

THE FULL SPECTRUM

David McDiarmid's Rainbow Aphorisms

sally gray



Project Sisu Publications
PO Box 487, Ashfield NSW 1800
Australia
info@projectsisu.com
www.projectsisu.com

© Sally Gray, 2012

Copyright on artworks used in this publication is held by the copyright holder, Sally Gray.



Published in association with the exhibition *The Rainbow Aphorisms of David McDiarmid* at Neon Parc, 1/53 Bourke Street, Melbourne, 31 October - 24 November 2012.

The moral right of the author has been asserted.

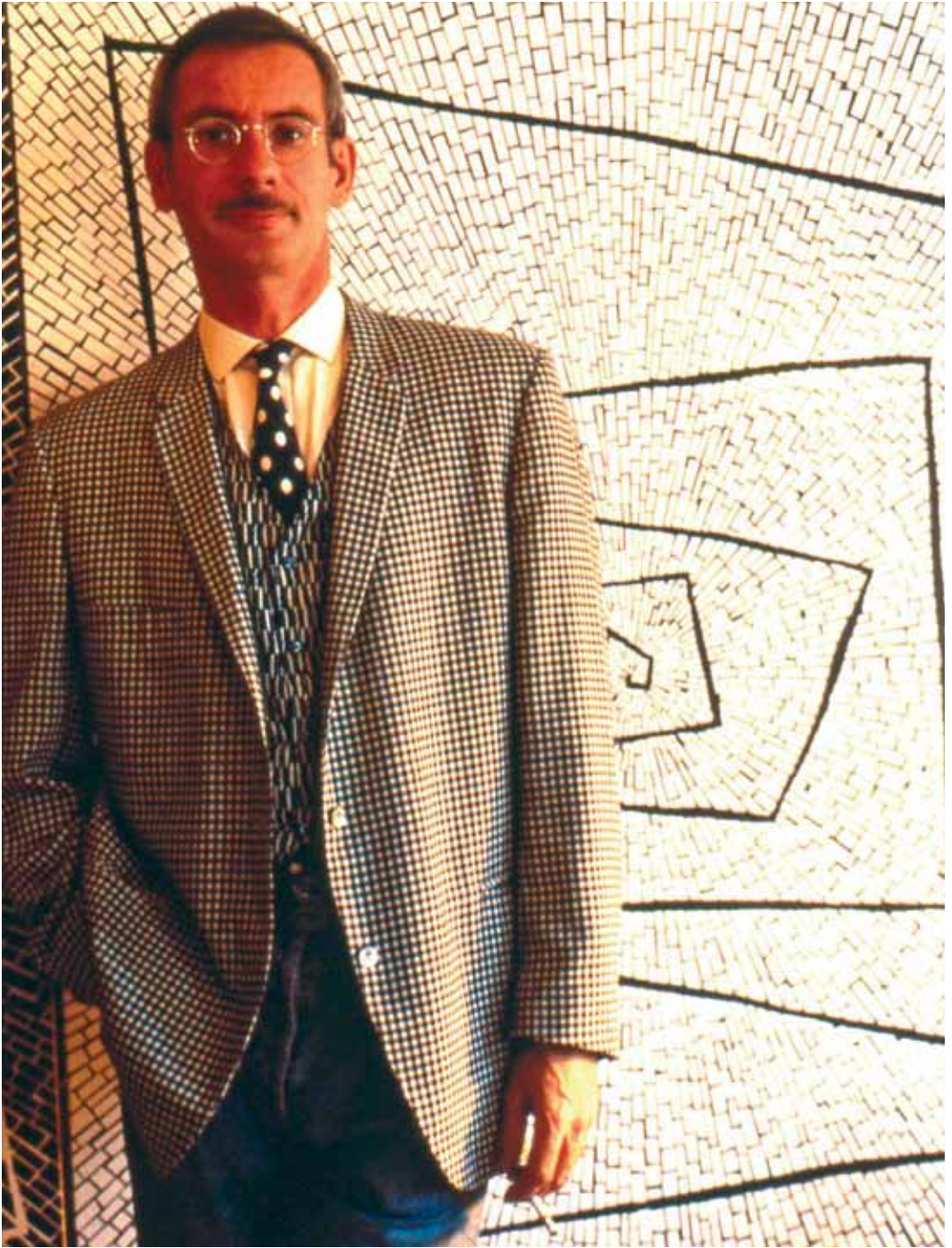
All rights reserved. Apart from any use as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part may be reproduced or communicated to the public by any process without prior written permission from the copyright owner and publisher of this book.

Designed by Anthony Wells, Pro Bono Publico
Printed in Sydney by PLT Print Solutions

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry
Author: Gray, Sally
Title: *The full spectrum: David McDiarmid's rainbow aphorisms* /Sally Gray
ISBN: 978-0-9874226-0-6 (pbk.)
Includes bibliographical references
McDiarmid, David 1952-1995
Art, Australian--20th century
Gay artists--Australia--Biography
Gay men--Australia--Biography
Gay activists--Australia--Biography
AIDS activists--Australia--Biography
AIDS (Disease)--Social aspects--Australia
Dewey Number: 709.94

I wanted to express myself and I wanted to respond to what was going on and I wanted to reach a gay male audience. I wanted to express very complex emotions and I didn't know how to do it ... I was in a bit of a dilemma. I thought, well, how can I get across these complex messages. I didn't think it was simply a matter of saying gay is good.

