

More Life: Derek Jarman

Opening June 24, 2021
525 & 533 West 19th Street, New York

Appointment bookings available
on davidzwirner.com



Derek Jarman, *Arse Injected Death Syndrome*, 1993
Courtesy of Keith Collins Will Trust and Amanda Wilkinson Gallery, London

David Zwirner is pleased to present the iconic film *Blue* (1993) and a selection of late paintings by the British interdisciplinary artist Derek Jarman (1942–1994) at the gallery's West 19th Street location in New York. Jarman's richly layered and symbolically dense work—encompassing painting and writing, stage and costume design, filmmaking and gardening—drew upon philosophy and literature, in addition to his own autobiography, to critically interrogate the world around him.

Blue and the paintings on view evidence Jarman's iconoclastic response to his HIV diagnosis in 1986, his confrontation with his own mortality, and the broader sociopolitical climate of the HIV/AIDS crisis. The monochromatic film *Blue* repudiates images because, according to Jarman, they "hinder the imagination and beg a narrative and suffocate with arbitrary charm, the admirable austerity of the void."¹ Instead, the viewer confronts an unmodified screen of Yves Klein's ultramarine "International Klein Blue" that forces one to internalize the soundtrack of music and sounds produced by Simon Fisher Turner and the disembodied voices of Tilda Swinton, Nigel Terry, John Quentin, and Jarman himself, who read a haunting combination of the artist's own poetry and autobiographical narratives from his hospital diaries. Made after an AIDS-related infection rendered him temporarily blind and following a condition whereby vivid flashes of blue light interrupted his vision, *Blue* not only recounts Jarman's corporeal experiences with the virus, but also demands that viewers viscerally internalize and embody the highly personal and melancholic poetry, descriptions, sounds, and music by denying them images upon which to project and escape.

Similarly, the works on view, a selection of Jarman's Slogan paintings (1992–1993), reject pictorial representation. Jarman scrawls phrases such as "Arse Injected Death Syndrome," "Blind August," and "AIDS Isle" across chaotic and garish expressionist abstract canvases that convey his personal and physical experience of living with AIDS, while critiquing tabloid

¹ Derek Jarman, *Smiling in Slow Motion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p. 198.

sensationalism of the crisis. The paintings also demonstrate Jarman's long-standing interest in language, particularly its representational possibilities as theorized by philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. In fact, the acidic color palette of the Slogan paintings resonates with the vibrant costumes in Jarman's film *Wittgenstein* that was released in September 1993. Hovering between abstraction and language, the paintings subvert the means through which the media and the government address and represent people living with AIDS and the virus. These works linger in the experience of a body failing, and a body being failed by larger systemic bias, inaction, and homophobia.

Derek Jarman is a part of *More Life*, a focused series of curated solo exhibitions presented on the fortieth anniversary of the ongoing HIV/AIDS crisis. For more information, please visit davidzwirner.com.

Derek Jarman (1942–1994) was a legendary iconoclastic multidisciplinary artist. Through filmmaking, painting, writing, and gardening, he offers invaluable insight into the nature of the society in which he lived. His work drew from philosophy and literature as well as his own personal history, and his interests included Heraclitus, alchemy and the writing of John Dee, Shakespeare, contemporary music, Benjamin Britten, and gardening and the history of plants. His groundbreaking use of the Super 8 camera, used in both short and feature-length films, illustrates the same daring innovation as his paintings. His poetry and journals display an immense writing talent and his garden at Prospect Cottage in Dungeness, Kent, is revered by horticulturists worldwide. He was an ardent and forthright campaigner for gay rights, and his work is a powerful testimony to the way he dealt with his HIV status, his sexuality, homophobia in the press and their manipulation of the AIDS epidemic, and to his courageous confrontation with his own mortality.

Upcoming exhibitions of the artist's work will be held at Centre d'art contemporain d'Ivry – le Crédac, Ivry-sur-Seine, France, and Manchester Art Gallery, UK. Recent important solo exhibitions include *PROTEST!*, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (2019); *The Last of England*, Void, Derry, Ireland (2019); and *My garden's boundaries are the horizon*, Garden Museum, London (2020). *Derek Jarman: When yellow wishes to ingratiate it becomes gold* is on view through August 7, 2021, at Amanda Wilkinson Gallery, London.

For all press inquiries, contact
Julia Lukacher +1 212 727 2070 jlukacher@davidzwirner.com
Erin Pinover +1 212 727 2070 epinover@davidzwirner.com