

Layers of Representation

Saturday 3 August, 2024

Layers of Representation was a panel discussion which explored the parallels between Jarman and queer artists working in Aotearoa today, opening up discussions around where Jarman fits into the art history canon and notions of legacy.

The discussion was chaired by Gregory Minissale, Professor of Art History at the University of Auckland Waipapa Taumata Rau. He was joined by artists Shannon Novak and Steve Lovett, alongside Gus Fisher Gallery Curator of Contemporary Art Lisa Beauchamp.

This conversation has been edited from the verbal discussion for clarity.

Derek Jarman: Delphinium Days is the first Aotearoa New Zealand exhibition of his work, bringing together rarely seen paintings and films by Jarman alongside photography and archival materials about the artist.

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, Aaron Lister, Senior Curator (Toi) at City Gallery Wellington Te Whare Toi, and Michael Lett.

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.



Lisa Beauchamp: Kia ora koutou, nau mai haere mai ki te Gus Fisher Gallery, ko Lisa ahau.

Welcome everyone today to our talk, *Layers of Representation*. This is a talk about Derek Jarman's art and paintings and is part of our extended public programme for *Derek Jarman: Delphinium Days* supported by Burnett Foundation Aotearoa.

I'm kind of an add on here [laughs], so I'm going to pass over to Professor Greg Minissale who's going to lead the discussion with Shannon Novak and Steve Lovett. Please join me in welcoming our speakers.

Gregory Minissale: Thank you. Kia ora koutou katoa. Very glad to be here. Thanks for inviting us all, Lisa. I am a Professor of Art History at the University of Auckland Waipapa Taumata Rau.

I'd like to introduce Steve Lovett, an artist and an art educator at Elam School of Fine Arts whose current research projects involve collaborative performance and visual arts projects with artists in France and America. I'd also like to introduce Shannon Novak, whose work aims to reduce anxiety, depression, and suicide rates for LGBTQIA+ communities. Shannon seeks to dismantle heteronormative structures, systems, and to build public spaces that acknowledge, celebrate, and support diversity and inclusion. Thank you both for joining me today.

I thought today we would structure the talk around the paintings that we see here and in the other gallery. A lot of paintings that we see in the exhibition are under researched. Most people know Derek Jarman's work in moving image and there's comparatively a lot less work done, or research conducted on the paintings. Given that we have this exceptional opportunity, because they're here today with us, we could talk about them in situ.

I thought we'd just divide the talk into several sections just to keep the discussion points going, starting with the political, social and historic background. Obviously very pertinent and very powerful times; the period under British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, fighting against homophobia at all levels in the 1980s and 1990s and, of course, with Derek Jarman's HIV-positive diagnosis, all of that is extremely relevant for the imagery that we see here today.

We'll talk a little bit about some of that social context and how it feeds into the images that we see. But I don't want to just think of the images just as carbon copies of the political and social - what I'd like to move on to in the second part, is to talk about how facture and materiality - the images and the way that these things are made - add another dimension to the political and social background. I recall the Belgian artist Francis Alÿs saying that sometimes politics can be poetic, and sometimes the poetic can be political. I think that we see glimpses of that in the very individual work of Derek Jarman.

Lastly, what I'd like to do is to take a step back in the last section and talk about the really big issues that some of these works grapple with, which is to do with finitude. How creativity fights, resists and balances that, the light with the dark, and how this powerful work can be inspiring as well as something that makes us reflect on where we are in the world, and our own finitude. Because we're here in Aotearoa, I'd like to also finish with some discussion of how artists here respond to similar kinds of issues.

Steve, you've lent me a couple of books on Derek Jarman, and I hadn't read *Chroma* (1994) before. It's a wonderful book by Derek Jarman talking about different colours and what those colours meant to him. But first, let's start with your personal exposure or access to Derek Jarman. When did you first get to know his work?

Steve Lovett: Mostly from the films which I saw in the late 1970s. Later, at art school I began to discover his writing, so I came to his work not through the paintings. The films and the writing largely obscured the work in this show. Though Jarman makes reference to these works in the *Dancing Ledge* (1984) and *Kicking Against the Pricks* (1987). It was the writing, even more than the films, that changed the way that I viewed things. As HIV AIDS tore through art communities it was Jarman's intermingling of art and politics that reshaped my own art practice.

Jarman didn't make a distinction between the personal and the political. They flowed into one another. I would say that Jarman is one of the people who transformed the way I approached making work.