David McDiarmid, 1992

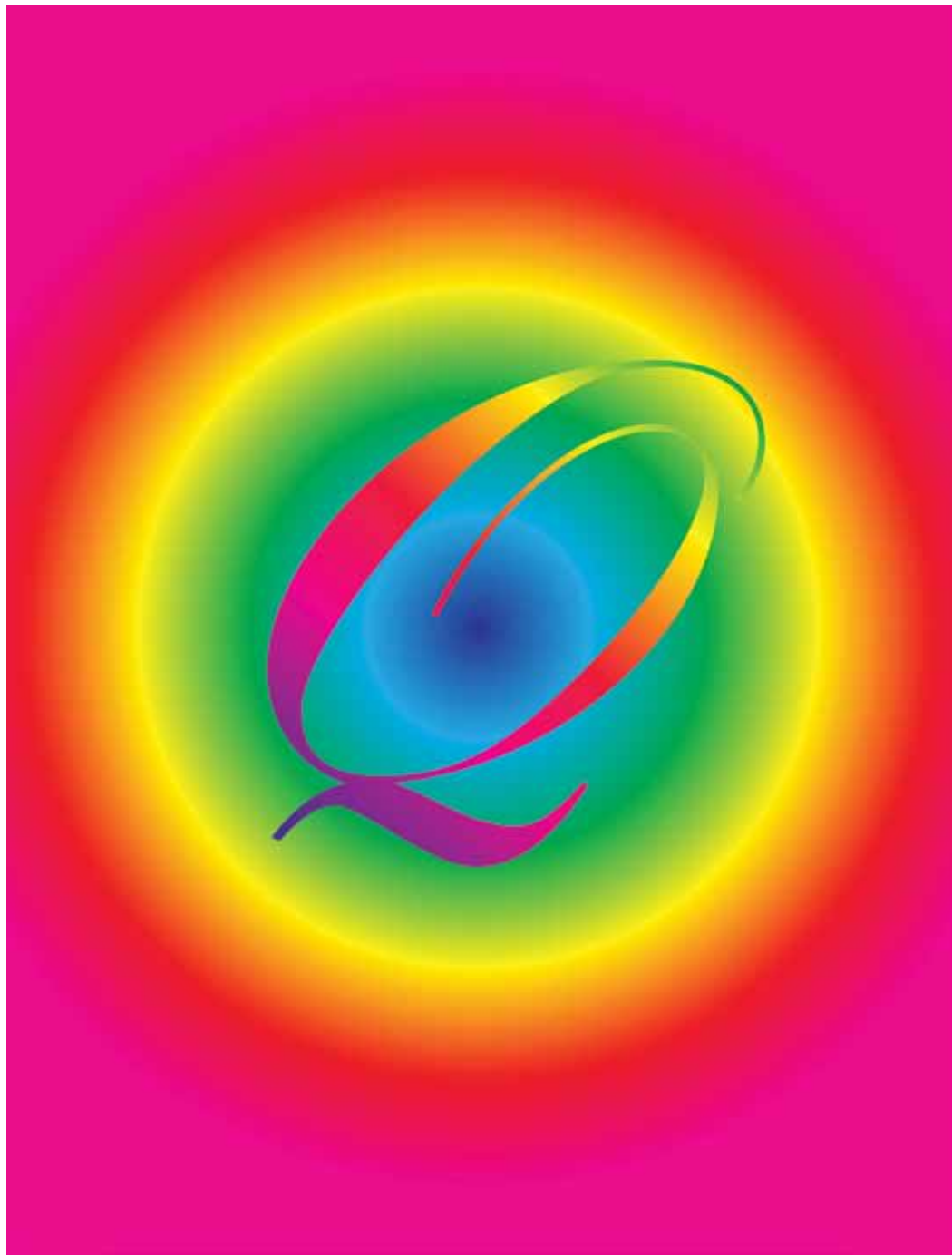


David McDiarmid, Sydney, 1993, photographer C. Moore Hardy, reproduced with permission

THE FULL SPECTRUM

David McDiarmid's Rainbow Aphorisms

sally gray



THE FULL SPECTRUM

To make your own suffering into a vehicle of parody, to refuse to exempt yourself from the irony with which you view all social identities, all performances of authorised social roles, is to level social distinctions. By disclaiming any pretence to be taken seriously and by foregoing any personal entitlement to sympathy, sentimentality, or deference, you throw a wrench into the social machinery of depreciation. When you make fun of your own pain, you anticipate and pre-empt the devaluation of it by others. ¹

So writes queer theorist David Halperin, analysing the democratic impulse in the camp, ironic humour animating David McDiarmid's *Rainbow Aphorisms*.

In February 1995 Australian queer artist David McDiarmid produced a large site-specific work for the tympanum of the neo-classical facade of the state Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney. Commissioned by curator Judy Annear for the 1995 *Australian Perspecta*, a biennial survey of Australian contemporary art, the work consisted of a large rainbow-streaked, rococo-styled *Q*, laser-printed on a fuchsia vinyl ground and affixed to the architecture of the building. McDiarmid seized this rhetorical opportunity to brand the art museum as queer:

His huge *Q*, shot through with the rainbow colours of the queer flag, filling the tympanum that crowns the museum entrance, is both a signal to the world outside and an appropriation of the world within the institution. Typically McDiarmid makes no concessions, retaining that oblique significance which characterises the queer flag itself. ²

¹ David Halperin (2012) discussing camp humour in *How to Be Gay*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass. and London, p188.

² Mathew Jones, (1995) "David McDiarmid" in Judy Annear (Ed) *Australian Perspecta 1995*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney.

**FIERCE
BITCH
SEEKS
FUTURE
EX-HUSBAND**

The *Q* was part of McDiarmid's *Rainbow Aphorisms*, a series of printed multiples, produced from 1993 until his death of AIDS-related conditions in May 1995. As David became more ill, his skill at computer graphics allowed for continuous production of art work when day-to-day health issues impacted on mood and mobility. Creating work on screen, in domestic space (as opposed to a separate studio), enabled a high level of productivity until the end of his life; no materials needed to be brought in, nothing needed to be lifted or reached for. The only outside production needed was the Canon laser copying service a short walk or bus ride from his apartment in Goulburn Street, Darlinghurst.³

David McDiarmid (1952-1995) produced the *Rainbow Aphorism* series in 1993-95 in response to his own and his community's experience of the devastations - political, emotional, intellectual and medical - of the AIDS crisis.

I wanted to express myself and I wanted to respond to what was going on and I wanted to reach a gay male audience. I wanted to express very complex emotions and I didn't know how to do it ... I was in a bit of a dilemma. I thought, well, how can I get across these complex messages. I didn't think it was simply a matter of saying gay is good.⁴

David had been diagnosed HIV+ in New York in 1986 and, consistent with his whole career, he turned his sero-positive status to creative and political purpose. His sexual subjectivity had been the driver, the subject matter and the creative modality for his art since his first exhibition at Hogarth Galleries in Sydney in 1976. McDiarmid exhibited in several important solo and group shows in Sydney between 1976 and 1979; he later moved to New York where he lived between 1979 and 1987. That year he returned to Sydney, "to die", as he put it with his characteristic camp hyperbole.⁵ McDiarmid's art, produced in Sydney and New York, traced his trajectory as a politically conscious and sexually alert gay man - from the identity politics of the 1970s through to the queer cultural politics of AIDS in the 1980s and 1990s. From the beginning of his career David was on his own path. Never interested in the orthodoxies of the contemporary art world, he maintained an unfashionable interest in the decorative and in vernacular visual culture; his work was born postmodern.

