

DEREK JARMAN SEVENTEENTH DAYS

Symposium

15 February 2025



A BLUEPRINT FOR BLISS

Throughout his career, Derek Jarman meticulously documented the planning and research for his creative projects in a series of albums and scrapbooks, which he called 'grimoires'—books of magic and spells, and filled these pages with personal reflections and ideas.

The phrase "a blueprint for BLISS" is found on the inside cover of a volume from 1989, outlining the initial concepts for his final film, *Blue* 1993. This work serves as a memoir of Jarman's formative experiences as a gay man and his confrontation with illness and mortality. Elsewhere in his writing, bliss expresses something radical—something that exists despite oppression and refuses to be diminished by it. He wrote: "Bliss in our mouths, bliss in our hearts, bliss in our bodies."

Similarly, this symposium provides a framework for considering the transcendent qualities of Jarman's art, politics, and lived experience, as well as social and artistic histories that challenge societal norms and stigmatisation and frame queer pleasure as a political act.

11.00am

Acknowledgement of Country

11.10am

Opening Remarks

with José Da Silva

11.30am

Fuck Me Blind

with Blake Lawrence, Jade Muratore, Jamie Dunbar, Lyle Chan, and Kirsty Machon

12.45pm

Lunch Break

1.30pm

Digging in Another Time

with Lisa Beauchamp, Mel Deerson, Ken Davis, and Nick Henderson

2.45pm

Queer Remains

with José Da Silva, Sholto Buck, and Tarik Ahlip

3.45pm

Performance

with Marcus Whale

FUCK ME BLIND

The painting *Fuck Me Blind* 1993 was one of Derek Jarman's final works, created for his 'Evil Queen' series. The phrase, scratched into the paint-smeared surface of his canvas, spoke of excess, humour, subversion, and joy, despite Jarman's bodily deterioration and loss of vision.

This session features presentations by artist-researchers Blake Lawrence and Jade Muratore, who draw on histories of activism and exhibition-making in the UK and Australia alongside Jarman's protest of prejudice and vilification of queer and HIV+ people. Coinciding with the 35th Anniversary of ACT UP Sydney, the session also includes a visual account of the group's actions between 1990–93 by photographer Jamie Dunbar, who discusses his work with composer and activist Lyle Chan, and journalist and activist Kirsty Machon.

Blake Lawrence

Make Mine Oblivion: rage, ruination and salvation at the end

Above a roaring furnace in the shadows of the nuclear power station of Dungeness, found objects—shattered glass, crushed cans, a bible, pillows, cutlery—are blackened and embalmed in melted pitch, and cast upon mattresses, boards, and canvases. In the wake of Jarman's HIV diagnosis in 1986, his catalogue took on a burning, urgent, and combative bent. Blake Lawrence considers Jarman's final insurgent years, and places them in conversation with local artists visualising their own (im-)mortality.

Jade Muratore

Death, desire, devotion: imaging queer sex in the time of AIDS

In the early 1990s, two groundbreaking exhibitions contesting representations of HIV/AIDS were exhibited in the UK and Australia: 'Ecstatic Antibodies: Resisting the AIDS Mythology' (1990–91, UK, curated by Tessa Boffin and Sunil Gupta) and 'Don't Leave Me This Way: Art in the Age of AIDS' (1994, Australia, curated by Ted Gott). In the spirit of Jarman's own artistic practice of doing desire and deviance against pathology and prejudice, Jade Muratore focuses on photographic works from both exhibitions that centre pleasure and sexual encounters in the face of death and discrimination.

Jamie Dunbar, Lyle Chan, and Kirsty Machon

ACT UP: Footsteps on the dancefloor

ACT UP Sydney was a chapter of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, an international activist organisation that worked to end the AIDS pandemic and gain access to new forms of treatment. Coinciding with the 35th anniversary of the founding of Sydney's chapter, Jamie Dunbar shares his photographic archive of the group's actions in discussion with friends, accomplices, and former ACT UP members Lyle Chan and Kirsty Machon.

DIGGING IN ANOTHER TIME

Derek Jarman's home garden in Dungeness symbolised the artist's prolific, generous, collaborative practice, which continued despite illness. In his memoir *Modern Nature*, he writes, "The gardener digs in another time, without past or future, beginning or end."

This session features presentations by curator Lisa Beauchamp and artist Mel Deerson that revisit the garden as a site of memory, resistance, and ceremony throughout Jarman's artmaking and experimental films. Accompanying these talks is a conversation with Ken Davis (Sr Mary Third Secret of Fatima) and curator Nick Henderson on the transformative actions of the Sisters of the Order of Perpetual Indulgence in Sydney and London, the latter canonising Jarman at Dungeness in 1991.

Lisa Beauchamp
The garden is an anchor

Jarman's love for gardens began with a book his parents gifted him as a child entitled *Beautiful Flowers and How to Grow Them*. From this moment to his time at the Slade School of Art and later years at Prospect Cottage, Jarman's passion for landscape has been central to his life and art. Lisa Beauchamp explores the presence of landscape in Jarman's practice with a focus on his paintings and the influence of his move to Dungeness, where he established a garden and wrote extensively on the healing potential of gardening.

