way where you desire the condom as a way to make sex more interesting or spicier. She's currently single after separating after many years, and so she's using both PrEP

and condoms because PrEP helps in HIV prevention, but there are all other sorts of other STDs, or STIs, that it doesn't protect against. She exhorts us to fall in love with condoms in that way.

David Gere: Now I want to ask you to talk about your work from the standpoint of an artist. Of the material that you work with and the ways you create, especially from a kind of sculptural perspective. I wondered if you could talk about the strengths of condoms as a sculptural material, and also the weaknesses of condoms as a sculptural material. How do you get them to hold color? For example. What techniques have you personally, as an artist, developed to create the structure, and the look, and the textures of your dresses?

Adriana Bertini: I use several techniques, but within many techniques. I use natural dyeing and saturated pigments. I had the opportunity to stay two years as an artist in residence at the World Museum of Cultures. Almost two years. I went several times and there was a studio there, where I could also try different techniques. I think that since it's an unconventional object, I've developed 74 ways of cutting and ways of dyeing, usually natural. For example, cold colors are the most difficult to pigment. Green, blue, purple are the most difficult pigments. So I created a technique of burying the condom with the pigment and letting it sit and then drying. I wanted several techniques, always trying to be as natural as possible and the least... toxic. The pigments are natural, the paints are natural. They work with a little bit of collage nowadays, but it's the sewing, the cutting, the tapestry. Lately, I've been using links a lot too. I always like to sew it together because I'm trying to get the glue off the condom. For example, I'm using links and seams by trying to join the shapes of the condom to eliminate the fabric. I'm currently challenging myself. And the other technique that I've been doing a lot now, this macramé technique, right? How can I join the condoms together, give them elasticity, but without using glue, or other materials like that. I'm passionate about all this. Everyday I discover a new technique. I keep discovering new techniques.

Arthur Schott Lopes: She prizes natural ways of dyeing, so natural pigments which are less impactful for the environment. While she was a resident artist at the Global Museum of Culture, she discovered a lot of new techniques on how to work with condoms, which are an unusual material to use for sculpture. She has 74 different forms of cutting and of dyeing condoms. She says that working with cold colors, so green and blue, is harder, but she created a technique, eventually, where she buries them and leaves them in some kind of moisture so that they're able to take up the color, and then she dries them, which also is less toxic for the environment. [...] She's still discovering new techniques and new ways to work with them. She's trying to use less glue, and work much more with sewing and with cutting. What she's working a lot with right now is rings. Joining the condoms as she showed, and also that chain macramé form.

David Gere: Nice. This leads me inexorably to asking questions about the exhibition that you did for the Fowler Museum at UCLA. This was in 2006–07. The exhibition was called *Dress Up Against AIDS: Condom Couture by Adriana Bertini*. It featured 14 gorgeous dresses. It followed major showings of your work in Toronto, at the International AIDS Conference, and in Chicago,

at Columbia College. I was kind of amazed, actually, when I looked up those years for your career in 2006–2007. There was so much going on. It was a peak moment for people encountering your work. I wanted to ask you what you recall about preparing for the Fowler exhibition, and also specifically working with the Fowler Museum director, Marla Berns, and her staff to mount that exhibition. What recollections do you have about what those conversations were like, and how it felt to get that commission? Specifically, did you even know, at the time, that Marla Berns is somebody who just loves fashion, and she was so attracted to your work? Tell us about that.

Adriana Bertini: I have a memory that moves me. I think it was my best collection to date, and I've never been able to repeat anything of the same level like that. At the time we did this work, I remember that we shared the transportation with Columbia College, and with Columbia College to be able to do two simultaneous exhibitions in Chicago and another in Los Angeles. But it was my best work as an artist, and I think I even created a block after that, because I couldn't repeat anything at the same level. It was a very special collection where I tried to work with some Chanel references, Balenciaga, Valentino. The affection, the welcome, the affection of the museum made all the difference. Of course, in this story I had never had a door so open until then. I think it's a milestone like that. I have a lot of love, a lot of affection, a lot of respect, a lot of gratitude for this project, because I couldn't see myself either. I didn't get to see that artist afterwards. So, while it's very good, sometimes it's a little sad, because I couldn't find that Adriana anymore. I changed several platforms to work with art, with 1,000 things, but I haven't met her yet. Anyway, working with Marla was very special. She was an extremely affectionate, loving person. This issue of us talking and sharing moments, and personal life, of our relationships. For me, this type of bond is what always remains.

