

i-D

Writer Hilton Als and Filmmaker Isaac Julien Discuss Black Gay Desire

By Felix Petty

July 4, 2017



Isaac Julien's 1989 film, *Looking for Langston*, is a landmark piece of work. A cinematic masterpiece, as well as a meditation on race, queerness and beauty. Set during the Harlem Renaissance in the 20s, the film is a stylized black-and-white take on the life of poet Langston Hughes. It's one of the most touching cinematic works of Britain's black art scene of the 80s. It's use of archival imagery and heavily styled set pieces made it a classic; totally unique in the history of queer cinema.

Despite being set in the 20s, *Looking for Langston* finds deep and moving parallels with the devastation of AIDS upon the gay community in the 80s -- the film's two leads both died of AIDS after the film was released, as did many who contributed to it.

The making of the film is the subject of a new exhibition at London's Victoria Miro gallery, running through until the end of July. The exhibition combines photographs taken from the completed film and behind-the-scenes shots, as well as a film featuring American writer Hilton Als and filmmaker Isaac Julien in conversation. Made by i-D's own Stephen Isaac-Wilson and Roxy Rezvany, the two discuss the film's impact, inspiration and legacy -- specifically on *Moonlight*, another moving meditation on black, gay desire.

"I was searching a history of black artists and I was looking to America for that history, it was a connection to an internationalism that I was seeking. I was trying to connect it to questions of homoeroticism and connect it to our different generations," Isaac states in one illuminating segment. "I wanted to combine it with questions of AIDS and discrimination, and how these questions haunt the present."

Link to video: <https://vimeo.com/223592891>

Isaac Julien, I Dreamed a World, is open until 29 July 2017, at Victoria Miro Gallery.

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