³ McDiarmid taught himself Photoshop and Illustrator computer graphics after-hours at the Mardi Gras art workshop in 1990 when he was Artistic Director of Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras: "Mardi Gras bought a \$22,000 computer and I fell in love with it," he recounted in a letter to a friend in New York. "It's an Apple Mac 11CX - top of the line graphics machine and it's a dream", David McDiarmid, in Sydney, letter to Paul Angelo, in New York, March 1989 and October 1989

⁴ David McDiarmid, interviewed by Carmela Baranowska 1992 transcript (no date)

⁵ David McDiarmid (1993) "A Short History of Facial Hair", an essay presented at the conference, AIDS Towards a Paradigm, Melbourne April 1993, subsequently published in Jill Julius Matthews (Ed) (1997) *Sex in Public: Australian Sexual Cultures*. St Leonards NSW, Allen and Unwin: 91-96. "A Short History of Facial Hair" is also now a 15 minute digital film directed by Hermano Silva (2012).



**DARLING,
YOU MAKE
ME
SICK**

A gay life in art

McDiarmid's oeuvre, including the *Rainbow Aphorisms*, is excessive not just in its baroque visuality and its thrusting intellectual import but also in the fact that it exceeds the categories hitherto allowable for interpreting gay male art. Yes, his work covered seventies identity politics and, yes, the later work encompasses the more sophisticated political conceptualisation of queer. However McDiarmid's oeuvre also proposes that a particular sexual subjectivity implies an aesthetic, political and cultural stance, a viewing position or vantage point on 'reality' - as controversially argued by David Halperin in his 2012 book *How to be Gay*.⁶

McDiarmid's numerous suites of work between 1976-1995 are serial iterations of this proposal: each carried a distinct creative modality and aesthetic, and each advanced his current, always unfolding, ideas of what it was to be a gay man.⁷ The work encompassed painting (1983; 1991); calligraphic graffiti on cotton bed-sheets (1984); printed multiples (1978; 1993); works in hand-sewn plastic (1976; 1977; 1978), linoleum cut-outs (1977); collage on mulberry paper (1978) drawing (1976: 1991); holographic Mylar foil mosaic ('Disco Kwilts' 1979-82 and 'Kiss of Light' works 1991); artist's books (1993). Each suite of work uncovered another domain of enquiry into what it was to live as a gay man and as a gay artist with HIV/AIDS. These were inseparable for him. David was:

... acutely aware of the dilemma facing gay artists who wanted to comment upon their lives as gay men. He was witheringly bored by the 'I'm an artist first, and a gay artist second' stance that may lead to greater commercial acceptance, but can also result in greater invisibility.⁸

McDiarmid was simultaneously a gallery artist and a community activist designing posters for Gay Liberation dances and events; for Mardi Gras parties, festivals, film festivals and parades; Leather and Pride parties. He designed the globally well-received Safe Sex campaign posters of 1992 for the AIDS Council of New South Wales and World AIDS Day posters for The Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations. He was artistic director of Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras (1988-90) creating memorable floats and street sculptures for Mardi Gras parades.

⁶ David Halperin [2012] op cit

⁷ For an outline of McDiarmid's career see pages 29-34. For an analysis of that career see Sally Gray (2006) *There's Always More: The Art of David McDiarmid*, PhD thesis, University of New South Wales, <http://unsworks.unsw.edu.au/fapi/datastream/unsworks:1695/SOURCE02>

⁸ Ted Gott (2002) "Don't Forget to Remember: The Art of David McDiarmid" *Art Monthly Australia*, August 2002

**WHEN
I WANT
YOUR
OPINION
I'LL GIVE IT
TO YOU**

McDiarmid also had a parallel fashion design practice creating hand-painted fabrics for fashion designer Linda Jackson and made his own range of hand-crafted suede garments for sale through Jenny Kee's Flamingo Park 'frock shop' in Sydney. His calligraphic T-shirts, derived from his 1984 'Bedsheet Painting' series, were seen on dance floors in Sydney, New York and London. The gay male and African American inventions of Disco and House music provided inspiration for his art, generating the 'Disco Kwilt' series of 1979-82. He was a DJ for Mardi Gras parties and gay clubs, making the unforgettable compilation 'Funeral Hits of the 90's' in 1993.

A camp trickster

The *Rainbow Aphorisms* operate within an excessive totalising queer politics inseparable from the artist's sero-positive and full blown AIDS status. They upset the liberal, repressive tolerance of normative culture by calling its bluff through an insistently perverse linguistic *twisting*. The trickster figure, who *twists* received reality, is one of the animators of McDiarmid's creative vision. Originating in both Western cultural traditions and in the African American lineage of hipness, the trickster is the outsider who teases, speaks in code, unsettles moral certainties and generally disrupts; "working the gap between words and their meanings."⁹ The playful and perverse character of the trickster "undermine[s] all the positions on the board."¹⁰ Tricksters don't merely work towards a 'better world'; they undo the certainties of the current world, including certainties about who's on top and who's not, what is understood to be 'true' and what's not. Tricksters are individualists who provocatively poke at culturally received myths. Their revelations, just like camp humour and irony, first circulate among the initiated, "the enlightened few."¹¹

The *Rainbow Aphorisms* employ an encoded camp and hip sensibility to convey ferociously witty messages foregrounded by sugary colours. The main playground for tricksters, as John Leland remarks in his book on hip, is language. Overloaded language like, *Fierce Bitch Seeks Future Ex-Husband*, 'shades' its receivers in the manner of the divas in *Paris is Burning* who, as McDiarmid remarks in his performed essay 'A Short History of Facial Hair', "read and shade their sisters into oblivion".¹²

⁹ John Leland (2004) *Hip, The History*. New York, Ecco and Harper Collins. op cit. pp162-163.

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ Leland. (2004). Op cit. pp164-166

¹² David McDiarmid (1993) "A Short History of Facial Hair", an essay presented at the conference, AIDS Towards a Paradigm, Melbourne April 1993, subsequently published in Jill Julius Matthews (Ed) (1997) *Sex in Public: Australian Sexual Cultures*. St Leonards NSW, Allen and Unwin: 91-96.

HONEY,

HAVE

YOU

GOT IT?