Arthur Schott Lopes: She said she's very moved by her memories of the exhibit. She considers it the best show that she's had to this day. She feels she's never been able to produce anything at that same level. There was almost an artist block after that. She included references to Chanel, Balenciaga, Valentino. She really felt that the museum received her so openly with open doors. It was a very affectionate reception. Her relationship with Marla was very special, very affectionate. They talked about their personal lives and their relationships, and that really means a lot to Adriana. She says, and I thought this was a striking sentence, she feels that she wasn't able to find that Adriana anymore, or yet, in her work again. She's worked with a lot of things since, but that... the work that has led to that show, she hasn't been able to find again yet.

David Gere: It truly was extraordinary. There's no question about it. It was so striking in the room, and had such a powerful impact on people who saw the work displayed in that way. In fact, this is an invitation for Isaiah Baiseri, who's helping us out now, on the screen, to bring a couple of images. I asked him if he might show three dresses, from that show, that you could look at more closely with us, Adriana. Perhaps describe those dresses for us. The techniques that you used, the inspirations that you brought to bear for each of these three dresses. Isaiah, if you

could bring up one of them, that would be fantastic. This is a dress called *Gabrielle*. Adriana, can you tell us about it? How you made it. What inspired it.

Adriana Bertini: Chanel. A classic, right? Inspired by Chanel. Funny when David says that they are sensual. My extremely classic work. Doing something more covered that doesn't show much of the body, I'm extremely classic in the art of dressing clothing. It has different techniques. There is even tapestry, collage, and sewing. And it's a classic, right? From the 60s, that's how it is. I've always tried to portray this more empowered, demure, chic, elegant woman like this, who calls the shots. The character. The fortress.

Arthur Schott Lopes: It was inspired by Chanel, and she actually finds it interesting that you describe some of her work as sensual because, actually, what she wants to do, she has a very very classic approach to fashion. She actually covers up the body a lot. She wants to portray a 60s woman. She is empowered, but at the same time, she is somewhat... I don't want to say coy... That doesn't show the body as much. For this, she used tapestry, collage, and/or glueing, and also sewing.

Adriana Bertini: What also impresses me the most about this piece is that when people look at it, they don't know the history that is preserved. It takes a long time to recognize that it is made of condoms. And when a person recognizes what I perceive? That person, they have so little intimacy with their own sexuality, with condoms, that they don't recognize the object, and this is this transition that I find interesting in the work. Because as much as I [display condoms openly], with the ends sewn, the person doesn't know. It takes a long time to recognize the object, hence this proves to me that they are extremely distant from the product itself. I find this dialogue that the interplay provides very interesting. It's one thing for a person to know what they're going to see, or not to know what they want, isn't it?

Arthur Schott Lopes: She's saying, very quickly, that a lot people a long time to realize that these are condoms. That just goes on to show the distance between people and the product.

David Gere: Let's look at another dress then. Tell us about *Eva*.

Adriana Bertini: I think it's Balenciaga, and I just think it's a little bit more... shows a little more. At the same time, she has this armor. The bust is armed. It is protected. It is strong, and it is rigid. But at the same time, it is super delicate. It's a garment that won't stick, so they're just fitted to a screen. So it's a super flexible, light piece that has volume. But, at the same time, it was the piece that I donated. I had to donate because I think it was the least I could do as an artist, with the reception that I had with my work. I think it's a counterpart like that to be thankful. But it's an ephemeral piece. All my work. It's ephemeral. It has a life of its own. Beginning, middle, and end. There is no way to preserve the condom, unless it is kept specifically within a [preservation] cube, because it is tinted, etc, as the Museum of Sex in New York and some other museums that have my work in their collections did. But it is a piece that is not made to be worn (though it can be worn). But the more it is worn in performances, the more

it is degraded because of its delicate nature. So it had this life of its own there. The beginning, middle, and end.