GM: Shannon, would you like to answer that question as well? What was your first exposure to Jarman's work?

Shannon Novak: Relatively recently during a research stream, I was looking into interactions between early queer art and artists in the context of Aotearoa. In terms of Jarman's work, from what I was able to gather, the first instance or interaction that I could find evidence of was in the late 1960s and then the early 1980s pre-legalisation when some of his films were shown in Christchurch and then after the legalisation, the use of Jarman's work to do things like help fund the Labour Party and their campaign in New Zealand. So yeah, just more the early historical context of Jarman's work in Aotearoa.

GM: I suppose we're all new or relatively new to the work and given that the paintings aren't really that well known it's interesting how they're a microcosm of the things we know about Derek Jarman. But they also seem to me to be a lot more direct because you've got the marks of the artist's hand and they're here for you to see, whereas you can show the film virtually anywhere, and it's not actually located here, is it? It seems to be somewhere else, in another place. But these paintings are here and they're confronting.

So, Lisa, maybe you could tell me a little bit, because we're talking about the political and social background. How did you manage to get all the paintings together? And did you aim to get all the paintings together? It was mainly a painting show, wasn't it to begin with?

LB: Well, firstly to talk about my connection to Derek Jarman, I came to his work through his garden. I had a good art schoolteacher and when I was 15 years old, I was doing a project on artist gardens and wrote an essay on Derek Jarman's Garden. I then circled back to his practice when I was working in Birmingham many years later and was confronted with some of his paintings. I just couldn't believe how visceral and powerful they were in the flesh. For me, having grown up in a working-class household where I remember my dad going to anti-Thatcher rallies, I immediately connected with Jarman's political activism as well. I suppose my relationship with his work hasn't been through film initially, so I've come from it from a different angle.

And then putting this show together, we've been working on it for about two years. We knew that some of his films have been shown here, and we knew that his paintings had never been shown here before. In part that's because of the challenges of bringing works of this scale to Aotearoa as they are all in the UK. We also wanted to make that connection with Jarman to Aotearoa because his father

Lancelot was born here in 1907 in Canterbury, and that's something that's relatively lesser known, even though he does reference it in his writings and in some of his work.

So yes, with sheer determination and a lot of generous supporters, we've managed to make this show happen. And it coincides with the 30th anniversary of Jarman's passing at the age of 52.

The original idea for the show was to really highlight his paintings, but also to show some of his experimental Super 8 films, to do a screening programme of his feature length films, and to try and emphasise that connection between his painting and film practice. A lot of people think that he was mainly a filmmaker and kind of dabbled in painting on the side, and that wasn't the case. He trained as a painter at the Slade School of Fine Art, and he finished life as a painter, so it was a consistent part of his practice. I think that when you see his films, you can see how painterly they are, particularly his experimental Super 8's. Painting was a continual thing for him, and that's what we wanted to highlight through the exhibition.

GM: Steve, you were very intent on talking about the political, how the political melds with the personal, and how the aesthetic can be political as well. Did you think that when you first saw the paintings here that it changed that kind of equation in any way, that understanding, because of the strength of the works or the impact?

SL: Interesting question. No, it reinforced that sense that comes through initially for me and the writing that he does. *Modern Nature* (1991), *Kicking the Pricks* (1987), they're trenchant, political texts as much as they are recording an aesthetic register. And if you have ever heard the text for the film *Blue* (1993), and if you've been in a theatre and seen it as a whole - I saw it in The Civic one night and the whole inside of The Civic was blue. It was very beautiful. That's an extraordinarily painterly moment. It's very still, but there's this very busy, urgent text that Jarman delivers. And all those stories, the heartrending ones about his friend on the other side of the world, who knew to phone him up but made no sense when he spoke. It was the way that he never deviated from that point of making the personal very political.

French philosopher and professor Jacques Rancière talks about politics having a certain kind of aesthetics. I think Rancière's discussions about big political movements, fascism and any of those totalitarian regimes have a strong aesthetic.

But Jarman takes that observation and boils it down to something which is extremely personal. He links class, sexuality, gender and race, so that these become observable. We call them intersectionality today, but before that word was in common use, Jarman had marked out that territory to form a series of ideas that animated everything.