Conceptually and visually the *Rainbow Aphorisms* evolved from McDiarmid's use of tabloid headlines in the famous visual obituary, *Moody Bitch Dies of AIDS* in *The Sydney Star Observer*, for his best friend and collaborator, the artist Peter Tully, after Tully had died of AIDS-related conditions in Paris in August 1992. McDiarmid's subsequent works 'Standard Bold Condensed' (1992) and 'Toxic Queen' (1993) extended his use of homophobic headlines in a radical *détournement* - questioning everything about established cultural assumptions and power relations.

The politics of camp

The *Rainbow Aphorisms* continue in this trajectory, juxtaposing the outrageous, trivial and the deeply serious, an emblematic ploy of camp. The 'cheap trick' of unrestrained rainbow colour along with biting humour and deep import - *Darling You Make Me Sick* - echoes Jack Babuscio's account of the politically communicative potential of camp. As Babuscio puts it, camp through its style, aestheticism, humour, and theatricality, allows us to witness serious issues with temporary detachment. He claims, as one of the strategies of camp, a "bitter-wit" as a means of dealing with a hostile environment.

Society says to gays [and to all stigmatised groups] that we are members of the wider community; we are subject to the same laws as "normals"; we must pay our taxes and so on; we are in short, "just like everybody else". On the other hand, we are not received into society on equal terms; indeed we are told that we are unacceptably "different" in ways that are absolutely fundamental to our sense of self and social identity. In other words the message conveyed to us by society is highly contradictory: we are just like everyone else, and yet ... we are not. It is this basic contradiction, this joke, that has traditionally been our destiny.¹³

Not surprisingly, this contradiction has produced particular perceptions of the world; a knowingness about the hegemonic world's lack of acceptance and comprehension in the face of alterity. It produces a particular expression in artistic efforts, like McDiarmid's: "Like other oppressed groups gays have developed skills out of ... the need to concentrate on strategy when the rules are stacked against us," says Babuscio.¹⁴

¹³ Jack Babuscio (1993) "Camp and the Gay Sensibility". *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality* in D. Bergman (Ed) Amherst, Mass., University of Massachusetts Press: 19-37, p27.

¹⁴ *ibid*

THAT'S
MISS
POOFTER
TO YOU
ASSHOLE

The political power of the *Rainbow Aphorisms* lies in McDiarmid's refusal to see his situation as other than what it is. Pain and rage is fuel for the humour in the work. As David Halperin writes:

Unlike the kind of mockery that fortifies you in an illusory sense of immunity to what other people are going through, that insulates you from their [or your] suffering, the sort of trivialization that is involved in this type of [camp] humour is not an exercise in denial. For despite its outrageous impertinence, it has an egalitarian, inclusive thrust: it implies that no tragedy, not even yours, can or should claim so much worth as to presume an unquestionable entitlement to be taken completely seriously – that is, to be taken straight – in a world where some people's suffering is routinely discounted.¹⁵

The *Rainbow Aphorisms* cut straight to the point when it comes to revealing and 'outing' the not-so-hidden animosity straight society holds for queers. *When I Want Your Opinion I'll Give It To You* asserts a perverse speaking position in opposition to the normative whose centrality it simultaneously exposes and unseats. It turns that centrality against itself, syntactically and semantically shifting the subject/object positions of the riposte. We cannot decipher it – complete its meaning – unless we unseat the authority of the normative. The greatest rewards in these works are reserved for those who 'get it'. *Honey, Have You Got It?* refers in an in-group way to the AIDS virus but also equally to the simple enquiry – Do you get it? Are you hip to what's going on? The works employ linguistic strategies Karl Keller describes as camp "invention of awkward intensities in syntax and metaphor," an extravagance of style and a tone of voice which is "too much" and which entertains with its "flamboyant playfulness." *Its My Party And I'll Die If I Want To* fully intends its "erratic range, its arbitrary intensities".¹⁶

¹⁵ David Halperin (2012) op cit p187

¹⁶ Karl Keller (1993) "Walt Whitman Camping" in *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality*. (Ed) D. Bergman. Amherst, Mass., University of Massachusetts Press: 113-120

**IT'S MY
PARTY,
AND I'LL
DIE**

**IF I WANT TO,
SUGAR**

Injurious language and homophobia

The bold rainbow epithets both repudiate, and at the same time embrace, the “injurious language” of homophobia. *That’s Miss Poofter To You Arsehole* asserts a confident queer speaking position by inverting a common insult. This semantic move unsettles, repudiates and potentially overcomes the insult - perhaps casually hurled from a passing car at a gay man. Judith Butler writes of how “injurious speech” which “derogates and demeans” the person to whom it is addressed, can be “returned” to its speaker in a different form. She suggests that it can be cited against its “originary purposes” and perform a “reversal of effects.”¹⁷ Discussing language, power and agency, Butler proposes the possibility that by reiterating injurious language against its originary purposes the threatening speech act has a “future it never intended.”

The political possibility of reworking the force of the speech act against the force of injury consists in misappropriating the force of speech from those prior contexts. The language that counters the injuries of speech, however, must repeat those injuries without precisely re-enacting them. Such a strategy affirms that hate speech does not destroy the agency required for a critical response.¹⁸

As Butler says, it’s not that the word loses its power to injure but that we ask the question: “How does a word become the site for the power to injure?” She claims that the “de-contextualising and re-contextualising [of] such terms through radical acts of public misappropriation” (such as the *Rainbow Aphorisms*) potentialises the agency of the injured subject.¹⁹

In this “radical act of public misappropriation”, David McDiarmid uses a strategy he employed for over twenty years in his queer world-making. He refuses to indulge (by crediting it with legitimacy) straight society’s norms and aspirations. In this way he enacts what Butler calls a “felicitous performative act” from which something follows - a changed view of legitimating social norms, a changed, reappropriated meaning for ‘poofter’ or ‘queer’.²⁰

¹⁷ Judith Butler (1997) *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, New York and London, Routledge, p14.

¹⁸ Butler op cit pp 40-41.

¹⁹ Butler op cit p14.

²⁰ Butler op cit p100

**HAIRY
DYKE
BOY
SEEKS
SHAVE
FROM
FAGGOT**

This linguistic twisting and unsettling of subject/object relations resonates with the African American linguistic game of ritual insult known as 'the dozens'.²¹ The Civil Rights activist H. Rap Brown was known as a skilled exponent of this linguistic signifying form whose virulent energy is encapsulated in the title of his 1969 autobiography, *Die Nigger, Die*.²² This wilful troubling of meaning (and of liberal democratic notions of 'tolerance') confuses the viewer, reader or listener unless they are 'in the know' in the hip or camp sense mentioned above. *Hairy Dyke Boy Seeks Shave From Faggot* uses the kind of relentlessly non-complying language of H. Rap Brown's *Die Nigger Die*.

