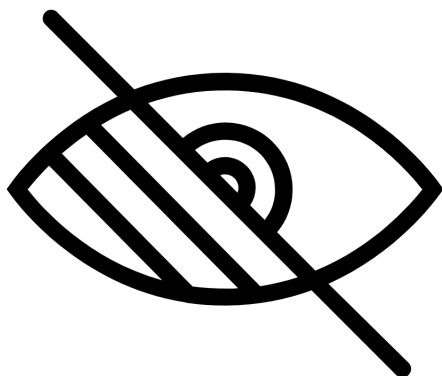


IMMA  
MAIN GALLERIES, WEST WING  
15 NOVEMBER 2019 – 23 FEBRUARY 2020

# Derek Jarman PROTEST!



## Large Print Guide

**PROTEST!** is a major retrospective of the work of Derek Jarman (1942-1994), one of the most influential figures in twentieth century British culture, and marks twenty five years since his death. While acknowledging his influential contribution to film, this exhibition focuses on Jarman's wider practice as a painter, writer, set-designer and activist. **PROTEST!** captures Jarman's concerns with political and personal freedoms arising from the AIDS crisis.

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## **Room One** **BLUE, 1993**

The exhibition opens with Derek Jarman's earliest and latest works: his self-portrait painted when he was a teenager and his last and most radical work in film, **Blue**.

**'Because the virus is invisible'** replied Jarman when asked why this film would not include images, apart from an apparently static screen of International Klein Blue. His final feature film, **Blue** was made shortly before he died of an AIDS related illness in 1994. Jarman was almost blind by 1993 so he turned away from imagery to focus on text and sound. The complex soundtrack is layered with voice-overs and music that feature many of his long-time collaborators including Tilda Swinton, Simon Fisher Turner and Brian Eno. **Blue** is in many ways a requiem to his life's work, both as an artist and activist for AIDS awareness.

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## Room Two

### Early Years

This room demonstrates some of the diverse avenues that Jarman took as a young artist. At school, he explored various media including painting, sculpture and furniture-making. At third-level he studied at King's College, University of London, and later at the Slade School of Art, where he experimented with collage, theatre design and collaborative performance. With an interest in Neo-Romanticism and Existentialism, he combined abstract and figurative styles, and referenced historical imagery in a distinctively contemporary manner. By 1966, at the age of twenty four, his work had already been staged in solo gallery exhibitions and won prizes at amateur art competitions.

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## Room Three

### 1960's and 70's

While at the Slade in the mid-sixties, Jarman worked in a loose, romantic style, quoting classical artists like Nicolas Poussin. After graduation in 1967, he saw early success when a number of his paintings were included in the prestigious **Young Contemporaries** exhibition at the Tate and an Arts Council touring exhibition. Another work won a Peter Stuyvesant Prize for painting.

In the late sixties, his images moved from figuration towards spare and geometric forms. Although disparate in style, the works engage subjects and themes that recur throughout his life: ancient landscape, language and alchemy. His practice became increasingly cross-disciplinary and he made mixed-media, neon and sculptural works that were included in the opening show of the Lisson Gallery, London. In 1973 Jarman made an early Super 8 film, **A Journey to Avebury**, recording his journey to the Neolithic site Avebury Henge. The motifs from the film are carried into his large landscape paintings also seen in this space. This illustrates how a specific subject was explored across the varied media in which he worked.

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## **Room Four**

### **Feature Film Screening Room**

Jarman made a total of eleven feature films between 1976 and 1993. His techniques and subject matter, often deeply political, were both pioneering and influential. Super 8 footage was frequently edited into the feature films. Few follow a traditional narrative but offer open and poetic interpretations. Utilising economic and accessible materials, his working process thrived on collaboration. Jarman was an artist of 'firsts': **Sebastiane** (1976) is often described as Britain's first Queer film, and **Jubilee** (1977) its first Punk film. After his HIV positive diagnosis

in 1986 he made queer lives the central concern of his filmmaking and art practice.

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## **Room Five**

### **1970's**

The 1970s saw marked changes in Jarman's style of painting. This was partly due to limited studio time as he concentrated on filmmaking and theatre design for himself and others. He made many paintings based on his travels around Italy while researching the film **Caravaggio** (finally released in 1986). The content of these paintings can be read as broken statuary on an ancient or Classical site, or as intertwined bodies that suggest physical intimacy. Continuing to use unconventional materials, he made a series of engraved slates containing abstract geometric forms and pyramid shapes that signal his sustained interest in ancient sites. These images are repeated in the film **Garden of Luxor** (1972) seen here.