Looking around the room, the works in the small room have a very definite sense. We were talking about how soon after his diagnosis he was looking down and picking things up and kind of marking things and that there are some obvious parallels with Robert Rauschenberg's *Combines* (1954-64). If we think back to those pre-Renaissance religious paintings where the word of God comes down, that ribbon from the sky, here [in Jarman's paintings] we have the word in space like it's being spoken. And that's what I think about when I look at these paintings, the lasting impression I have in my mind is sitting in the Civic theatre watching and listening to this film, looking, being immersed in that blue colour. It's a very painful and very political moment.

GM: Shannon, would you like to talk about your feelings about the political and personal content of the work? When you saw it close-up, did you feel that the political was being manifested in a particularly unique way?

SN: Absolutely. The political came through from the perspective of, I guess for me, politics around the relationship between queer relationships within the family, particularly the father-son relationship, and how that has been politically manifested over the period of the last 50 years or so. That was something that really hit home from a personal perspective.

GM: So the personal is political when you think about how you live and grow up in a normative society with certain standards. I remember there's a quote from Jarman's book *Chroma* about how he asked his father for a white lily for his birthday, and his father really frowned on it because it wasn't masculine enough. Already that becomes a political problem rather than just a personal kind of bracket or framework. And these works just scream out at you in terms of the visible. They say, "I'm here, I'm here," you know? Whereas what was happening in Thatcherite Britain and in America was ignorance to the whole thing by sweeping AIDS under the rug and calling it a gay disease. So, I think that the anger comes out here quite clearly in terms of the writing too.

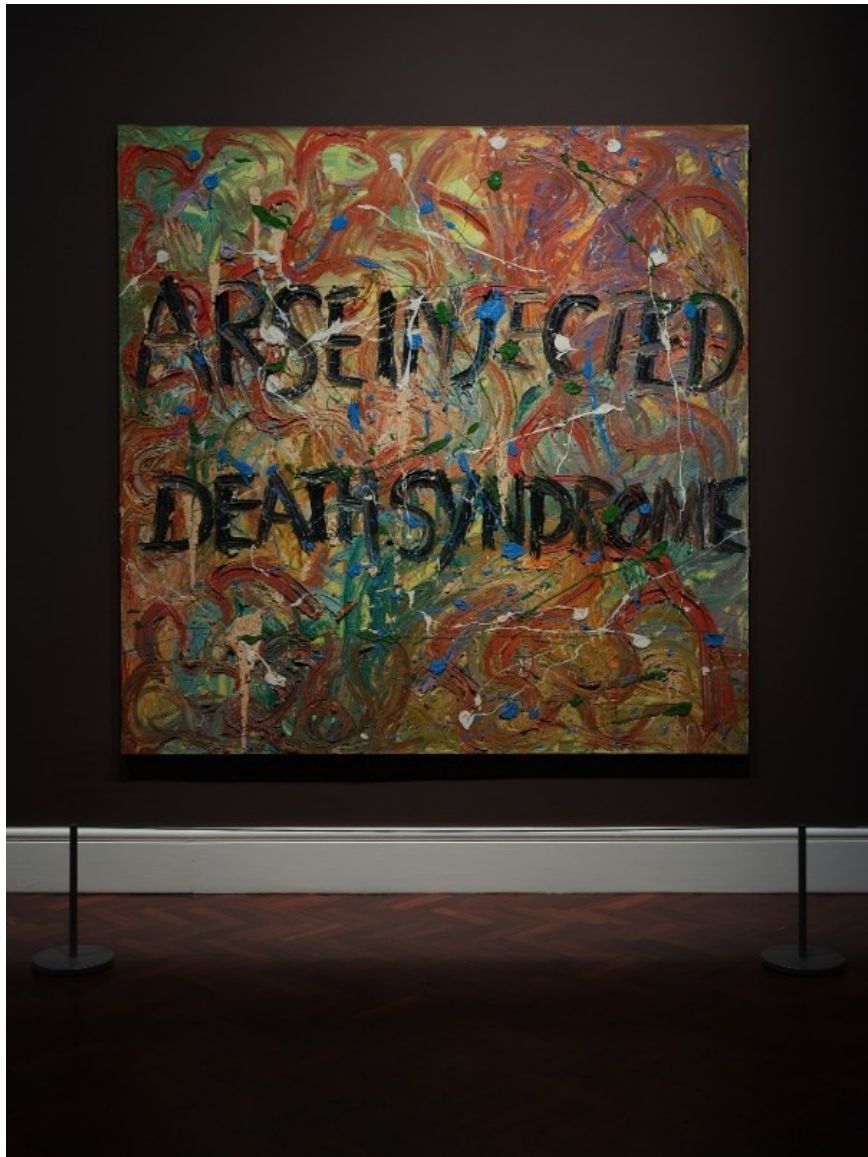
Let me just reformulate the question about the personal a bit more. We've kind of touched on some of the images but there's a lot to be said about how things are made and the materials, colours and choices. It's not just a message, it's an exploration through touch, an exploration through our understanding of colour, texture, and image and memory and all those things.

