

ARTFORUM

Derek Jarman

ELIZABETH DEE GALLERY

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Derek Jarman, *In the Shadow of the Sun*, 1974, still from a Super-8 film transferred to video, 54 minutes.

Like Stan Brakhage, British independent filmmaker, painter, and writer Derek Jarman was an avid diarist, a maker of “home movies”: *Sloane Square*, 1976, consists of collaged footage of friends and collaborators hanging around his space. Warhol, it has been said, also made home movies, but in contrast to the Factory’s stark and still productions, Jarman’s films emphasize superimpositions and fast cuts. Accentuating the jumpiness of Super-8 with artful editing—stop-frame filming and dissolves—Jarman honed a language that looks back through the history of avant-garde film and forward to music videos (he made several, notably for the Smiths, among other bands). Echoing Kenneth Anger’s, Jarman’s filmic gaze lingers on beautiful boys, occult symbols, and objects. He relied on repetition and a lyricism that was loosely associative rather than narrative. Though Jarman was a bit late for avant-garde film, directors like Genet, Cocteau,

and Pasolini provided inspiration for his works and, more specifically, permission to portray a new kind of visceral sexuality that was right on time for the nascent queer movement.

In his autobiographical volume, *The Last of England* (1987), which was published in the US as *Kicking the Pricks* in 1998, Jarman writes, “Andy Warhol’s world of transvestites, transsexuals and very sexy boys seemed like the best thing in the world. . . . I knew I couldn’t fit in; I hadn’t lost my passion for the Gregorian chant.” His mesmerizing fifty-four-minute film *In the Shadow of the Sun*, 1974—in which a Dorian Gray–esque figure and his voyeur appear intermittently amid fields of crackling oranges, reds, blues, and purples, as well as shadows, fire, tarot cards, and pyramids—exemplifies how Jarman made his seemingly contradictory impulses his own.

— *Amoreen Armetta*

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