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Derek Jarman: Delphinium Days

15 June – 14 September 2024

*'Blue of my heart
Blue of my dreams
Slow blue love
Of delphinium days'*

Artist and activist Derek Jarman (1942-1994) is one of the most important and influential figures in twentieth century British culture. Fighting restrictive political and artistic orthodoxies, he moved between painting, film, installation, writing, set design, performance, and gardening. Jarman is best known today as a pioneer of experimental film and as an early campaigner for the rights of the LGBTQIA+ community, particularly for people living with HIV and AIDs. He was the first high profile public figure in Britain to make his HIV positive status known by being open about his illness and putting it at the centre of his work. Speaking for and to the dispossessed and alienated, his art sought to challenge the normative culture and reigning neoliberal politics of his (and our) times.

Born Michael Derek Elworthy Jarman in Northwood, England, Jarman connects to Aotearoa through his father Lancelot who was born in Canterbury in 1907. Though he never set foot in Aotearoa following his father's return to Britain, Jarman's familial and imaginative connection to the country is present in his writing and art, having contributed to his love/hate relationship with a modern Britain under conservative political leadership.

Derek Jarman: Delphinium Days brings together a selection of Jarman's paintings and films with rare archival materials alongside a suite of photographs of the artist and his garden at Prospect Cottage in Dungeness – a refuge and retreat that fuelled his creativity and has since become a sight of pilgrimage for visitors from all over the world. The exhibition begins with Jarman's ethereal and mesmeric Super 8 films from the 1970s, and centres around a series of paintings made from the late

1980s and the very last years of his life which demonstrate his uncompromising yet lyrical vision. From the sculptural viscosity of his tar and black paintings to the physical immediacy of his final text-based painting series, Jarman's work abounds with an energy and outrage that is as palpable and relevant now as it was when he first created them.

Derek Jarman: Delphinium Days marks thirty years since the artist passed away from an AIDS-related illness at the age of 52. This is the first Aotearoa New Zealand exhibition of his work.

Derek Jarman: Delphinium Days has been co-developed by Gus Fisher Gallery and City Gallery Wellington Te Whare Toi. The exhibition is co-curated by Lisa Beauchamp, Curator of Contemporary Art at Gus Fisher Gallery, City Gallery Wellington Te Whare Toi Senior Curator (Toi) Aaron Lister, and Michael Lett.

The exhibition was made possible with the lead support of Tony Kerridge and Micheal Do, with additional support of the City Gallery Wellington Foundation the Delphinium Days Exhibition Circle, and those who wish to remain anonymous. The Auckland public programme is brought to you by Burnett Foundation Aotearoa with additional support from the Gerrard and Marti Friedlander Charitable Trust, the Sir William & Lady Manchester Charitable Trust and cinema partners, The Capitol Cinema. With thanks to the Keith Collins Will Trust and Amanda Wilkinson, London. Films courtesy of LUMA Foundation and James MacKay.

Derek Jarman: Delphinium Days will be presented in Wellington at The Dowse Art Museum in partnership with City Gallery Wellington 28 September – 26 January 2025.

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Te Whare Toi

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Foundation
Aotearoa**



aalto

Super 8

"The Super 8 camera is free".

Derek Jarman was given a Super 8 camera in 1970. It opened a new range of filmmaking possibilities which Jarman pushed beyond the 'home movie' tradition that this technology was made for—and the normative domestic and familial experiences it was designed to capture. By the time Jarman made his first feature film *Sebastiane* in 1976, he had already made over forty Super 8 films.

Jarman's Super 8 language is based on improvisational freedom and experimentation that refuses fixed form or meaning. He would shoot footage through prisms and filters and superimpose and collage it together to create a sense of fragmentary, psychedelic visions or dreams. Films were projected and then refilmed to create multi-layered imagery one step further removed from the world they were taken from. These films would be screened at different speeds, and have their soundtracks switched out. The visual and formal qualities of the Super 8 films drew from and fed into Jarman's painting practice as much as his feature films. They have been described as his 'secret garden'.