So, what are things that for you, Shannon, you find exciting or interesting about the facture and the technique that we can see around us, but also with the assemblages in the other room?

SN: The layering process. And the extremes in scale from the smaller and intimate to the larger and wild.

SL: My eyes keep travelling to *Blind Maniac* (1992). It's a fantastic piece of work in the sense that you can see the physical engagement with the paint, and you can see how Jarman manipulates it - even if he has assistants helping him - he's in control of the process of manipulation. He has a strong sense of touch being this important sense in painting. It's not just something to look at, it's something to feel. Greg and I were talking about *Arse Injected Death Syndrome* (1993). The marking is very flesh coloured, and in the period that these were painted, Jarman would have had Kaposi sarcoma, which marks out the flesh. There are accounts of him going to get this stuff removed from his skin with hydrogen - it's horrendously assaulting. And he translates this into something which is like flesh rendered in paint with those green tinges. It's jaundiced and falling apart. It's a really powerful thing.

The reading of the painting is another important political act. We read Jarman's political engagement in painted actions. There is no heteronormative context for the work. Jarman makes a direct address that invites us to set aside any gestures of performative acceptance or worse to read the nuances in the work often don't get read. The work offers a lesson to neoliberal social systems to take seriously queer lives. That is doesn't happen is the real crime. When queer students, practitioners don't have their work read and don't have their voice understood in the work. It's an awful thing to go through, to have nobody engage with the work, but have nobody say anything about it, either.



Derek Jarman, *Arse Injected Death Syndrome*, 1993. Installation view. Courtesy of the Keith Collins Will Trust and Amanda Wilkinson, London. Photography by Sam Hartnett.

The other thing about Jarman is he's very witty. He's very, very witty. He manages to embed a model of his father's Spitfire in tar. It's forever stuck in this ground, never to fly again. It brings his father's legacy right down to Earth.

GM: And I like the feathers because, obviously you think of something falling from the sky or something, but also the idea that you could touch it. It has that gentleness, but also you retract that too, because it's dark and it will possibly stick to you. So that's that to-ing and fro-ing with the idea of touching.

SL: Even Jarman's selection of tar to work with. Possibly not within his lifetime, but certainly lots of gay men would have had the experience of being tarred and feathered.

GM: Yes, I was thinking that because it's like being humiliated. We have to bring the Catholic aspect in as well, which is shame. It's not just anger and finitude, but it's also the idea of the shame which is attached to sex.

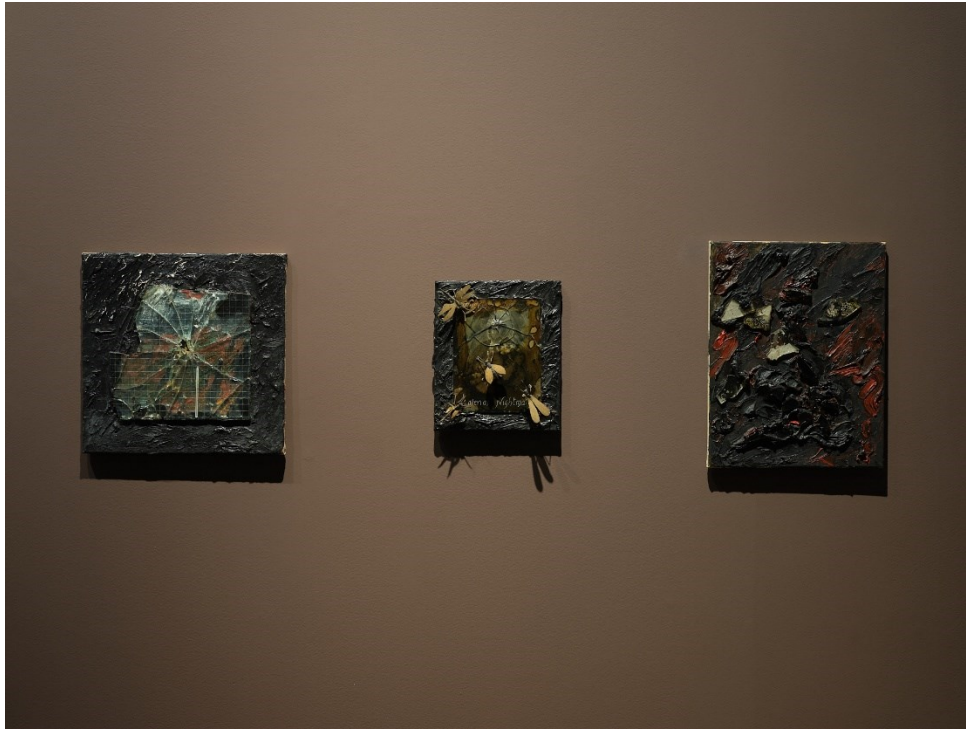
SL: Yeah, of course. And so, it turns something that is like a stigma, or a stigmata that marks him out, into something that's an emblem, and it's a real "fuck you" gesture back at anybody who wants to challenge him. And it was *that*, it was that particular quality of his staunchness, you know? I don't know if they were using staunch when his dad was here as a word to describe something, but he imbues that kind of sense in the work, in the way that it is unapologetic and confrontational.