Arthur Schott Lopes: This one is Balenciaga inspired. This is the one that she donated to the Fowler. She's highlighting its ephemerality, the fact that it is actually very hard to preserve condoms. This dress, it can be used, it can be worn, but it does degrade the more it is worn. She highlights that this one shows a little more more skin, but the same time you have this almost armor-like effect, and a rigid bust. At the same time, it's a very delicate dress. There's no glue in it at all. Everything is set against a canvas.

David Gere: Let's look at a third dress. This is *Jessica*.

Adriana Bertini: It is a technique where the edge of the condom is cut out. There are, I don't know, I don't know how many. 15–20,000 edges of cut-out condoms. It's all with collage. It is also a classic, but it differs by the texture, by the way it is collaged. I said that I have 74 forms of collage. Cutout, but there are 86 collage shapes that I cataloged. As for textures, I have 120 shapes of textures, and this is one that differs a lot in that, despite its color. This piece was a piece that ended up being sold to a museum, and it is preserved to this day because it is in an air-conditioned glass cube, so it is untouchable. The Denmark Museum.

Arthur Schott Lopes: This one, she takes the rims of the condoms and cuts them and glues them. This one is glueing, but there are about 15–20,000 condom rims in this dress. She was talking about how she has 86 forms of glueing condoms and 120 different kinds of textures that she can produce out of condoms. This one is in Denmark now. It is actually preserved because it is within a glass cube.

David Gere: Since we're talking about preservation, I wonder if we could go back to *Eva*, the pink dress, for just a moment.

Adriana Bertini: I think that's exactly what I said before. That as it was a dress that it was used for several performances, it is much more delicate. It doesn't have that much structure to use. I don't like to make it for use. I prefer to make it for a mannequin, but it degrades much faster. Although it causes another type of effect on performance. It is a piece that... I believe it has already died. But I don't know, but I think it already has, because there is no way to preserve it.

Arthur Schott Lopes: She's talking about the challenge of preservation, and is joking that the dress might have already died because of the times it's been worn. She's wondering what you have to ask about it.

David Gere: Yes. I hope this will make you smile as opposed to cry. My memory is you actually gave the dress to me and to the Art & Global Health Center, not to the Fowler itself, though we're just across the sidewalk from each other, and we work closely together. This is to say that we kept the dress, the dress pink dress, *Eva*, for a very long time. The dress was on a mannequin

in our office. Every once in a while, we had a student who was small enough because it's essentially a size zero, I think. We'd have a particular student who was small enough that they could wriggle into this dress and wear it. It was a major feature of our experience of sharing with students for a couple of decades. For quite a long time. But then, it started to not look so good. It started to look bedraggled. It started to pull apart. The latex started to droop. and it even, at a certain point, began to smell. There was a realization that hit us at a certain point in the office that we had to let go of the dress.

What this leads me to asking you is about making sculptures, because these dresses are essentially sculptures, that are so ephemeral that they fall apart eventually because there's no permanence to latex. I wondered if, when that happens, do you mourn them the way we mourn the loss of a person, or is there some other feeling that you have about working with this material?

Adriana Bertini: You have to let her rest, right? Her time is up [laughs]. Anyway, I like that ephemerality because it reminds me of life. Sexual relations, the relationships we have, everything has a beginning, middle, and end time. And I think it's okay. We have, thank God, photography to eternalize, but the work... She is ephemeral. She belongs to time. It is timeless. It is part of this process. I really like this process related to the intersectionality of life. It's not like a painting, right? I even have many other works. I've been working a lot with medications, with antiretrovirals, with the garbage of public health, with HIV test slides. It belongs to time. I have a painting here. I'll show you my wall. I don't know if you can see it. It's a picture with glued pills. And the other with the failed commitments that they represent: adherence to antiretroviral medication. A 100% adherence, a sequential form or a failed adherence comes and goes. Or zero adherence.

