

Kelly, John. "What New York Was Like in the Early '80s — Hour by Hour," *T Magazine*, 17 April 2018.

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## John Kelly, performance and visual artist

My first loss was my partner, around the time Grace Kelly died in 1982. I made a short performance called "Life Without Grace," a kind of eulogy. The title was an intentional lure — the work wasn't about Grace Kelly, but the painter William Schwedler. When he got sick, we were in a downward spiral for a year and a half. (How many spinal taps can you give to someone under a refrigeration blanket whose fever wouldn't break?) I don't even know if it was named AIDS at that point. There were all these conspiracy theories. People would drop change in your hands, turn their heads when you tried to kiss them. We didn't know how the virus transmitted. You'd see people that you hadn't seen in months in the street with KS [Kaposi's sarcoma] lesions; people would just disappear. "Where's Joe?" Eventually you'd realize that he died, and his family came and put his artwork in a dumpster. Or his family didn't come, and the landlord put his work in a dumpster.

When you're at a memorial mourning the passing of a friend or a lover and they're really young, where do you put that stuff? One of my responses was to just keep working. I chose a very mournful, elegiac, orchestral piece of music, and I created a gray-scale portrait of three heads: Bill's head in the middle, and my two profile heads coming out of either side of his. It was [at the Pyramid Club] just one night, October of 1982, before the floodgates opened. It was a very quiet audience. I went from area to area of the performance space, onstage and offstage. It was totally improvised, like a live prayer: "Do you know that people are dying?"