GM: Jarman writes in *Chroma* about black. He says, "Black velvet registers as infinity on film with no form or boundary, a black without end, that lurks behind the blue day. It is soulful, and as Ad Reinhardt's *The Quintessential Master of Black* stated ... it does away with petty incident and the romance of the coloured surface. It is puritan, black as the clothes of the seventeenth-century burghers of Amsterdam. A priestly black. Black hearted. Victorian ladies mourning in jet."¹ I think there's a gothic aspect to it, as well. "Beyond the galaxies lies that primordial dark from which the stars shine out."²

There is this way in which, although these images are very precise and very focused, they zoom out to these cosmic ideas of existence, and black, and what we associate with that. And obviously Goya being one of the major influences, Jarman knew his art history well. In *Chroma* Jarman quotes from Spanish artist Francisco Goya and that particular image of madness - where the bats are flying around - and there's an image in the exhibition that actually refers to that - *Imperial Dreams, Material Nightmares* (1988). It's very considered, the black. And for an artist to paint many images of black - it's quite a big psychological step to do that. Would anyone like to comment on that? Shannon, your work is really colourful. Have you ever decided to paint with just black?

¹ Derek Jarman, *Chroma* (London: Random House, 1994), 137.

² Derek Jarman, *Chroma* (London: Random House, 1994), 137.



(L-R) Derek Jarman, *Untitled (Wired Glass/Thermometer)* (1990). *Imperial Dreams, Material Nightmares* (1988). *The Precious Stone* (1986). Installation view. Photography by Sam Hartnett.

SN: Yes, very early on I painted with black a lot and did a series of paintings, in fact, that were all black with streaks or small elements of colour. For me that was about my own process of coming out in my practice. Starting off in my practise as closeted and not comfortable with being out as an artist who is queer and creates queer work, and then later-on coming out. It was just that kind of era of coding and not being comfortable, and then outwardly expressing my queer identity.

GM: It's strange why you reach for certain things. Sometimes it's unbeknownst to you the reason why you do, but later in retrospect, you realise that there's a powerful metaphor that you're dealing with - the idea of being in the dark and being invisible.

SN: Yes, I mean, for me, the black was positive and negative. Negative in terms of being in the dark, but the positive was linking to space and the idea of endlessness and possibilities, the unknown and the discovering.

GM: Steve, would you like to comment on your own personal use perhaps in your own practise?

SL: Okay, I don't paint anymore. I went to art school with the ambition of being a painter, but I couldn't get into the painting department. I couldn't bribe them to let me in the painting department, so I did something else. I've made things that are

headed towards black but it's a hard colour to manipulate. I do have a couple of images that I'd love to print in black just on a black surface or just print them as black as I could get them to be.

When I printed typographical interpretations of poems for the Hone Tuwhare Trust the team I work with spent three or four weeks mixing the perfect shade of black. And black is an incredibly subtle language, very nuanced. What shade of black can be sensed "is it 4:00 AM in the morning or, you know, just after dark." I haven't done black. Sometimes I put on a whole wardrobe of black in the morning because it's like a bit of a salve.