Mel Deerson
Dream of the poppy

Throughout his career, Jarman explored the improvisational potential of Super 8 film to create a sense of fragmentary, psychedelic visions or dreams. Mel Deerson explores this spontaneous, visionary energy through the recurring image of the poppy flower in Jarman's work. The poppy is associated with dreams, sleep, and death in European myth and folklore, and its glowing form appears throughout Jarman's films, writing and his garden. An opportunist plant that springs unbidden from disturbed and unkempt soils, the poppy can provide a portal to the improvised dream-world of Jarman's experimental films.

Ken Davis and Nick Henderson
The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence: gay creative political interventions in 1970s and 1980s culture

In 1990, Australian missionary nun Mother Ethel Dreads-a-Flashback (aka Sister Mary Anna-Lingus) introduced a group of activists in London to the Order of Perpetual Indulgence, a global network of queer and trans nuns whose mission is to 'expiate homosexual guilt from all and to replace it with universal joy'. Later, in 1991, the London Order declared Jarman Saint Derek of the Celluloid Knights of Dungeness in one of their most famous canonisations. Ken Davis speaks with Nick Henderson about his experiences as Sister Mary Third Secret of Fatima, giving special reference to Fabian LoSchiavo (Mother Inferior) who was leading light of the Sydney Order. Together they discuss the cultural and political context of the sexual freedom movement in the 1970s and 1980s and creative responses to the Christian Right.

QUEER REMAINS

In their article 'Queer Remains: Derek Jarman's Archives and Medieval Reliquaries', M.K Myerson describes how Jarman drew inspiration from medieval reliquaries – containers for holy relics – to develop practices of queer mourning and memorialisation during the AIDS crisis.

This final session features presentations from curator José Da Silva, poet Sholto Buck, and artist Tarik Ahlip. This session explores tangible expressions of reliquaries in Jarman's archival material, including his recently discovered video experiments, extensive writing, poetry, journals, sketchbooks, and draft scripts for unrealised films to consider their relevance today, and how LGBTQIA+ lives, stories, and bodies are remembered, archived, or unearthed.

José Da Silva
Will You Dance With Me?

Will You Dance with Me? sits adjacent to Jarman's filmography, having only been rediscovered in 2014 by filmmaker and friend Ron Peck who commissioned the footage in 1984. This work isn't so much a film or a documentary, but a document that provides insight into Jarman's first use of video technologies, and the atmosphere of London's gay community in the early 1980s. José Da Silva considers this work as a preparatory drawing, or home movie that captures the halcyon days of London's gay scene, right at the onset of the AIDS epidemic that would soon ravage the city's community, and alter its carefree approach to socialising.

Sholto Buck
Puerile Nonsense? On the poetics of Derek Jarman

Published in 1972, *A Finger in the Fishes Mouth* was Jarman's first and only poetry collection – a book he later dismissed and attempted to erase, leaving only four original copies. Reprinted as a facsimile in 2014, Sholto Buck offers insight into this rarely seen material, problematising Jarman's poetic legacy and the ethics of archival excavation. Buck considers poetry a key process within Jarman's practice, most intensely expressed in his films where text meets image. Buck will read works from the collection alongside two poems commissioned for the 'Derek Jarman: Delphinium Days' exhibition.

Tarik Ahlip
Cold War pastoral

The totality of Jarman's oeuvre encompasses an active chronicle of his times and a restless search for historical echoes. Drawing on his film work, writing, personal archives, and commercial collaborations, Tarik Ahlip will describe how Jarman's reclamation of pastoral lyricism and the historical tense amid the tensions of the Cold War and AIDS crisis prefigured the political postures of an incoming generation of artists.

Marcus Whale
Performance

Marcus Whale makes music, performance, and writing about the ecstasy and horror of desire, the void and the divine. Here, he presents a special performance in response to Jarman's film *Blue*.

DEREK JARMAN DELPHINIUM DAYS

14 February — 4 May 2025

UNSW Galleries stands on an important place of learning and exchange, first occupied by the Bidjigal and Gadigal peoples. We recognise the Bidjigal and Gadigal peoples as the Traditional Custodians of this land, and recognise them as the first sexually, socially, and gender diverse communities to live and love in this area. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present, and extend this respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from all nations of Australia. Sovereignty never ceded.

Derek Jarman: Delphinium Days has been co-developed by Gus Fisher Gallery | The University of Auckland, 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.

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Exhibition public programming curated by Siân McIntyre. Film series presented in partnership with the Art Gallery of New South Wales and curated by Ruby Arrowsmith-Todd.

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**Derek Jarman:
Delphinium Days**
14 February — 4 May 2025

UNSW Galleries
Bidjigal and Gadigal Country
Cnr Oxford St & Greens Rd
Paddington NSW

Wednesday – Friday
10.00am – 5.00pm
Saturday – Sunday
12.00pm – 5.00pm
unsw.to/galleries

Public Programs
At the Sea's Edge
3.00pm Saturday 22 March
& Saturday 12 April 2025

UNSW Galleries

Magic Mirror
A Derek Jarman Retrospective
16 February — 6 April 2025
Wednesdays 2.00pm, 7.15pm;
Sundays 2.00pm

Art Gallery of New South Wales
Naala Nura, South building
Lower level 3, Domain Theatre