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Almost Bliss
Notes on Derek Jarman’s Blue

29th January 2014 – 15th March 2014
Private View: 28th January 2013, 6.00 – 8.30pm

Almost Bliss is a contemplation on the filmmaker, artist, writer, and activist Derek Jarman. This blue-lit installation centres on a set of Jarman’s hand painted and carefully written notebooks, giving insight into the artist’s creative thinking towards his seminal late film work, Blue. The dates of the exhibition encompass both the date of Jarman’s birth on 31st January 1942 and the date when he died, February 19th 1994, sadly marking the 20th anniversary of the artist’s death.

Almost Bliss gives a sense of what could have been, alluding to the tragedy of Jarman’s premature demise from AIDS related illness aged 52 and referring to the evidence that ‘Bliss’ was the original title for what was to become the film Blue (“Bliss” is etched into a fragment of glass on the cover of the first notebook and the title page announces ‘A Blueprint for Bliss’). Almost Bliss is also the title of a 1990 album of ambient music by Simon Fisher Turner who composed the soundtracks for many of Derek Jarman’s films including Blue.

The exhibition makes reference to two earlier installations linked to Jarman: one by Mark Wallinger in 1994 and another by Peter Fillingham with Keith Collins in 1999. The Wallinger installation was part of a show entitled Every Now and Then by the curatorial collective, Rear Window and set in the Kensington galleries and home of the art dealer Richard Salmon. Prior to his death, Derek Jarman had used one of these purpose built Victorian studios to make his large scale visceral paintings with his assistant and friend Karl Lydon. Wallinger’s installation preserved the atmosphere of the working studio minus the artist; Jarman’s painting paraphernalia - brushes, paints, etc were left in place along with his paint splattered overalls draped over his old armchair. Around the walls were blank canvases and in the middle of the room, a grand piano and the sound of a piano being tuned, giving an overwhelming sense of the potential of all of the art that was never made.

The second reference is to Peter Fillingham and Keith Collins’ Blue rooms for the 1999 exhibition Stimuli at the Witte de With in Rotterdam. Fillingham was invited by former
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CHELSEA space

Witte de With Director, Chris Dercon, (currently Director of Tate Modern) to participate in a group exhibition around the themes of physical and hallucinatory experience. Peter Fillingham took Derek Jarman’s Blue as his starting point but, as a close collaborator of Jarman’s, he chose not to make an archive show but rather to create an ambient environment in which to contemplate and celebrate his late friend. Lights and windows were covered in blue gels and photographed pages of Jarman’s Blue notebooks were shown in vitrines (the pages were photographed by Donald Smith, now Director of CHELSEA space and curator of Almost Bliss).

In the blue tinted CHELSEA space installation three notebooks with hand painted gold covers are shown closed whilst facsimile pages of the notebooks line the walls of the exhibiting space. Almost Bliss includes prints, books, a canister of test cinefilm and other ephemera related to Jarman’s Yves Klein-inspired monochrome movie. The show also provides an informal reading room for the new book Derek Jarman’s Sketchbooks which reveals the full scope of his working ideas and creative processes. Derek Jarman’s importance becomes ever clearer and his influence is growing amongst a generation that he sadly never met.

- Ends -

Exhibition curated by Donald Smith.

Publication
As with each exhibition at CHELSEA space, a new illustrated publication will accompany the show.

Press Information
For further information, images or to discuss interviews please contact: Karen Di Franco or Daisy McMullan at CHELSEA space via email info@chelseaspace.org or tel: 020 7514 6983

Notes to Editors
• Images and further information are available upon request
• About: CHELSEA space is a public exhibiting space, sited on the Millbank campus of Chelsea College of Art & Design, where invited art and design professionals are encouraged to work on experimental curatorial projects. See: www.chelseaspace.org
• In copy please refer to CHELSEA space and not ‘The Chelsea space.’
• Gallery opening times: Tue – Fri: 11:00 – 17:00, Sat: 10:00 – 16:00
• Private view: 28th January 2013, 18:00 – 20.30
• Admission Free

Chelsea College of Art is one of the world’s leading art and design institutions. Located at Millbank, next door to Tate Britain, Chelsea specialises in Fine Art, Graphic Design and Interior and Textiles Design. Since its origins in the 19th century, the College has produced many of the greatest names in the arts, including: Quentin Blake (illustrator and author) Ralph Fiennes (film and stage actor), Anish Kapoor (sculptor), Steve McQueen, (artist), Chris Ofili (artist), Alan Rickman (film and stage actor), Alexei Sayle (comedian) and Gavin Turk (sculptor).

Operating at the heart of the world’s creative capital, University of the Arts London is a vibrant international centre for innovative teaching and research in arts, design, fashion, communication and the performing arts. The University is made up of six Colleges: Camberwell College of Arts, Central Saint Martins College of Arts and Design, Chelsea College of Art and Design, London College of Communication, London College of Fashion and Wimbledon College of Art. Renowned names in the cultural and creative sectors produced by the University include 12 Turner prize winners and over half of all nominees, 10 out of 17 fashion designers named British Designer of the Year, more than half of the designers showcased in London Fashion Week and 12 out of 30 winners of the Jerwood Photography Award.