GM: Yes, there's so many layers of representation that the black itself represents, right? It's not just the colour black, but it's the way in which black embraces and completely shells all the forms that we see, so its sculptural element changes the nature of the colour itself. It makes it much more of a substance to be reckoned with. But at the same time, this is the period when Jarman was beginning to lose his eyesight, and if you're an artist and you're losing your sight, it's almost like a kind of death anyway, you know? The death of an artist. But then to know that you're going to die, and then to be painting with things that show that you have limited or waning visibility. It's powerful in itself.

[To Lisa] Do you have anything to add in terms of the black? And when you staged this, did you feel that you wanted to do it in a particular way that would emphasise the colour black?

LB: Yes, just to add with the black paintings, I think it's important to recognise when he started the series and the context he was working in. It was in 1986, and his father had just passed away. In the same year, Derek received his HIV positive diagnosis, and he was nominated for the Turner Prize. Following the death of his father, he came into some money, and he travelled to Dungeness. I think he was on a bluebell hunt with Tilda Swinton and Keith Collins when he came across Prospect Cottage. He noticed these fisherman's cottages which were all painted in black tar to help protect them against the weather. So, aesthetically, he was inspired to use tar because of the cottages. And there's lots of references as we've mentioned - tarring and feathering, of which there's a scene in his film *The Garden* (1990) which refers it, a difficult scene to watch, but very important.

So his use of black was partly inspired by the Dungeness cottages, but also Goya - he looked back at history a lot in his work. We know from speaking to a friend of Jarman's in the UK that he was aware of artistic traditions in Aotearoa, so artists like Ralph Hōtere and Colin McCahon he was aware of. Also, I like how, when I spoke to one of his friends he said how the Dungeness cottage was like a New Zealand bach. I really love that whilst he never came here, there are these connections particularly through his father, but also his cottage on the edge of Sussex in the UK, its outer layer of black tar kind protecting this cottage against the weather with these beautiful yellow windowpanes and doors. It's a kind of brightness into the dark.

GM: Thank you. We have talked quite a lot about the technique, using black and the tar and the looking down. But is there anything that we can also add to that in terms of the actual choice of objects, the images in terms of the objects? I mean there's a crucifix over there staring at me, but obviously he had a very complex and difficult relationship with religion and that's something that isn't just at loggerheads with it but feels as if sometimes God's looking at you over his shoulder and saying, "tut tut."

[To Shannon] you've had lots of experience of religion, haven't you? That you felt that you needed to push back on here in Aotearoa, right? Would you like to talk about that? Do you have any parallels, or do you feel that the work that we see here is familiar in the way that Jarman treats religion?

SN: Absolutely. The religious iconography in the work is something that I felt the first time I came to and experienced the show. I came out of the exhibition feeling heavy in many ways. It's a very heavy, dense show in terms of the energy around religion.

For me, a recent part of my work has been in the context of Aotearoa and forming a group to resist conversion therapy practices here and to eventually and successfully work with the government to pass a bill to ban conversion therapy, which stems further back.

For me personally, my first romantic relationship with a man was in Taranaki. He was my youth group leader in church, we were in a relationship behind closed doors and eventually he was found out. I wasn't - he covered for me. But his punishment was conversion therapy. He went through conversion therapy as a result of being found out, then got married, had kids, all that sort of thing. He came out the other end not

so good and has since passed away. So yeah, when I see this kind of stuff, it's very heavy.

GM: What about you, Steve? Did you have a particular response to some of the ways in which Jarman features and pushes back on religion? Because obviously it's very powerful, in his voice, in doing that.

SL: The one that is striking is *I.N.R.I.* (1988) featuring a crucifix and Christ on the cross who is being embraced by some sort of male action figure doll. The religious stuff – I don't have the same reaction as you, Shannon. My mum left my father, so that was the end of any kind of church stuff. After that I didn't grow up with any religion. I look at this stuff, the religious imagery, kind of like a tourist.

I mean I get its force completely, but it doesn't touch me personally in that way. But it's a very significant tangent. I mean, when you were introducing Greg, you talked about that connection between moral and fiscal rectitude. The two things seemed to travel together. The financial conservatism that Margaret Thatcher ushered in brought with it a whole series of moral panics that acted as constraints on liberalising forces in British Society. And we can see that happening here in Aōtearoa right now - a very conservative government dismantling a whole lot of social structures. The two things go together.