Re-deploying gay male lineage

The *Rainbow Aphorisms* reference, as did McDiarmid's work in the 1970s, his favourite homosexual antecedents and the idea of gay male history, politics and sensibility. The series includes ironically slanted, coded references to Walt Whitman; *So Many Pills So Little Time Sweetie* paraphrasing Whitman's "So many comrades, so little time" which had in turn generated the popular T-shirt aphorism "so many men so little time" associated with the gay male urban sexual revolution.²³ Oscar Wilde's *Only the Shallow Know Themselves* is appropriated from Wilde's *Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young* (1882) carrying, in McDiarmid's version, an implicit critique of convictions about 'real', unified and authentic subjectivity; the 'depth subject' on which normative Western culture is built.

The 1993 campaign to lift the ban on gays in the United States military is referenced in *Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Die Alone* which lays bare the so-called 'gay survival strategy' of adopting a low profile and attempting to be invisible, a strategy advocated by some gay and straight spokes-people in relation to gays in the military. The strategy of 'Don't Ask Don't Tell', potentially lethal when applied to AIDS and the cultural politics of safe/unsafe sex, was seen by McDiarmid as an example of the re-instated closet. Silence and the hiding of one's status (whether sexual orientation or HIV status) was a ploy he vehemently rejected, echoing ACT-UP's famous dictum *Silence=Death*.

²¹ McDiarmid's work from 1979 was strongly inflected by his experience of African American urban culture, especially musical culture, see Sally Gray (2007) "Reinterpreting a Textile Tradition - David McDiarmid's Klub Kwilt", *Textile History*, The Journal of the Pasold Research Fund (38: 2 November 2007) pp198-210.

²² Leland op cit p 173

²³ Keller op cit p114

SO MANY

PILLS

SO LITTLE

TIME

SWEETIE

Miss Thing, Our Skills Are Indispensable to The Advancement Of Civilization resonates with the knowingly outrageous text of a leaflet entitled "Queers Read This", claimed by some as the founding statement of Queer Nation. Reputedly dropped by helicopter on the Gay Pride Parade in New York in June 1990, it read: "We've given so much to [the] world [at large]: democracy, all the arts, the concepts of love, philosophy and the soul, to name just a few gifts from our ancient Greek Dykes and Fags".²⁴ This excessive, ironic slant on the notion of a 'queer world history' is, as David Halperin says, a way to:

... acknowledge, promote, and support a heterogeneity of queer identities, past and present. There is more than one strategy for entering into a queerer future.²⁵

Beyond blood

The Family Tree Stops Here Darling refuses the normative, biologically-reproductive, narrative trajectory which gives both power and legitimacy to heterosexual subjectivity. As Roland Barthes claims, "narrative form" and "family structure" are one.²⁶ Forms of sexuality separated from procreation are "ec-centric, consigned to the margins, to the asides, the footnotes, the prefaces of a text", says Robert Martin writing of Barthes' *écriture gai* and the [ec]centricity of non-normative sexuality.²⁷ *Family Tree...* brings to a full-stop that hetero-normative narrative. Meaning will have to be construed differently, queerly, outside linear bloodlines.

McDiarmid reclaimed the marginal not only by moving the marginal to the centre, but also by questioning the notion of the margin itself. The sex-positive messages embedded in all of his work are part of a queer political insistence on bliss, heat, energy, transcendence and excess. His oeuvre is based on an understanding that by re-eroticising life we prevent it being channelled into the *something else* of normative culture. McDiarmid's work allies itself with the idea that sexual energy is autonomous, not harnessed to biological reproduction and the productive economy of sublimation which in the West is understood as the basis of culture. The operation of excess and pleasure underpins McDiarmid's entire oeuvre. His work continually insists on a *more*, reaching beyond notions of production, utility and consumption.

²⁴ Quoted in David Halperin [2002] *How to do the History of Homosexuality*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, p16.

²⁵ *ibid*

²⁶ quoted in Robert Martin [1993] "Roland Barthes: Towards an "Écriture Gaie" in *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality* in D. Bergman (Ed) Amherst, Mass. University of Massachusetts Press: 282-298, p292

²⁷ *ibid*

**ONLY
THE
SHALLOW
KNOW
THEMSELVES**

Full spectrum colour

The visuality of the *Rainbow Aphorisms*, works off the “power of the superficially satisfying image” as Mandy Merck and Chris Townsend put it.²⁸ As in all of his work, McDiarmid is conscious of the political, ideological and affective implications of his chosen materials, techniques and aesthetic. His choice of vibrant full spectrum colour gives a passing nod to the rainbow symbolism of gay community politics, evoking the ‘rainbow flag’ of gay activism and identity politics. The works teeter on a fine point between an ecstatic “falling into” colour, and the camp verbal abrasion of the text.²⁹ They employ the full seductive artifice, the “culpable eloquence” which intense colour represents in Western art and philosophy, privileging “pure pleasure” over restraint and reason.³⁰ The playful visceral pleasure of the *Rainbow Aphorisms* juxtaposes disease, death, fear, rage, abjection, resistance and mortality with visual excess, pleasure and glamour.

²⁸ Mandy Merck and Chris Townsend [2002] *The Art of Tracey Emin*. London, p13.

²⁹ David Batchelor [2002] *Chromophobia*, London, Reaktion Books, p37

³⁰ Jacqueline Lichtenstein [1993] *The Eloquence of Colour: Rhetoric and Painting in The French Classical Age*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford, University of California Press, pp100-107