My Very Beautiful Movie (1974) is a languid celebration of the magic of the landscape, of everyday experiences, and the people we choose to share them with. Shot through a glass prism held in front of the camera, it transforms New York's Fire Island into a meditative and profoundly human environment of the imagination. Featuring a soundtrack composed by Simon Fisher Turner in 2021, *My Very Beautiful Movie* is one of the most imagistic of Jarman's Super 8 films.

On Jarman's death, his friend and collaborator James Mackay set about restoring, preserving, and tending to the legacy of the Super 8 films, which are now recognised as a vital part of Jarman's output. We would like to thank James and the LUMA Foundation for their support of this project.

Jordan's Dance

1977

Super 8, duration: 16 minutes, 15 seconds

Jordan's Dance is a raucous and political film connected to London's punk scene. Set in a derelict industrial space, it stars punk icon Jordan doing a debauched ballet performance around a blazing pyre in which a Union Jack flag burns. It would form the basis of Jarman's second feature *Jubilee* (1978), one of his anti-Thatcherite State of the Nation films. Jordan appears in *Jubilee* as Amyl Nitrate, performing a sexed-up version of Rule Britannia as Britain's representative in a Eurovision Song Contest.

Courtesy of LUMA Foundation and James Mackay

The Final Paintings of Derek Jarman

"I'm not afraid of death but I am afraid of dying. Pain can be alleviated by morphine but the pain of social ostracism cannot be taken away."

In 1993, Derek Jarman created what would be his last painting series, *Evil Queen*. Characterised by words gouged into the centre of the canvases, these paintings evoke Jarman's own personal response to his illness and follow on from an earlier text-based painting series, *Queer*, which took the tabloid press's homophobia and stigmatisation of the AIDS epidemic as stimulus.

Despite the bleakness of the subject matter, these paintings pulsate with colour. Paint has been applied rapidly and spontaneously. Several paintings were often completed in a day. In *Drop Dead* and *Arse Injected Death Syndrome*, paint has been dripped, flung, dragged and smeared across the canvas, while *Blind Maniac* has black foil enmeshed in layers of thick oil paint. Jarman would write the title across the centre, often using a cutlery knife to etch the words into the impasto surface. These phrases were often recycled slang and insults that held double meanings in the context of Jarman's illness. *Arse Injected Death Syndrome* was likely used in the tabloids as an offensive slur based on the AIDS acronym (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).

Other paintings in the *Evil Queen* series include phrases like *Dizzy Bitch*, *Do Lalley*, and *Ataxia - Aids Is Fun*, each a reference to the blindness and loss of coordination that Jarman was experiencing at this time due to his illness. *Fuck Me Blind* was a favourite expletive of a friend's Australian flat-mate, which Jarman emblazoned across the surface of another painting as a bitter nod to his condition. Jarman took ownership over these phrases and highlighted their double meanings in order to draw attention to the entrenched social stigma that he and others experienced.

Suffering from near blindness and being too physically weak to make these paintings alone, Jarman took on a directorial role. His assistants Piers Clemmett and

Karl Lydon became his hands and eyes, working to Jarman's highly detailed instructions.

These final paintings reveal much about Jarman's personality. Even at the last moment, his response to his illness and artmaking was laced with a cuttingly tongue-in-cheek sense of humour. Carrying the urgency and activism that remained steadfast throughout his entire practice, these paintings are emphatically angry and demand attention. As noted by Professor Robert Mills, "perhaps these works are speaking and perhaps even delivering a proverbial 'fuck you' from beyond the grave."

I.N.R.I.

1988

Oil and mixed media on canvas

I.N.R.I. is Jarman at his most blasphemous. Set against a ground of squashed and rusty beer and soft-drink cans, a plastic He-Man action figure from the Masters of the Universe franchise is sexually rather than spiritually bound to the crucified Christ. Two versions of He-Man's nemesis Skeletor watch on, surrounded by the Arma Christi, the instruments of the Passion of Christ.

This assemblage was part of a number of works Jarman made in response to Margaret Thatcher's Government, a profound source of shame for him. In 1988 the British Conservative government's enactment of Section 28 stated that local authorities, and especially schools, 'Shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality'.