And there's some lovely photographs in the exhibition of Jarman's baptism by the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. That stuff turns an oppressive force into some fabulous bit of camp subversion. And camp then isn't just ironic, it is the overturning of something and turning it into something which has a real bite to it.

GM: Yes, I agree, we should actually acknowledge that because it's definitely part of his humour. Sticking your fingers up to authority and religion and discrimination is through that route for making fun of things.

SL:

At the same time that Jarman is making these works, David McDiarmid, an Australian artist, is making some biting funny text pieces. One work is *Fierce bitch seeks future ex-husband*. It's very funny, but it's very, very dark.



Gordon Rainsford, Derek Jarman's canonisation series, 1991. Image courtesy of the artist and Bishopsgate Institute. Photography by Sam Hartnett.

I think that there were lots of artists who shared, in a personal physical sense, how HIV and AIDS transformed their lives and the world around them. American author Fran Lebowitz talks about the tragedy of so many artists dying and then she goes on to mention that the other thing that happened is the audience died as well. And we no longer get to see our friends as the walking dead on the street. We have completely missed that bit of horror, fortunately, and that produces something which transforms painting. It transforms the notion of camp. It makes the politics so much more direct and urgent, you know? And that question, if not now, then when? It just becomes it, it screams.

GM: I think that it's really interesting that you could be tempted to be swept away by the fact that it's very austere and deeply touching, this show, because of the material. But it's also defiant and it's plucky, you know - the black comedy, if you like. It takes it away from the morose and the melancholy to something else.

SL: Yes, absolutely. In the black paintings in the other room, there's so many funny moments where all anger, all those observations are communicated through the sensuousness of the way that the materials are handled. And that's an extraordinary, poetic and political gesture. It's really beautiful.

GM: Yeah, I mean, two men touching. How could it not be political?

SL: Exactly.

GM: So maybe we should just now move on to the final part where we talk about things like the viewer and the confrontational aspect of the finitude and so on. And then maybe we could talk to the audience, maybe the audience will have questions.

So, if you were to sum up what you've seen in the context of Aotearoa, what do you think that LGBTQIA+ artists are dealing with now? Do they have the same kind of profundity as Jarman's, and can we say that artists are doing things in similar ways? Or do you feel that it's a different time, so therefore there's a different imagery and a different kind of materiality that's involved? Is this very specific or is it very historically specific or is it able to transcend that?

SL: It's a different time. I distinctly remember in 1997 when the first protease inhibitors showed up and HIV and AIDS moved from being a fatal disease to a chronic disease that could be managed. That was a huge transformative moment. It was like something had been lifted off our shoulders collectively. And some people born in the second half of the 1990s or in the early 2000s would have no understanding of what that was like. And that's their good fortune.

Things move on, and we deal with different questions. Or we forget the significance of artists like Jarman. We forget the lessons of our history. This is the point that Patrick Moore makes in *Beyond Shame* (2004). Moore charts the inter-generational changes in the artworld in New York which amount to a disavowal of recent history. I think this is something that we can see in some art institutions where the programme focus continuously defaults to the centre. And so, we see the centre, but not about the places where we might find resonance and relevance. So, we receive a warped understanding, I think, where the politics of the personal is defused. Critiques in school, critical discussion don't go to there that commonly, or it's my experience that they don't.

GM: It's interesting how it's controlled, but also a little bit like gravity. It's this default thing where people slip into it because they are pretty lazy about finding out what's happening with those communities. They don't go out there and take the effort. What do you think, Shannon, about the question: is there something here that transcends this Jarman moment that's important for LGBTQIA+ here?

SN: A lot of the focus for Queer communities in Aotearoa is on mental health and growing positive mental health outcomes. When we talk about the walking dead, I guess in the street and so forth, it's a different kind of walking dead now in terms of depression, anxiety and suicide. As we said earlier, those rates are horrendous, the rates are two to three times more than in non-queer communities when it comes to anxiety and depression. A lot of the work that I've seen around the country extend from themes or places. From negative mental health outcomes I'm seeing manifestation in similar ways to what we're seeing here. Maybe not the same message or the same challenges. That to me feels like there's been this continuation and it's just that the struggle is morphing and changing into different forms. But it's always a struggle of some sort.

GM: Different kind of struggle, but a struggle, nevertheless. Thank you for that.

