View All 48,000 Panels of the AIDS Memorial Quilt

They’re pictured in one awe-inspiring digital image. Meanwhile, select panels are displayed in San Francisco as part of AIDS 2020.

July 9, 2020 By Trent Straube

Panels of the AIDS Memorial Quilt were unveiled Monday at San Francisco City Hall and Oakland City Hall. The two cities had been slated to host the 23rd International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2020) this week, an event now taking place virtually because of COVID-19. But you don’t have to be in California—or worry about physical distancing—in order to see the AIDS Memorial Quilt.

AIDS Memorial Quilt panels are displayed at San Francisco City Hall to coincide with the opening of AIDS 2020: VirtualLiz Highleyman

You can now view and search a digital image of the entire quilt—all 48,000 panels—on AIDSMemorial.org, the website of the National AIDS Memorial, which has been the Quilt's official custodian since last year (previously, the NAMES Project Foundation had that honor). Simply type in the name of a loved one to see that person's panel.

A screengrab of the Interactive AIDS QuiltAIDSMemorial.org

Although AIDS 2020 is online this year, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D–San Francisco) and Congresswoman Barbara Lee (D–Oakland) made opening remarks for the conference.

"San Francisco has always been central to the story of HIV and AIDS, and it has always been a center of community-based research, prevention, and care," Pelosi said, according to The Bay Area Reporter. "We suffered from it, we learned from it, we had the intellectual resources to address it and we understood that everyone did not share the same love that we had for people with HIV."

"When we created the first Quilt panels it was to share with as many people possible lives tragically being lost to AIDS and to demand action from our government," said Quilt founder Cleve Jones in a National AIDS Memorial press release. "The Quilt has become a powerful educator and

symbol for social justice. My hope is that through continued storytelling and making the panels available online, that more people will be drawn to its stories, its history and that we can continue to change hearts and minds."

Each of the Quilt's 3-foot-by-6-foot panels memorializes someone lost to AIDS. The fabric panels include stencils, photos, collages, paint, sewing and much more. Eight panels are sewn together to form a 12-foot square "block." (To learn how to create and submit a panel, visit "Make a Panel" on AIDSMemorial.org.)

Conceived in 1985 by Jones, an LGBT activist who created the first panel in June 1987, the Quilt was displayed at the National Mall in Washington, DC, for the first time later that year; it included 1,920 panels and was the size of a football field. It returned to DC a year later with more than 8,200 panels. The Quilt returned to the nation's capital several times, including in 2012 as part of the International AIDS Conference that year. At 48,000 panels spanning the globe, the Quilt continues to grow and be displayed.

For more about the Quilt, check out the videos above, including a POZ on Location segment from the 2012 display.

This week, the National AIDS Memorial also launched a storytelling platform called 2020/40 that posts personal HIV stories and videos from the past four decades. For details, see "Watch 40 Years of Personal Stories From the AIDS Epidemic." And for a roundup of POZ articles on the International AIDS Conference, click #AIDS 2020.

In related news, see "Fabric From the AIDS Memorial Quilt Made Into Coronavirus Masks" and "AIDS Memorial Quilt—All 50,000 Panels—Is Moving to a New Home."

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