**DON'T
ASK,
DON'T
TELL,
DIE
ALONE**

References

- Babuscio, Jack (1993) "Camp and the Gay Sensibility" in D. Bergman (Ed) *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality*, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press: 19-37
- Batchelor, David (2002) *Chromophobia*, London, Reaktion Books
- Butler, Judith (1997) *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, New York and London, Routledge
- Gott, Ted (2002) "Don't Forget to Remember: The Art of David McDiarmid", *Art Monthly* Australia, August 2002
- Gray, Sally (2006) *There's Always More: The Art of David McDiarmid*, PhD thesis, University of New South Wales, <http://unsworks.unsw.edu.au/fapi/datastream/unsworks:1695/SOURCE02>
- Gray, Sally (2007) "Reinterpreting a Textile Tradition - David McDiarmid's Klub Kwilt", *Textile History*, The Journal of the Pasold Research Fund (38: 2 November 2007) pp198-210
- Halperin, David (2002) *How to do the History of Homosexuality*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press
- Halperin, David (2012) *How to Be Gay*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass. and London, p188
- Jones, Mathew (1995) "David McDiarmid" in Judy Annear (Ed) *Australian Perspectives* 1995, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
- Keller, Karl (1993) "Walt Whitman Camping", in D. Bergman (Ed) *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality*, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press: 113-120
- Leland, John (2004) *Hip, The History*, New York, Ecco and Harper Collins
- Lichtenstein, Jacqueline (1993) *The Eloquence of Colour: Rhetoric and Painting in The French Classical Age*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford, University of California Press
- Martin, Robert (1993) "Roland Barthes: Towards an "Ecriture Gaie" in D. Bergman (Ed) *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality*, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press: 282-298
- McDiarmid, David, (1989) letter to Paul Angelo in New York, March 1989 and October 1989
- McDiarmid, David (1992) interviewed by Carmela Baranowska 1992 transcript (no date)
- McDiarmid, David (1993) "A Short History of Facial Hair", in Jill Julius Matthews (Ed) (1996) *Sex in Public: Australian Sexual Cultures*. St Leonards NSW, Allen and Unwin: 91-96
- Merck, Mandy and Townsend, Chris (2002) "The Eminent Domain: The Cultural Location of Tracey Emin" in M. Merck (Ed) *The Art of Tracey Emin*, London, Thames and Hudson: 6-21

**MISS THING,
OUR LABOUR
AND SKILLS
ARE INDISPENSIBLE
TO THE
ADVANCEMENT
OF
CIVILIZATION**

DAVID MCDIARMID

Career Outline

Born Hobart 1952, raised and educated Melbourne, died Sydney 1995

Lived and worked Melbourne, Sydney (1972-79) and New York (1979-87)

Represented in:

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; Powerhouse Museum, Sydney; State Library of NSW, Sydney; British Museum, London; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Bendigo Art Gallery, Bendigo; Ballarat Fine Art Gallery, Ballarat; Queensland State Library, Brisbane; University of Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane; Private collections in Australia, USA, Europe, Japan and Britain.

Art/Design/Exhibitions:

- 1972 design and layout *Sydney Gay Liberation Newsletter*
- 1975 design and layout *Gay Liberation Papers*
- 1976 solo exhibition 'Secret Love', Hogarth Galleries, Sydney
- 1977 solo exhibition 'Australian Dream Lounge', Hogarth Galleries, Sydney
- 1978 solo exhibition 'David McDiarmid New Work', Hogarth Galleries, Sydney
- 1978 group exhibition 'Homosexual and Lesbian Art', Watters Gallery, Sydney
- 1978 'Strine Shrine' installation (with Peter Tully), Hogarth Galleries, Sydney

- 1978 group exhibition, 'Mistresses and Masterpieces', Fourth Annual Gay and Lesbian Conference, Paddington Town Hall, Sydney

- 1979 solo exhibition 'Trade Enquiries', Watters Gallery, Sydney

Moved to New York 1979, returned to Sydney for, or sent work to, the following solo and group shows:

- 1980 group exhibition 'Summer Show', Watters Gallery, Sydney
- 1980 group exhibition 'Art Clothes', curator Jane de Teliga, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
- 1981 group exhibition 'The Harbour Bridge Show', curator Ursula Prunster, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
- 1982 group exhibition 'The Australian Experience: Elements of Change', Crafts Council of Australia Gallery, Sydney
- 1983 group exhibition 'Hogarth Galleries 10th Anniversary Show', Sydney
- 1984 solo exhibition 'David McDiarmid New Work', Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney
- 1985 group exhibition, 'Sydney Gay Mardi Gras Art Exhibition', The Print Source Gallery, Sydney
- 1985 group exhibition, 'Flamingo Park and Bush Couture', curators John McPhee and Robyn Healy, Australian National Gallery, Canberra

**THE
FAMILY
TREE
STOPS
HERE
DARLING**

- 1986 commissioned by Sydney Gay Mardi Gras Association, to design Sydney Gay Mardi Gras poster
- 1986 group exhibition, 'Plastic Rubber and Leather: Alternative Dress and Decoration', curators John McPhee and Robyn Healy, Australian National Gallery, Canberra

While in USA McDiarmid supplied Linda Jackson with hand-painted fabrics and designed interior fabrics, he exhibited at:

- 1980 Signature Fabric collection, Etalage, New York.
- 1980 Oasis Club Mural, Florida, through Childs/Dreyfus Group.
- 1981 group exhibition Cinzano poster competition, touring Britain
- 1983 'Wall Art' Childs/Dreyfus Group, Chicago
- 1986 'Down Under' show, Club Zero, New York

1987 returned permanently to Sydney

- 1987 group exhibition "Mardi Gras Festival Exhibition' Hogarth Galleries, Sydney
- 1988 Artistic Director Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras
- 1988 group exhibition 'Australian Decorative Arts 1788-1988', curator John McPhee, Australian National Gallery, Canberra
- 1988 group exhibition 'Mardi Gras Show', Roslyn Oxley Gallery, Sydney
- 1988 group exhibition 'G'Day Gala'h', curator Brian Sayer, Yuill Crowley Gallery, Sydney
- 1990 Commissioned by Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Association, to design Mardi Gras posters and banners
- 1990 group exhibition 'Pink Summers', Paddington Town Hall, Sydney