LB: I just wanted to add, I think what has really struck me about this show is that Jarman's legacy feels very present. It feels like it's touched a lot of people, and I think Jarman is a hero to so many. From someone over the other side of the world who was working for actually quite a short period, he was prolific. He produced so much, aside from his paintings and films, he did theatre sets, he did costumes for a while, and music videos like Pet Shop Boys' *It's a Sin*. He almost set the cultural zeitgeist. I feel that, when I look at these paintings now, seeing his marks on those paintings, it gets me every time. It's 30 years since he made them and, to me, I feel like they're still hugely relevant. I think there's a physicality and a message that feels incredibly profound.

GM: Thank you for that. I feel that, too. I'm glad you said that because there is a vitality in the concrete aspect of it, and that's pretty amazing.

Audience member 1: I'm just thinking about this point you made about the painting behind you (*Drop Dead*, 1993), it's quite a dramatic painting, which I have seen before online. It just struck me how inadequate sometimes it is to see an image online. The total visceral nature of the way that this paint has been hurled at the canvas is so aggressive. I thought about what it would have been like for him at the time, obviously he's painting at a time when there's no particular direction of the way things need to be as an artist and he of course is an artist who's got many different mediums in which he uses...



Derek Jarman, *Drop Dead*, 1993. Installation view. Courtesy of the Keith Collins Will Trust and Amanda Wilkinson, London. Photography by Sam Hartnett.

LB: Yeah, it's interesting when you look back at Jarman's body of work because, I don't know whether he really fits into a particular genre. You can't just look at his work and go "oh, he was an abstract expressionist." In a way, created his own kind of art.

SL: Jarman trained at the Slade School of Fine Art, I don't think there was an immediate place for his painting work after art school. Working in film, first with Ken Russell to make *The Devils* (1971) which is very much of its time. (I watched it again this week and it's pretty shocking still.) The fact that Jarman works in film and has to do a number of things, designing costumes and stuff, means that there's this dexterous approach to the work. Jarman's approach to making the black combines (in the smaller gallery) are very different than this, but the thing that links - my eye keeps on drifting back to the bonfire [in *Jordan's Dance*] - the thing that links the films and the paintings together is that his training as a painter allows Jarman to appreciate and respond to the nuances of colour. That is embedded in those hues, those shades, those tones, the physical gestures on the canvas itself or on the black paintings made after his HIV diagnosis. There's a kind of a gestural poetry there. It comes through in the film. Look at the flames. It's a beautiful image destruction and regeneration. A perfect counterpoint to mid-1970s in Britain, the Queen's Jubilee, the grinding down end of the Labour government. I mean, it would have seemed like

things were about to be burnt out. It's just the most gorgeous thing and it really for me Jarman really packs a punch.

Audience member 2: I just want to go back to what the other guy was saying about the works. Getting things out of them in real life that you don't get from reproduced images and the black works are never really appreciated that much. But seeing them in real life - they are like Victorian mourning objects. And the other thing about Derek being a pioneering figure is his garden in Prospect Cottage.

LB: Yes, I mean, I hadn't seen these paintings in the flesh either, so I was looking at tiny little images online for years! For me, it's the texture and colour when you see them in the flesh. Just seeing them come off the truck outside, we were just flabbergasted. And when we brought them into the gallery, we were all silenced. I think it's rare to experience art like that. And we know that these works are in really good condition as he used really good materials. I also think that the way that he layered his garden is like the layers you see in his paintings, and it was like a continual sense of renewal as well. In a way, it's a kind of living, breathing kind of horticultural extension of his artwork and it's an artwork in itself. We could sit here all day and talk about how amazing these pieces are, but I do feel like every time I look at them something else pops up or I notice something different about them and you can only get that experience seeing them in the flesh.

GM: And we only noticed the other day, the condom in *Untitled (Ganymede)* (1989).

LB: I actually didn't see that until literally a few weeks ago. And I was like "oh, okay!" But I think also again that is the humour in the way Jarman works - he wants to surprise. He works right until the end of his life, making these paintings (Evil Queen series, 1993) and directing these with his assistants. I mean, he's nearly blind, he knows he's deteriorating, and he makes a painting where he scrawls "drop dead." I mean, his courage and dark tongue in cheek humour, right to the end. He knows that he's dying. He knows that these paintings are going to outlive him. And he wants that. He wants them to talk back at people for decades to come, and that's what they're doing.

GM: Thank you very much.