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## **Room Six**

### **Designing For Others**

Interested in ballet and theatre design since his school years, Jarman was catapulted into top-level design projects in 1968 when Frederick Ashton chose him to design **Jazz Calendar** for the Royal Ballet, London.

The set's backdrops resembled his geometric paintings blown up to a massive scale; his designs had a mood of sharpness and delicacy; and were praised for introducing 'originality and a bright new look to ballet design of the sixties'.

Two years later, film director Ken Russell commissioned him to design sets for **The Devils**, and when Russell directed a 1982 theatre production of Stravinsky's **The Rake's Progress**, Jarman designed the sets and costumes. Working with Russell taught Jarman valuable methods for scaling up his practice to include feature filmmaking. By the early seventies Jarman had become known as 'the Andy Warhol of London' due to his lifestyle and approaches to design. In the late seventies, he began to produce his own films and hire young creatives. He nurtured many talented people early in their careers, including Sandy Powell, Tilda Swinton, Sean Bean, Sally Potter and Joanna Hogg.

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## **Room Seven**

### **Super 8 Screening Room**

From 1970 onwards, Jarman used his Super 8 camera to record his lived environments and relationships. Like Andy Warhol in New York, Jarman greatly expanded the scope of a medium that was originally intended for domestic use. Super 8 offered a poetic, creative and

inexpensive process that was unhindered by the need for technical crews or production budgets. The selection screened here shows how multiple effects and moods were possible from very limited means.

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## **Room Eight**

### **Black Paintings**

Jarman often worked in series that expressed his current interests. While researching the film **Caravaggio**, he began to utilise some of the Renaissance artist's techniques like **chiaroscuro** (the dramatic contrasting of light and shadow). After 1980, he created a new series that he broadly described as 'Black Paintings'. Many contain explicitly sexual images - a radical gesture at a time of increasing political conservatism and homophobia under Thatcher's government. This room is a partial reconstruction of his 1982 solo exhibition at the Edward Tottah Gallery in London.

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## **Room Eight-A**

### **The Angelic Conversation (1985)**

One of Jarman's many innovations was his method of transferring Super 8 and video footage to 35mm film. This allowed him to combine the many visual effects that each format produced. **The Angelic Conversation** is an example

of this at work with its complex layering of images. The film presents Shakespeare's sonnets (read by Judi Dench) from a queer perspective. Jarman's aim was to capture the love affair he imagined to be blossoming between two men.

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## **Corridor**

Returning to the corridor, we find a large illustrated timeline of Jarman's life and work. This places his practice in the context of world events that impacted him and his peers, as well as some points of interest to an Irish audience.

Between the windows are a number of vignettes that briefly introduce some of his activities. These include winning Alternative Miss World in 1975; a few of the radical living spaces he designed; and his unusual clothing creations that doubled as costume and sculptures.

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## **Music Videos**

Music videos became a cultural phenomenon after the launch of MTV in 1981. Musicians used them as the central vehicle to promote their work but also to situate it in specific contexts. Jarman's films were associated with



punk and rebellion so he was commissioned by musicians who wished to align themselves with his vision. He welcomed the opportunity to work with some of Britain's most iconic musicians. Beginning with three promo videos for Marianne Faithfull's 1979 album **Broken English**, Jarman went on to work with The Smiths, Pet Shop Boys, Bob Geldof and Marc Almond, among others.

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## Library

The vitrine holds a series of books selected by Prof. Robert Mills from Jarman's Prospect Cottage library. Jarman was a bibliophile and avid reader whose material, although diverse, represented a continuum throughout his life. As was typical in his practice, the literary bled into the visual: the paintings on the wall quote the philosopher Heraclitus, one of Jarman's touchstones.

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## Poetry

Jarman was an accomplished author of poetry and memoir. The vitrine displays his first published book of poetry entitled **A Finger in the Fishes Mouth** (1972). Composer Donna McKevitt put a selection of his writings to music in 1993. Her album **Translucence** can be heard on the adjacent headphones.