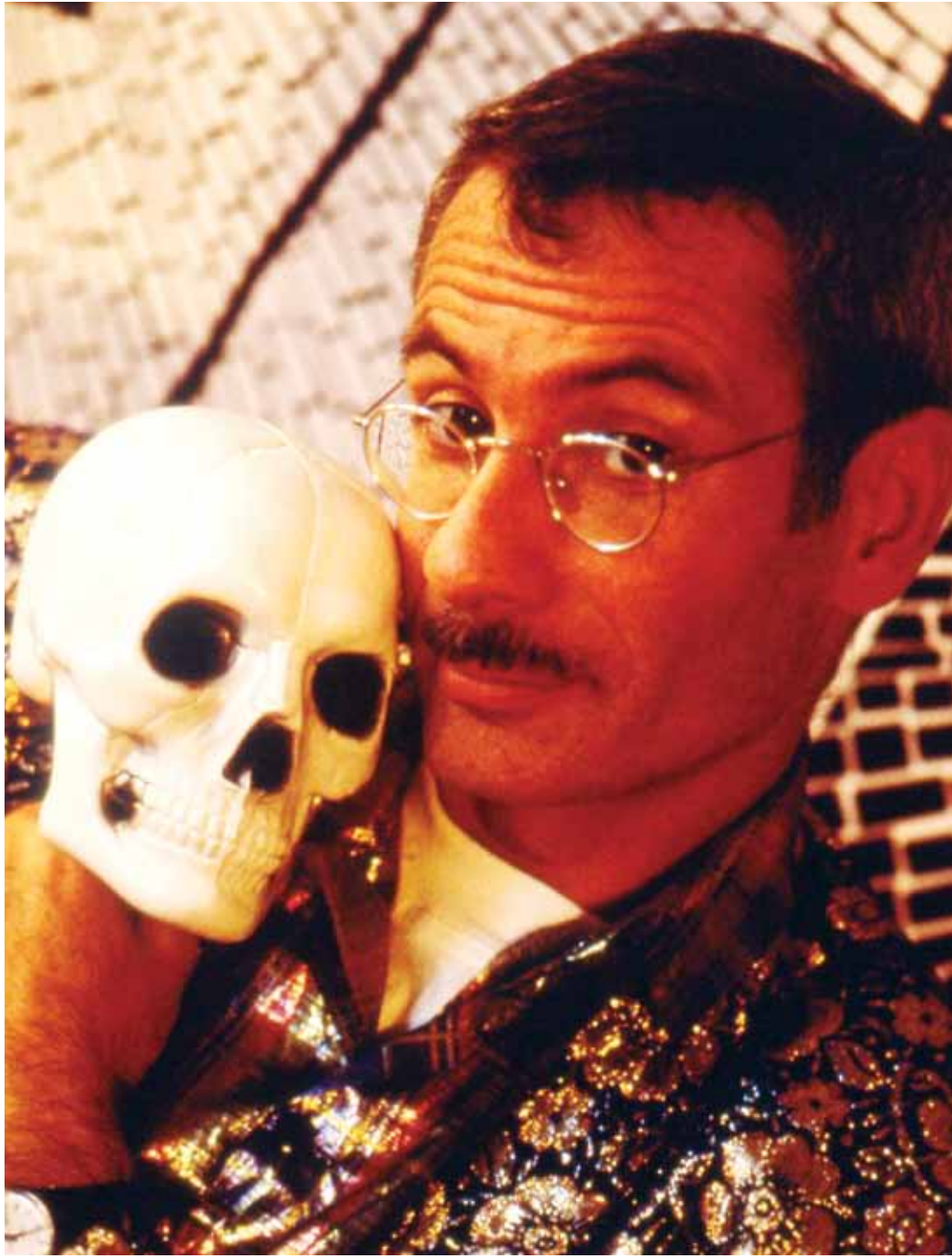
- 1991 Poster/catalogue design for 'Urban Tribalism and Beyond: Peter Tully', curator John McPhee, National Gallery of Australia (McDiarmid designed all of Tully's exhibition posters from the mid 1970s until Tully's death in 1992)
- 1991 group exhibition 'Beauty and the Beast', Tin Sheds Gallery, University of Sydney
- 1991 solo exhibition 'Kiss of Light', Syme Dodson Gallery, Sydney
- 1992 commissioned by the AIDS Council of New South Wales (ACON) to design Safe Sex campaign posters, launched at Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney April 1992
- 1992 group exhibition 'The Phallus and its Functions', curator Sam Schonbaum, Ivan Dougherty Gallery University of New South Wales, Sydney
- 1992 group exhibition 'Stormy Weather' curators Juliana Engberg and Jane Trengrove, Monash Studios Exhibition Space, Melbourne and then to Warrnambool Art Gallery and Mildura Arts Centre.
- 1992 group exhibition Access Art project, Sydney.
- 1992 Third Australian Contemporary Art Fair, Melbourne, with Suzanne Biederberg Gallery, (Amsterdam)
- 1992 group exhibition 'Don't Push It', NSW Department of Health HIV/AIDS education campaign, Inner Circle Gallery, Sydney
- 1992 McDiarmid's ACON Safe Sex campaign posters translated into a series of float structures for the (1993) Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras parade.

- 1992- 1993 group exhibition 'Your are Here: An Exhibition of Works by Gay Male Artists', curators Scott Redford and Luke Roberts, Institute of Modern Art Brisbane, then McDonald Street Gallery, Sydney, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia
- 1993 'Toxic Queen' Limited Edition artist's book, exhibited Mary Place Gallery, Sydney
- 1993 As community artist designed 'Day of the Dead' sculpture for the ACON PLWA float for 1993 Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras parade, Sydney
- 1993 group exhibition 'Death', curators Felicity Fenner and Anne Loxley, Ivan Dougherty Gallery University of New South Wales, Sydney
- 1993 group exhibition 'The Streets as Art Galleries: Walls Sometimes Speak' Poster Art in Australia', curator Roger Butler, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
- 1993 group exhibition 'Nine Artists', Barry Stern Galleries, Sydney
- 1993 group exhibition 'Leather Pride Week: Images of a Dark Sexuality', The Warehouse, Sydney
- 1993 group exhibition 'Theme AIDS', Heinie-Onstad Art Centre, Norway
- 1993 group exhibition 'AIDS Culture/ Culture AIDS', Flughafen Tempelhof, and ACUD Gallery, Berlin
- 1993 group exhibition AIDS Culture/Culture AIDS, Adelaide
- 1993 group exhibition 'Myth Fantasy and Reality', The Warehouse, Sydney
- 1993 group exhibition 'Fighting Back: The Arts of AIDS Education', Drill Hall Gallery Australian National University, Canberra
- 1993 group exhibition 'Mardi Gras 1993', Mary Place Gallery, Sydney
- 1993 Commissioned by Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO), to design World AIDS Day posters, stickers, t-shirts, postcards
- 1993 Commissioned by Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO), to design t-shirts, postcards, for IXth International Conference on AIDS, Berlin
- 1993 Commissioned by, Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Association, to design Sydney Gay and Lesbian Film Festival posters
- 1993 Film 'Positive Art', director Greg Shears, ABCTV
- 1993-1994 group exhibition 'The Australian Scarf', curator Rosie Nice, Hyde Park Barracks, Sydney
- 1994 ArtsLaw Australia talks and formulation of publication on artists' wills and estate planning in the context of AIDS
- 1994 group exhibition 'Darkness+Light= Legends' TAP Gallery, Sydney
- 1994 group exhibition 'Two Weeks' Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne
- 1994 group exhibition 'Re-Iterations: Imaging the Future', Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney
- 1994 'Funeral Hits of the 90s', limited edition, 60-minute audio-cassette
- 1994 group exhibition 'Don't Leave me This Way: Art in the Age of AIDS', curator Ted Gott. National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

