

More Life: Marlon Riggs

Opening June 24, 2021
519 West 19th Street, New York

Appointment bookings available
on davidzwirner.com



Production still from Marlon Riggs, *Tongues Untied*, 1989, video, image courtesy of Signifyin' Works

David Zwirner is pleased to present *Tongues Untied*, the seminal 1989 film by documentarian, poet, activist, and educator Marlon Riggs (1957–1994), at the gallery's 519 West 19th Street location in New York. The award-winning videomaker dedicated his life and career to interrogating the politics of representation and interlocking systems of oppression in American culture and politics.

Tongues Untied, his second major documentary, was, in Riggs's words, "motivated by a singular imperative: to shatter this nation's brutalizing silence on matters of sexual and racial difference."¹ In so doing, he reinvents, or even abandons, the documentary genre by eschewing distinctions between the objective and the subjective, fact and fiction, the singular and the collective. The film's visual and auditory fragmentation, tonal shifts, and ensemble of dancers and poets—including Riggs and his collaborators, among them poet Essex Hemphill and writer, actor, and director Brian Freeman—inform its rhythmic poetic structure. Its collage-style arrangement not only deconstructs representations of Black men and gay men, but also constructs new ones, giving voice and visibility to the rich plurality of the lives and experiences of Black gay men.

Despite the work's enthusiastic reception at international film festivals, *Tongues Untied* became embroiled in intense public debates on censorship and federal funding in the arts that dominated public discourse in the late 1980s and early 1990s following its broadcast on the PBS *P.O.V.* series in 1991.

Marlon Riggs is a part of *More Life*, a focused series of curated solo exhibitions presented on the fortieth anniversary of the ongoing HIV/AIDS crisis. For more information, please visit davidzwirner.com.

Tongues Untied appears courtesy Signifyin' Works.

¹ Marlon Riggs, "Tongues Re-Tied," in *Resolutions: Contemporary Video Practices*, ed. Michael Renov and Erika Suderburg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 185.

Marlon Riggs (1957–1994) received a BA in history from Harvard University in 1978, and graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1981, with an MA in journalism, specializing in documentary film. His first feature documentary, *Ethnic Notions* (1986), earned him an Emmy Award. His subsequent films—*Tongues Untied* (1989), *Affirmations* (1990), *Anthem* (1991), *Color Adjustment* (1992), *Non, Je Ne Regrette Rien (No Regret)* (1993), *Black Is ... Black Ain't* (1995)—received a number of prestigious awards, including the Berlin International Film Festival's Teddy Award, the George Foster Peabody Award, and the San Francisco International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival's Frameline Award, among others. In 1991, Riggs founded the nonprofit Signifyin' Works, an organization dedicated to the production and distribution of videos and films that explore African American culture and experience. The following year, the American Film Institute awarded Riggs the Maya Deren Lifetime Achievement Award. In 2019, the Peabody Awards honored Riggs on the thirtieth anniversary of *Tongues Untied*, and the Brooklyn Academy of Music, in association with Signifyin' Works, hosted a nine-day retrospective entitled *Race, Sex & Cinema: The World of Marlon Riggs*. In the summer of 2021, the Criterion Collection will release a box set of Riggs's complete films.

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