I.N.R.I. challenges the hypocrisy of homophobia by juxtaposing 'acceptable' objects and behaviours from both the sacred and profane realms that have long been embedded with queer love and desire. The artwork's title *I.N.R.I.* refers to the

initials of the Latin inscription on the crucifix 'Iesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum' which translates to English as 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.'

Courtesy of Keith Collins Will Trust and Amanda Wilkinson, London

Prospect

1991

Oil on canvas

This painting was made on site at Prospect Cottage when Jarman's garden was flourishing. It is a faithful depiction of the Dungeness landscape with colours that echo the scarlet field poppies and blue viper's bugloss growing wild in the area. Jarman made a number of these small landscape paintings and they connect to his time at the Slade School of Art, where training was rooted in an English tradition of landscape painting. Whereas Jarman's early landscape paintings were characterised by a minimalist aesthetic, these later works reflect a different approach of thick impasto surfaces and bold hues that can be seen in his larger canvases made around this time.

Courtesy of Keith Collins Will Trust and Amanda Wilkinson, London

Drop Dead

1993

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of Keith Collins Will Trust and Amanda Wilkinson, London

Arse Injected Death Syndrome

1993

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of Keith Collins Will Trust and Amanda Wilkinson, London

Blind Maniac

1992

Oil on canvas with black metal foil

Courtesy of Keith Collins Will Trust and Amanda Wilkinson, London

The Lord's Prayer

1989

Tar and mixed media on canvas

Private Collection, Auckland

Crucifixion

1989

Tar and mixed media on canvas

Courtesy of Keith Collins Will Trust and Amanda Wilkinson, London

Derek Jarman's Garden

Derek Jarman discovered Prospect Cottage during a bluebell hunt with Tilda Swinton and his partner HB (Keith Collins). He had previously visited Dungeness, on the south-east coast of Kent, while capturing images for a film and was entranced by the otherworldly atmosphere and extraordinary light. In 1986, the same year he received his HIV diagnosis, Jarman purchased Prospect Cottage and embarked on the creation of a garden that would become one of his most treasured and fulfilling works of art.

Dungeness is an expansive headland and one of the largest shingle formations in the world. Often referred to as Britain's only desert, its barren landscape bears the brunt of coastal winds, strong sunlight and low rainfall. It also houses the now retired Dungeness B Nuclear Power station.

Jarman had a long-standing passion for plants and gardening. When he was four, his parents gave him the book *Beautiful flowers and how to grow them*. Jarman was told that the high salt-laden winds and an almost total absence of soil at Prospect Cottage would make gardening impossible. However, through a combination of wild and introduced plants, and use of novel planting techniques, his garden bloomed. Jarman found that the Dungeness climate suited certain plants—poppies with their moisture seeking roots and anything fleshy and glaucous-leaved like the native purple sea kale flourished. Yucca trees and harakeke were planted and there was an abundant vegetable and herb garden.

The garden at Prospect Cottage was a visual cornucopia, featuring concentric stone formations, domes of santolina flowers, upright dragon-toothed flints, and rusted metal and beachcombed items. Other objects included old iron hooks, fishing boat floats and spiral lengths of iron.

Jarman's friend and photographer Howard Sooley was integral to the garden's creation as a keen plantsman. The photographs he took demonstrate the

importance of Dungeness as refuge and retreat, which Jarman revered as his Gethsemane and Eden. From 1986 until his passing in February 1994, Jarman transformed the most inhospitable of places into one of breathtaking beauty. The garden's verdant flora became a metaphor for Jarman's brave and persistent struggle against the effects of his illness. And yet slowly, the garden began to contrast with Jarman's struggle with his illness. As HB notes, 'The flowers blossomed while Derek faded.'

Artist residency and research programmes at Prospect Cottage now ensure that Jarman's legacy continues to inspire future generations.

HOWARD SOOLEY

born 1963

1991- 1993

Photographic prints

As photographer and close friend of Derek Jarman, Sooley has been responsible for capturing some of the most recognisable and iconic images of the artist and Prospect Cottage, Dungeness. Many of his images are featured in the landmark book *Derek Jarman's Garden* (1995).

