



EXPERIMENTA

The Blue Description Project + discussion

The Blue Description Project

Christopher Robert Jones, Liza Sylvestre, Sarah Hayden
Blue Description Project
2024. 81 mins. Digital

Blue (original credits)

Directed by:

Derek Jarman

©: Basilisk, Uplink

Production Companies:

Basilisk, Uplink

Presented by:

Channel Four

In association with: Arts

Council of Great Britain,

Opal, BBC Radio 3

Producers:

James Mackay,

Takashi Asai

Production Co-ordinator:

Angela Connealy

Production Accountant:

Chris Harrison

Associate Director:

David Lewis

Written by: Derek Jarman

Titles: General Screen

Enterprises

In 1993, Derek Jarman released *Blue*, an epoch-defining account of AIDS, illness, and the experience of disability in a culture of repressive heteronormativity and compulsory able-bodiedness. Despite being referred to as a feature film, *Blue* never existed exclusively in one medium. It was screened in theatres, simulcast on television and radio, released as a CD, and published as a book, creating opportunities for many different kinds of sensory abilities – visual, aural, and textual – to experience the work.

The formats in which *Blue* existed before its formal release, and the various modes in which it was made available simultaneously, decentralise its content and resist simplistic and reductive characterisations that claim it is a film with ‘no image’, with ‘nothing to look at’ but a ‘single static shot’ of International Klein Blue that you ‘watch ... for the film’s 79 minutes’. *Blue* provides multiple points of access that are not indexed by a ‘primary’ or ‘intended’ format through which to experience the work. *Blue*’s formal variants allow us to reflect upon the ways that art leverages a series of ability-based assumptions (read *requirements*) to construct an interpretive space for the work to be parsed or understood. *Blue* complicates singularly formatted work and reveals the degree to which that singularity relies upon wilful inaccessibility.

‘If I have overlooked something you hold precious – write it in the margin.’ (Derek Jarman, *Chroma*, 1994)

Taking up Jarman’s invitation to write in the margin, the BLUE DESCRIPTION PROJECT builds on the multifaceted nature of Jarman’s work through newly

Colour by: Technicolor

Composer:

Simon Fisher Turner

Musicians:

Jhonn Balance, Gini Ball,

Marvin Black, Peter

Christopherson, Markus

Dravius, Brian Eno, Tony

Hinnigan, Danny Hyde,

Jan Latham Koenig,

Marden Hill, King of

Luxembourg, Miranda

Sex Garden, Momus,

Vini Reilly, Kate St John,

Simon Fisher Turner,

Richard Watson,

Hugh Webb

Music Recording

Engineer: Markus Dravius

Music Recorded at:

Wilderness Studio

Sound Design:

Marvin Black

Re-recorded at:

De Lane Lea

Re-recording Mixer:

Paul Hamblin

With the voices of:

John Quentin

Nigel Terry

Derek Jarman

Tilda Swinton

UK 1993©

79 mins

Digital

commissioned and expansive accessibility. Reflecting *Blue's* standing as a foundational work of Crip art, the project challenges ableist hierarchies in art while focusing on the generative possibilities of difference and interdependence.

The BLUE DESCRIPTION PROJECT (BDP) is produced by Liza Sylvestre and Christopher Robert Jones (*Crip* – Cripistemology and the Arts*) in partnership with Sarah Hayden (*Voices in the Gallery*). BDP is made possible by a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, with support from the College of Fine and Applied Arts at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and additional support from the Southampton Institute for Arts and Humanities HEIF Research Stimulus Fund.

Liza Sylvestre is a transdisciplinary artist and research assistant professor within the College of Fine and Applied Arts at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign where she has co-founded the initiative Crip* – Cripistemology and the Arts. Her work has been shown internationally at venues such as the Weisman Art Museum (Minneapolis), John Hansard Gallery (Southampton), ARGOS (Brussels), and Museum für Moderne Kunst (Frankfurt). Sylvestre has been the recipient of numerous grants and fellowships, most recently a Joan Mitchell Foundation Fellowship and a Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Fellowship. She has been artist-in-residence at the Weisman Art Museum and the Center for Applied and Translational Sensory Science and in 2019, she received a Citizens Advocate Award from the Minnesota Commission of the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing. Sylvestre's work has been written about in numerous publications and books including *Art in America*, *Mousse Magazine*, *Ocula Magazine*, *Art Monthly*, and *SciArt Magazine*.

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Christopher Robert Jones is an artist and writer based in Illinois. Their research revolves around the 'failure' or 'malfunctioning' of the body and how those experiences are situated at points of intersection between Queer and Crip discourses. They are a regular contributor to *Art Papers* magazine and their work has recently been exhibited at the Krannert Art Museum, Gallery 400, and the Weisman Art Museum. Jones is the co-founder of Crip* – Cripistemology and the Arts, a transdisciplinary initiative that is housed within the College of Fine and Applied Arts at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, where they are also a research assistant professor.

Sarah Hayden is a writer and Associate Professor in Literature and Visual Culture at the University of Southampton. From 2019–2023, she led 'Voices in the Gallery', a research, writing and curatorial project on intersections of voice, text and access in contemporary art, funded by the AHRC. In 2022, she developed *slow emergency siren, ongoing: Accessing Handsworth Songs* in partnership with LUX. Recent writings include essays on Charlie Prodger for *Secession Vienna*, Sharon Hayes for *Bricks from the Kiln*, and captioning as 'unvoiceover' for *Angelaki*.

Thanks to everyone who so generously contributed their descriptions to the Blue Description Project. Warm thanks to Elaine Lillian Joseph and Corvyn Dostie. Special thanks to James MacKay, Basilisk Communications, and Zeitgeist Films.

We are keen to gather and learn from your responses to this presentation of BDP at BFI. If you would like to share a response, please leave an email address with us as you leave the auditorium.

Programme notes and credits compiled by **Sight and Sound**
and the **BFI Documentation Unit**

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