



Dear ACT UP: London

We want to thank you for sharing these concerns with us and giving us the opportunity to respond. We are eager to explore the critical discussions this project continues to generate and we respect your responses to the artworks.

Firstly, we can confirm that these works are a part of Studio Voltaire's presentation of David McDiarmid's *Rainbow Aphorisms* project. Documentation of the more recent iterations of the project have not yet been updated on our website.

Rainbow Aphorisms is a year-long offsite project presenting a series of public works shown intermittently across sites in London, particularly in Clapham and Brixton. Over the last year, sixteen works from David McDiarmid's *Rainbow Aphorisms* series have appeared at various locations including Two Brewers, the façade of Studio Voltaire, Brixton Underground station, and other temporary locations.

David McDiarmid (1952–1995) was an Australian artist, designer and activist, recognised for his prominent and sustained artistic engagement in issues relating to queer identity and history. *Rainbow Aphorisms* are a series of printed multiples, produced from 1993 until the artist's death in 1995 of AIDS-related illnesses. McDiarmid produced these works in response to his own, and his community's, experience of the AIDS crisis, and the multiple forms of devastations it manifests – political, emotional, intellectual and medical.

In the *Rainbow Aphorisms*' series, the artist was fascinated by the power of the aphorism to contain a whole conceptual and cultural world. Bold sans-serif texts are superimposed on a ground of full spectrum rainbow colours referencing Gilbert Baker's rainbow flag (1978) – "THE FAMILY TREE STOPS HERE", "HONEY HAVE YOU GOT IT?", "I'M TOO SEXY FOR MY T-CELLS", "THAT'S MISS POOFER TO YOU ASSHOLE". Whilst some works reference the virulence of tabloid newspapers responses to AIDS and become ironic statements, others are poignant and melancholic personal observations of its devastating effects and the wider crisis.

Although McDiarmid is a seminal figure in the evolution of LGBTQI culture in Australia and his work is in the national collections of the British Museum and Art Gallery of New South Wales, this is the first solo presentation of McDiarmid's work in the UK. McDiarmid wanted these works to be seen in the public realm and to be available to a large number of people, as he felt that "the audience for a gallery exhibition is extremely small and privileged" (David McDiarmid in his talk: *A Short History of Facial Hair* given at *HIV: Towards a Paradigm*, for the National Centre for HIV Social Research, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, 1993). As curators of the project, we are very honoured to help to bring the works of this important artist to a wider public. It was our desire to help bring an underrepresented queer voice to a wider audience and contribute to both the historic and current narratives around HIV and AIDS.

We have worked with a range of artists, writers, academics and activists to expand the dialogue and explore the themes of the works in greater depth through talks, walking tours, performances and film screenings including David Hoyle, Dr. Sally Gray, Paul Flynn, Catwalk4Power and Theo Gordon, Huw Lemmey and Rebel Dykes.

We value ACT UP: London's response to the series. It was never our intention in presenting the series to cause any distress or upset, especially to those who are affected by HIV and AIDS. We take on board the concerns and issues in presenting this work in the public realm without giving appropriate context. At a number of the sites, we were able to provide further information on the wider project via information panels. Unfortunately this was not possible when the works were postered across numerous temporary locations. We decided not to include any further information (including our website) on the works and to present them as the artist had originally intended. We were concerned that if we had done so the artworks might be misread as adverts or promotions. We now understand how this work in the series, when presented without any context and in isolation, can be read out of context. We apologise to those who were caused distress or upset.

Studio Voltaire is committed to supporting underrepresented and emerging voices to a wider public. We remain open to discussion and criticism, and welcome any individuals or groups affected by this to contact us directly to continue this critical dialogue. We have included further information about the project below.

With best wishes,

Laura Harford, Curator (Participation) and Joe Scotland, Director
Studio Voltaire

About the artist:

David McDiarmid (born 1952 Hobart, Tasmania, died 1995 Sydney, Australia) was an Australian artist, designer and activist, recognised for his prominent and sustained artistic engagement in issues relating to queer identity and for making one of the most significant contributions to the culture of HIV/AIDS internationally.

He was the first gay man to be arrested in Australia for protesting for gay rights with the Sydney Gay Liberation in 1972. His first solo exhibition *Secret Love*, held at Sydney's Hogarth Galleries in 1976, featured collages explicitly exploring gay male sexuality, anti-gay legislation and public and private sexual hypocrisies.

McDiarmid lived and worked in New York from 1979 to 1987. After returning to Australia at the end of 1987, he immersed himself in community art projects, working tirelessly for HIV/AIDS awareness. He created posters for ACON: the AIDS Council of NSW, was the creative Director of Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras and worked with people from the HIV Living Group.

About the project:

David McDiarmid's *Rainbow Aphorisms*, are a series of public works shown intermittently across sites in London (November 2017-November 2018). Over the course of a year, artworks were installed at various locations including neighbouring LGBTQ+ venue Two Brewers, the façade of Studio Voltaire, Brixton Underground station, temporary billboard sites at Clapham High Street Bridge, South Lambeth Road, Clapham Junction Station and Wandsworth Road Station and across various sites London wide.

studiovoltaire.org/exhibitions/archive/david-mcdiarmid