I like many processes like this. I really like this ephemerality. Of course, there are moments of farewell. Last year, I had a moment of farewell to my atelier, which I threw everything away. So what, a new beginning, right? Starting over with the same support, with another technique, thinking about what can be done that still generates impact and that really educates. It's been a long time since I worked with a condom, and now I'm making a comeback because I spent a long time working in NGOs, with fixed jobs, being a strategist for social projects. I worked in some UN agencies. Because it's not a job that is also financially maintained, right? I think it's part of this, if it belongs to time.

Arthur Schott Lopes: She's highlighting that she actually loves the ephemerality of it because she thinks it reflects both life itself and the ephemerality of sexual relations. She was describing how she works with a lot of other media that are ephemeral as well including pills, medications, Petri dishes for HIV testing. She was showing one of her works that uses pills on the wall. She was talking about how there are these moments of saying goodbye, or these moments of farewell. There was one moment where she got rid of everything she had in her atelier and started anew, and how she likes that. She's always looking for the best medium to generate

impact and to educate. Right now, she's actually turning back to working with condoms after a stint working for NGOs, for social projects, and also for the UN. There are, of course, financial challenges with the work, and so....

David Gere: This leads me to want to ask a kind of summary question, Adriana, as you think over the arc of your artistic life, and all the many dresses and other art forms, other art materials that you've worked with over the years. I wonder if you've meditated on art that is specifically a form of activism, and how that comes about, how that works, and what that means to you. Even to the point of asking the question of whether the dresses, the condom couture that you make, can save lives. I'd like to hear your thoughts about art as activism, and specifically, the life-saving aspects of what you do.

Adriana Bertini: That being said, art saves lives when you are working with art with this information of education, of love, of respect, it really saves lives. I believe in that a lot. I think, even more than that, I think that art has to be a prevention methodology combined with intention, because it is a methodology. The Ministry of Health defends this. We have the art park within the World Health Organization, and this is already proven that art saves lives, art therapy, right? I don't like some prevention technologies, and so I defend this a lot. This narrative of how art and art workshops can educate new generations, especially the new generations who are starting their sexual relations earlier and earlier. In Brazil, we have a very large increase, and a very large anticipation of the beginning of sexual life beginning at 11 years of age. We're talking about childhood. Sex is extremely balanced, so I think that more and more we have to talk more about prevention, more about self-care, more about technology. Incorporate behavioral prevention technologies within the realm of prevention, because it really breaks stigma and opens a dialogue that is easier to educate, especially when we talk about Brazil, which removed sex education from schools. Since the Dilma government, we no longer have sex education classes in schools, and we see a huge increase in births. So, how do we continue to work? What kind of behavioral innovation without being just biomedical can we make? I believe that art is a technology and innovative, despite being thousands of years old, for behavior change.

Arthur Schott Lopes: She absolutely believes that art can save lives, and talks about it as a vehicle for education, for love, for respect, but also as a methodology of prevention that's actually been WHO-approved and WHO-recommended. On that note, she talked about art therapy, but about how that's not yet used when it comes to STI prevention, and how that would be important, especially in a country like Brazil where teenagers' and even children's sex lives have started earlier and earlier. At this point, we're at an average of 11 years old for the first sexual relation. The aggravating factor there is that, since the mid-2010s, since the Rousseff administration, we don't have sexual education in schools anymore. We don't have health class, and so that has led to a rise in teenage pregnancies and births. Adriana really likes to think of art as an innovative technique of prevention of STIs and risky sexual behavior in that sense, even though it is thousands of years old.

Adriana Bertini: When we talk about combined prevention, that this is a very specific thing about HIV/AIDS. This combined prevention. If it is biomedical, it has no behavioral component. And when we talk about HIV and sexuality, we don't talk about behavior, we can't have a biomedical result. Even the adherence itself. I even wrote an article about it. It came out in the journal, *The Lancet*. And art? It has to be incorporated as a prevention technology in the combined prevention effort, defending....