In 1990, Sooley was sent by magazine *The Face* to meet Derek Jarman and he recalls their walk along the Dungeness beach discussing plants and films as 'genius.' Jarman described Sooley's portraits as both flattering and revealing. Vibrant depictions of the garden combine with tender portraits of the artist at his most vulnerable. With an openness characteristic of the artist himself, these images are a true depiction of a place which both men held dear.

Courtesy of Howard Sooley

Derek Jarman, Prospect Cottage,

Dungeness

1991 -1993

Photographic prints

Courtesy of Howard Sooley

Black Paintings

"Personally I hope there is no afterlife. I find the idea of resurrection frightening. No heaven, no hell—just a void ... which is of course the black in these paintings. The black is that infinite void."

The Black Paintings were made in the wake of Jarman's HIV diagnosis and the death of his father in 1986. They have been described as 'small universes of anger, pain and sanctity'. Scratched words and found objects rich with symbolic meaning are embedded into their surfaces. The recurrent religious iconography alludes to Jarman's Catholic upbringing, while broken shards of glass and medical paraphernalia represent "My world in fragments, smashed in pieces so fine I doubt I will ever re-assemble them."

Jarman's move to Dungeness in 1986 changed the Black Paintings. He started pouring molten tar onto the canvases, placing and dropping objects into their sticky, bubbling surfaces. While some of these objects were still sourced from markets and junk shops, the majority were collected during beach walks or taken from his garden. Jarman claimed that these objects found him—and that their use represented a combination of deliberate and subconscious decision-making. In this way, these paintings or assemblages become an extension of his garden and environment, as well as his existence.

Jarman made these small, icon-like works over the last eight years of his life. They evoke the black of the mourning shroud, the protective melanosis of the moth, his 'spirit guide' Goya, and of that infinite void which Jarman's late works stare down with black humour.

Battle of Britain

1989

Tar and mixed media on canvas

Untitled (Ganymede)

1990

Oil and mixed media on canvas

References to Jarman's father Lancelot are embedded deep within the viscous surfaces of these two Black Paintings. His passing in 1986 was a major impetus for this series. Born in Ōtautahi Christchurch in 1907, Lancelot left Aotearoa in 1928 to join the Royal Air Force as a pilot. Derek Jarman was subsequently born in the United Kingdom. He never visited Aotearoa, but his art and writing hold several references to it.

The first of these paintings features a model fighter airplane slathered in tar. The battle referenced in the title might refer to the complex relationship that both Jarman's had with modern Britain and with each other, as well as the actual war that Lancelot fought in. The assemblage of objects in the other includes a photograph of Lancelot in his RAF uniform. There is also a paintbrush which belongs to the world of the son, not the father. There had been disagreement over Derek's decision to attend art school, but Lancelot agreed to finance his study if a university degree was also pursued.

Beneath the photograph is a representation of the classical myth of the mortal Ganymede being carried to Mount Olympus by Zeus in the form of an eagle, or an eagle doing his bidding. Jarman here mixes his own family history with a myth about lines of succession, movement between worlds, and homoerotic desire. There is a parallel here to his feature films that often revisit classical and biblical stories or characters to explore contemporary issues—in a way that can feel like collage or assemblage.

Courtesy of Keith Collins Will Trust and Amanda Wilkinson, London

Untitled (Wired Glass/Thermometer)