- 1994 Commissioned by AFAO to design poster for Fifth National Conference of People with AIDS
- 1995 Appointed to the Australia Council's Community Cultural Development Board
- 1995 group exhibition 'Active Agents: AIDS Art in Australia', First Draft Gallery, Sydney
- 1995 group exhibition 'Australian Perspectives', curator Judy Annear, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
- 1995 May 25, McDiarmid died of AIDS-related conditions, Sydney**
- Posthumous exhibitions**
- 1995 group exhibition, Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne
- 1996 group exhibition 'Recent Acquisitions', National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
- 1996 group exhibition 'AIDS and Art', Latrobe University, Carlton campus, Melbourne
- 1996-7 group exhibition 'Recent Acquisitions of Contemporary Australian Art', National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
- 1996 Film 'Toxic Queen' on McDiarmid, director Fiona Cunningham-Read, co-produced SBS Independent, Martien Coucke, Bart Groen
- 1997 'A Short History of Facial Hair' by David McDiarmid published in *Sex in Public: Australian Sexual Cultures*, (Ed) Jill Julius Mathews, Sydney, Allen and Unwin
- 1997 solo exhibition 'Body Language', Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne
- 1997 group exhibition 'Absolutely Mardi Gras: Costume and Design of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras', curators Judith O'Callaghan et al, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney
- 1996-7 'Recent Acquisitions of Contemporary Australian Art', National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
- 1997 'Tea Without Cake', curator Sam Schonbaum, Raw Nerve Gallery, Sydney
- 1998 Film 'Sadness: The Documentary', William Yang, produced Michael McMahon, Film Australia
- 1998 group exhibition 'Works on Paper', National Gallery of Australia
- 1998 group exhibition 'Flesh + Blood: A Sydney Story 1788-1988', curator Ace Bourke, Museum of Sydney
- 1999 group exhibition 'Artists and Cartoonists in Black and White', curators Joan Kerr, Jo Holder and Craig Judd, S. H. Ervin Gallery, Sydney
- 1999 group exhibition 'One Risk Diverse Responses, Australian HIV/AIDS Campaigns 1985-1999', curators Raymond Donovan and Leong Chan, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney
- 1999 group exhibition 'Funk de Siecle: Out of this Century', Museum of Modern Art Heide, Melbourne
- 1999 group exhibition 'Contemporary Art from the Collections of the National Gallery of Victoria', curator Jason Smith, NGV, Melbourne
- 2000 group exhibition 'Recent Acquisitions', curator Ted Gott, Museum of Modern Art Heide, Melbourne
- 2000 McDiarmid inducted into the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame, City Recital Hall, Sydney

- 2001 group exhibition 'Blondies + Brownies: Multiculturalism and Racism in the Old and New World', curator Rafael von Uslar, Root Cellar, Aktionsforum Praterinsel, Munich, in association with Fritz Bauer Institut, Frankfurt
- 2001 group exhibition 'Inside Out: Sculpture from the Collection', Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne
- 2001 group exhibition 'Desire', curators Robert Buckingham and Rachel Young, RMIT Gallery, Melbourne
- 2002 group exhibition 'Fieldwork: Australian Art 1968-2002', curators Jason Smith and Charles Green, Ian Potter Centre for Australian Art, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
- 2002 group exhibition 'With You and Without You: Revisitation of Art in the Age of AIDS', curator Royce Smith, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, University of New South Wales
- 2002 group exhibition 'Dead Gay Artists', curator Robert Lake, Tin Sheds Gallery, University of Sydney
- 2003 group exhibition 'On Paper: Australian Prints and Drawings', curator Kirsty Grant, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
- 2008 group exhibition 'Order and Dissent: Works from the Heide Collection', Museum of Modern Art Heide, Melbourne
- 2008 group exhibition 'Look! New Perspectives on the Contemporary Collection', curator Alex Baker, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
- 2011 group exhibition 'Out of Australia', curator Stephen Coppell, British Museum, London
- 2011 solo exhibition 'David McDiarmid: A Short History of Facial Hair', curators Sally Gray and Magda Keaney, The Fashion Space Gallery, University of the Arts London
- 2011 group exhibition 'Manstyle', curators Roger Leong, Katie Somerville et al. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,
- 2011 group exhibition 'Sculpture and the Painted Relief', Museum of Modern Art Heide, Melbourne
- 2011 group exhibition 'Forever Young: The Heide Collection: Thirty Years', Museum of Modern Art, Heide Melbourne
- 2012 'Linda Jackson Bush Couture', curator Laura Josic, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
- 2012 Film 'A Short History of Facial Hair' (from a 1993 illustrated essay by McDiarmid), director Hermano Silva, co-producers Sally Gray, Magda Keaney, Leanne Wierzba and London University of the Arts, London, Berlin, Sydney.
- 2012 group exhibition 'Ace Bourke: A Collector's Journey' Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Arts centre, Sydney
- 2012 solo exhibition 'David McDiarmid's Rainbow Aphorisms', Neon Parc Gallery, Melbourne
- 2014-2015 (forthcoming solo exhibition) 'Don't Forget to Remember: David McDiarmid', career retrospective, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

David McDiarmid, Sydney, 1994., photographer C. Moore Hardy, reproduced with permission





David McDiarmid (1952-1995) was Australia's leading gay artist. He was the first to exhibit out-of-the closet gay liberationist art in the 1970s, and a world-recognised figure in the cultural politics of AIDS during the 1980s-90s. McDiarmid's 1993-95 *Rainbow Aphorism* series of digital prints on paper are visually arresting witticisms on gay male subjectivity in the face of the experience of AIDS. With a fearless intensity they challenge the oppressive normative platitudes amplified by the epidemic.



Dr Sally Gray is a cultural historian who writes and lectures on art and fashion history. David McDiarmid's friend for twenty years before his death, she was executor of the McDiarmid estate and has been the copyright holder and curator of his artistic legacy since his death in 1995.

Photography:

David McDiarmid, Sydney 1995, William Yang, reproduced with permission
Sally Gray, Sydney 2012, Grant Turner/Mediakoo, reproduced with permission

ISBN 978-0-9874226-0-6