Arthur Schott Lopes: You can finish the sentence.

Adriana Bertini: That's my defense. That it has to enter within the context of the biomedical tale. There has to be behavioral change and art would be this technology.

Arthur Schott Lopes: She's highlighting that for this idea of combined prevention against HIV, which is a set of policies. Most, if not all, of those policies have to do with biomedics. They are all biomedical, and they don't include behavior. She believes art would be a very important technology for the prevention related to behavior. She has written an article in *The Lancet* about it, so that's a huge part of her activism.

David Gere: I have just one last question myself, and if there's anything else you want to talk about, or anything that's come up for you, Arthur, this would be the moment to raise it. The thing that's on my mind as a finale, I wanted to ask about the word "activist." I often use that word to describe the people I work with, in Los Angeles and other parts of the world, who identify as art-makers and also as activists at the same time. The first person I ever heard use that word was you, Adriana Bertini. I wonder sometimes if you coined the term yourself, or if you heard it in some other situation and used it. I wanted to ask about the meaning of the term for you and where, for you, it came from.

Adriana Bertini: The word "actHIVism" with HIV, is that....

Arthur Schott Lopes: He wants to know, how do you use that word? How do you see this activist identification? He thinks you were the first person he heard using that word, so he wanted to know what the origin is for you of that.

Adriana Bertini: Incredible, because today this word is common and the word has HIV, right? With H in the middle, "ArHIVist." Today it is just a common word in Brazil. We have many artists who work with this HIV narrative and call themselves arHIVists, but I know I was the pioneer. I created this word decades ago. In the same way that I created the dresses and today there are people who make millions of them, especially because I propose to disseminate what I do within workshops. I don't have this authorship registered, which I regret, because today it has become a common term in Brazil for everyone who works with HIV/AIDS. So I feel honored to have also created this terminology. I think this movement also had to be bigger like that. Although some people have this name in Europe, in America, in Asia it is very little, but more so in the United States.

Arthur Schott Lopes: She did coin the term, especially with the “HIV” in the middle. She says she wishes she had copyrighted it because she feels that it is a very common term in Brazil, specifically, right now. She’s very proud of having invented it and of taking ownership of it.

David Gere: Sweet. So there we are. Adriana, is there anything else that we have not spoken about that you’d like to make sure is included in the interview?

[Adriana responds in Portuguese, omitted due to technical difficulties.]

Arthur Schott Lopes: She was working with various UN agencies and was invited to stay and work with a different agency. She was working a lot with fundraising, and she has, apparently, an incredible talent for that, which I described to her as a rare talent. But she wants to go back to art. She wants to go back to being an artist, so she quit the UN for that. David, can I ask her one final question?

David Gere: Of course.

Arthur Schott Lopes: Should I do it in Portuguese or English? I’ll do it in Portuguese and then I’ll translate the whole thing to English. That’s the better way.

Adriana Bertini: Only I was able to raise, like, I don’t know, 10 million in two months from direct donations, which is difficult, right?

Arthur Schott Lopes: Very difficult. She was actually getting 10 million every two months from direct donations. Incredible fundraising work.

Adriana Bertini: As the United States is going through a very serious problem of global funds at a time of financing policy, I thought it was very important to contribute to this, but I don’t want to become a fundraiser, but specific art projects.

Arthur Schott Lopes: Yes, yes. I have one last one. I’d like to ask you a question. In fact, as a historian, also because I think that since you started your work in the 90s until now, Brazil has gone through immense cultural changes in relation to sex, sexuality. You talk about the old lady with the umbrella on the subway, right? But more. As I even described in the translation for David, Brazil has now had an evangelical escalation. We are a Catholic country, conservative for the country, evangelical, conservative. We had huge political changes, which you start to describe talking about Dilma, taking sex education out of schools. But, of course, we go through impeachment, through Bolsonaro. And even with Lula, now the country is extremely conservative in the sexual sphere. I wanted to hear a little bit about you, what it was like, what it was like to work with this type of activism and this type of artistic project in these last three decades. And what kind of changes do you think we’ve had?