1990

Oil and mixed media on canvas

Courtesy of Keith Collins Will Trust and Amanda Wilkinson, London

Imperial Dreams, Material Nightmares

1988

Oil and mixed media on canvas

Courtesy of Keith Collins Will Trust and Amanda Wilkinson, London

They've Done It In

1987

Oil and mixed media on canvas

Courtesy of Keith Collins Will Trust and Amanda Wilkinson, London

God Bless American Express

1987

Oil and mixed media on canvas

Courtesy of Keith Collins Will Trust and Amanda Wilkinson, London

Dead Souls Whisper

1986

Oil and mixed media on canvas

Courtesy of Keith Collins Will Trust and Amanda Wilkinson, London

Pinxit

1987

Oil and mixed media on canvas

Courtesy of Keith Collins Will Trust and Amanda Wilkinson, London

The Dead Sea II

1986

Oil and mixed media on canvas

Courtesy of Keith Collins Will Trust and Amanda Wilkinson, London

This Precious Stone

1986

Oil and mixed media on canvas

Courtesy of Keith Collins Will Trust and Amanda Wilkinson, London

GORDON RAINSFORD

born 1960

1991

Photographic prints

Gordon Rainsford's work as a freelance photographer provides an unparalleled archive of LGBTQIA+ Britain between 1985 and 2005. His work featured in major publications of the time including *The Pink Paper*, *Capital Gay* and many others. He documented many Pride marches, the protests of *Outrage!* and *ACT UP London*, and attended vigils for those lost during the AIDS crisis. Here, four of Rainsford's photographs capture Derek Jarman's canonisation by The Sisters of Perpetual

Indulgence. One shows Jarman surrounded by nuns during the laying of hands. In another, he joyfully paddles in the sea following the ceremony.

Courtesy of Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence Archive, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

DENIS DORAN

born 1950

1991

Photographic prints

Denis Doran worked as a photographer for various publications between 1980 and 1993. Growing up in the North East of England, he documented working class life in and around his seaside home. Along with Gordon Rainsford, Doran photographed Derek Jarman's canonisation by The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. One iconic photograph captures the moment when the crown was placed on Jarman's head, bestowing on him the title 'Saint Derek of Dungeness of the Order of the Celluloid Knights.'

Courtesy of Denis Doran.

Derek Jarman's canonisation by The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence

1991

Photographs by Gordon Rainsford and Denis Doran

The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence are an Order of queer and trans nuns with houses across the globe who use religious imagery to shed light on issues of sex, gender, and morality. Amid the AIDS crisis in Britain, The Sisters of the London house wanted to take a stand and protest the negligence of the government which

had resulted in the death and suffering of many. Their mission was to 'expiate homosexual guilt from all and to replace it with universal joy'.

Inspired by Jarman's openness about his sexuality and HIV status, the nuns decided to canonise him as the first living gay saint in Britain. On 22 September 1991, the fifth anniversary of his HIV positive diagnosis, the nuns travelled to Dungeness to canonise 'Saint Derek of Dungeness of the Order of the Celluloid Knights'. The ritual included a procession, the hymn *Amazing Pride*, a laying on of hands, and a mass communion.

Gordon Rainsford and Denis Doran's photographs capture the laughter and joy of this event. Jarman described this as one of the happiest days of his life, and noted that, after the service ended, they all had tea in the garden and went down to the sea.

Courtesy of Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence Archive, Bishopsgate Institute, London.
Courtesy of Denis Doran.

Gay culture: Derek Jarman interview

1991

Duration: 9 minutes, 43 seconds

In these two clips, recorded for Independent Television News (ITN), Derek Jarman talks to Fiona Murch about the 21st anniversary of the founding of the gay liberation movement in Britain. As an outspoken activist, he talks openly about the progress being made in protecting gay rights and the ability of art to effect change. Jarman sits in front of a backdrop of newspaper pages that he has arranged especially for the interview – the vitriolic headlines a reminder of the time and the ostracism they generated towards queer communities of his generation.

Jarman is credited with making some of the first films to include positive depictions of gay sexuality and lifestyle, beginning with his first feature length film *Sebastiane* in 1976.

Courtesy of Getty Images

Great Gardens "Prospect Cottage"

by Howard Sooley

2014

Duration: 10 minutes, 32 seconds

Derek Jarman's Prospect Cottage in Dungeness, Kent, is the subject of this video filmed and narrated by Howard Sooley. As a photographer, keen plantsman and close friend of Jarman's, Sooley was central to the early development of the garden by advising on different types of plants and driving Jarman to nurseries. Sooley's photographs of Jarman at Prospect Cottage and his flourishing garden have become synonymous with a serenity that Jarman encountered there.

Courtesy of NOWNESS and Howard Sooley