In the Beginning

David Zwirner highlights artists lost to AIDS early in the epidemic.

October 4, 2021 By Trent Straube

This year marks 40 years since the first published report of the disease now known as AIDS. To coincide with this milestone, David Zwirner galleries in New York City and London curated More Life, a series of solo exhibitions of artists who died of AIDS-related complications during the first half of the epidemic.

Four exhibitions and various related events ran this summer, highlighting the works of painter and filmmaker Derek Jarman, photographer Mark Morrisroe, filmmaker Marlon Riggs and the Silence=Death Project, which created several iconic posters. Beginning this fall, four other artists will be exhibited, all painters: Ching Ho Cheng, Frank Moore, Jesse Murry and Hugh Steers.

The show's title, More Life, "is a reference to the last lines of Tony Kushner's seminal play Angels in America," says Alec Smyth, who is the associate director of sales at David Zwirner and one of the organizers of the AIDS art series. "[The title] speaks to what we hope the exhibition will do: bring more attention and life to this group of artists."

Don't worry if you can't visit a gallery in person. DavidZwirner.com features images from the shows, along with the phenomenal resource "AIDS in the Art World: A Timeline," which was created with help from the What Would an HIV Doula Do? collective. The website also includes a video conversation, "AIDS Counternarratives," featuring Avram Finkelstein, Gregg Bordowitz, Joy Episalla and Pamela Sneed.

To narrow their gallery exhibitions down to eight artists, More Life organizers combed through the Artists+ Registry at Visual AIDS (you can peruse this archive online as well!). "We gravitated toward artists who have not had as much mainstream notoriety as Keith Haring and Robert Mapplethorpe," Smyth explains. "We hope that these exhibitions will be an entry point for more people to engage with this group and the many others who were lost."



"Act Up" by Derek JarmanCourtesy of David Zwirner

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