Adriana Bertini: We have a context without a beginning. In the era when we didn’t have the internet, because we have to contextualize this too, right? For sure. And at the same time, right? I

was talking to the journalist from *Folha* yesterday about what we were talking about the first LGBT parade. I participated in all the parades from the first. And I think we had more freedom. I think we achieved more things at that time. Some disagree, but I think we had more.... I think creativity was more boiling more in this time. When you talk to me about politics, about evolution on the internet, I see my work with a 2014 block here. A creative block, but so was my time. At the same time that we evolve biomedical prevention technologies to read on the cover, injectable PrEP, in short. At the same time that we were evolving immensely toward a possible cure biomedically, we were devolving culturally during a leftist administration. How does a left-wing government drop sex education? So, to a setback that we cannot negotiate in the government, then comes the Bolsonaro government. In the Lula government we can't negotiate. We can't negotiate. Lenacapavir, which can save millions of lives, and which already exists, the technology is not available in Brazil. Then, thinking about so much biomedical evolution, it seems that art has lost space. Even thinking about the HIV conferences over the years, from 2000 to today. Art is losing more and more space, more space, more space. So, it is time for us to have that artistic boiling again that we had in the 90s. I don't know if you're from São Paulo.

Arthur Schott Lopes: I'm from Curitiba.

Adriana Bertini: We had a Brazil of the 90s, of fashion, of the market, of the world, a mix of schools, of religions. We had an evolution, a huge artistic evolution, and today it seems that with the internet everything is replicated and content is lost. I think technology has also hindered creativity a lot, because everything. Anyway, I don't know.

Arthur Schott Lopes: You answered me perfectly. I'm just going to translate it to David. I asked her a historian's question, a political question, because Brazil has had many political transformations over the past 30 years. She began her work in the 90s. We had a series of leftist governments in the 2000s, but as she was describing, we took sex-ed out of schools during a leftist government in the mid-2010s. And then we had the rise of the far right, the rise of evangelicals. She has done this activism and all of this artistic work in very complicated political climates, and is now faced with a growing conservatism. Behavioral conservatism, specifically. So I asked her about this political context and how it has affected her work.

She reflected on two different strands. She talked, first of all, about how she has felt a creative block since 2014. That block is also political. It's been much harder to... It's been weird to see such incredible biomedical evolution on the side of PrEP, and now maybe an injectable form of PrEP. We are walking closer and closer to a cure, but at the same time we've had this immense behavioral regression, where society is more and more conservative, and where now, that is impacting the biomedical side as well. It's been very hard to actually negotiate the offering of the injectable in Brazil's public healthcare system with the third Lula administration because the political environment is so conservative that not even a left-wing government can get that through. But then, at the same time, she was reflecting on the rise of the internet and the problem that has caused for the arts. She feels that art has lost space, and that the 90s were such an

ebullient period in art in Brazil. Now there is a feeling that the Internet has really hindered creativity because everything has to be meme-able, Instagram-able, TikTok-able, we've lost forms of creativity that we used to have when there was no Internet. It is a bit of a pessimistic outlook, especially heading into elections this year. We have presidential elections in October.

David Gere: It parallels our work in the midterms. It's kind of the same moment in time too, isn't it?

Adriana, I have to say that your work continues to be an inspiration to me. It was political before other people were political in this realm. It was arthIVist before other people were arthIVist. It was inventive before anybody else invented what you invented. You really have created something remarkable over this multi-decade career of yours.

Arthur, I'm so glad to have shared the screen with you, in this case adding your historical knowledge, and also, very specifically, your linguistic knowledge, we're appreciative of.

Thank you, both of you. Thank you, Isaiah, also, for helping out.

We'll say official so long and turn off the recording machine, and then we'll just spend a moment to figure out translation.