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## NRLA (Third Eye) Installation

In 1989 Jarman staged an exhibition as part of the **National Review of Live Art** at the Third Eye Centre, Glasgow. The gallery space was wallpapered with homophobic headlines from tabloid newspapers, and tarred and feathered mattresses were mounted on the walls. In the centre of the space, two young men rested on a bed encased in barbed wire. This work was considered very provocative at the time due to the media frenzy that surrounded the AIDS crisis. Jarman was one of the only people in the United Kingdom to 'come out' as suffering from the syndrome. The monitor in the alcove is playing an important lecture he gave at the exhibition. He presented a spirited defence of his work and discussed the social and political background to its making.

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## Room Ten Slogan Paintings

The 'Slogan Paintings' were commissioned by Manchester Art Gallery for the **Queer Derek Jarman** exhibition in 1993. These paintings were made in response to the 'AIDS panic' that was fuelled by outrageous headlines in the British tabloid press. Jarman responded by overpainting hatred with sometimes hopeful, sometimes despairing, often funny messages that turn these headlines back on themselves. By this time, his health and eyesight had deteriorated to such an extent that he needed the help of studio

assistants to undertake the heavy work. The ravaged and visceral surfaces of these canvases mirror his physical decline.

The second exhibition from this series, titled **Evil Queen – The Last Paintings** (1994), was shown posthumously at Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester.

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## **Room Eleven**

### **Prospect Cottage**

In this space we see examples of the various works made in, and inspired by, Prospect Cottage: painting, film, sculpture, gardening and writing. Jarman purchased the old fisherman's hut in 1987, shortly after being diagnosed HIV positive. Sitting in the shadow of the Dungeness Nuclear Power plant by the sea in Kent, the surrounding landscape is both bleak and sublime: Britain's only desert.

This time and space away from London allowed the normally gregarious Jarman to enjoy periods of introspection. He had been a gardener all his life, and the garden he created at Prospect Cottage was won from the bare shingle. It combines local plants with sculptures made from flotsam and jetsam and patterns created with pebbles and stones. The garden soon attracted the notice of the public, ironically robbing him of his valued privacy. It survives to this day having been carefully tended after his death by his partner Keith Collins.

Jarman also made small scale paintings in his Prospect studio, read, and wrote a great deal, including his now-iconic memoir **Modern Nature** (1991). His diverse reading material covered poetry, alchemy, the bible, and the writings of psychologist Carl Jung and the Greek philosopher Heraclitus.

Prospect Cottage led directly to the creation of a new series of works that reference his earlier 'Black Paintings'. He introduced three-dimensional elements, and began to include new materials such as smashed glass and mirrors, and pitch (or tar or bitumen) that was used by local houses. The resulting constructions often made sharp comments on society, politics and queer concerns through the combination of found objects and text.

God and religion were never far from Jarman's mind after 1987. A devout atheist, his fixation on religion derived from his conservative education where his sexuality was severely punished. He combines religious icons purchased in junk shops with the paraphernalia of war and sex. Used condoms, spent bullets, rosary beads, and wedding rings all find their way onto his canvases. These unexpected juxtapositions create images that immediately jar and confront social and religious norms.

## **Catalogue**

**PROTEST!** will be accompanied by a fully-illustrated catalogue published in association with Thames & Hudson with contributions from curator of the exhibition Seán Kissane, Charlie Porter, Chrissie Iles, Christopher Lloyd, Philip Hoare, John Maybury, Jon Savage, Jonny Bruce, Karim Rehmani White, Mary Cremin, Michael Charlesworth, Norman Rosenthal, Olivia Laing, and Peter Tatchell. The catalogue will be available early in 2020.

## **Associated Talks and Events**

For details of IMMA talks and events programmed in association with this exhibition, please see the IMMA website at [www.imma.ie](http://www.imma.ie)

This exhibition is curated by Seán Kissane, Curator: Exhibitions, IMMA; assisted by Benjamin Stafford, Assistant Curator: Exhibitions, IMMA.

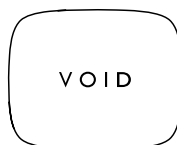
Have a question about an artwork? Want to know more? Ask a member of our Visitor Engagement Team, easily identifiable through their blue lanyards.





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Front cover:

Derek Jarman wearing the **Dollar Bill Cape** circa 1970.  
Photo courtesy Raymond Dean

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