BAMcinématek presents *I Am Divine*, a retrospective of comedic genius and queer icon Divine, Sep 25—Oct 3

Opens with the New York premiere of Jeffrey Schwarz’s new documentary *I Am Divine*

The Wall Street Journal is the title sponsor for BAMcinématek and BAM Rose Cinemas.

Brooklyn, NY/Aug 30, 2013—From Wednesday, September 25 through Thursday, October 3, BAMcinématek presents *I Am Divine*, a retrospective of the famed actor, singer, drag queen, and John Waters muse. “The most beautiful woman in the world, almost,” Divine (née Harris Glenn Milstead) was Waters’ outrageously eyebrowed, respectability-razzing, incredibly foul and funny superstar. Immortalized in *Pink Flamingos* as the “World’s Filthiest Person,” he left nary a taboo unbroken. But beneath the outré persona was a genuine comedic genius who became a pioneering queer icon.

Opening the series on September 25 is the New York premiere of Jeffrey Schwarz’s *I Am Divine* (2013), a new documentary that traces the transformation of a gay Baltimore teen into a cult drag icon. An official selection at this year’s SXSW, this “enjoyably naughty trip through Divine’s career…uncovers the lovable man behind the cross-dressing John Waters muse and pop star” (John DeFore, *The Hollywood Reporter*) who broke barriers and gave a voice to outcasts everywhere. Schwarz lovingly compiles archival footage of live performances and home movies with candid interviews with some of Divine’s closest friends and collaborators—including Waters, Ricki Lake, Tab Hunter, Mink Stole, surviving members of the Dreamlanders (Waters’ cast and crew of regulars), and her mother Frances Milstead—to craft this affectionate portrait of the revolutionary performer. Schwarz will appear in person for a Q&A following the screening.

Waters—who gave Milstead his nickname after the lead character in Jean Genet’s debut novel *Our Lady of the Flowers*, a Parisian drag queen—was first introduced to Divine in the mid-1960s. They ran in the same circles of the Baltimore underground scene, and the pair set about developing Divine’s outrageous persona. After collaborating with Waters on short films (*Roman Candles, Eat Your Makeup*) and early features (*Mondo Trasho, Multiple Maniacs*), Divine found his breakout role with *Pink Flamingos* (1972—Sep 26). In what Fran Lebowitz in *Interview* magazine called “the sickest movie ever made. And one of the funniest,” Divine goes head to head with a sleazy couple to defend the title of “filthiest person alive,” doing everything from licking furniture to eating dog excrement in the infamous finale. The film quickly gained a cult following in the midnight movie circuit and remains one of Waters’ most iconic films.

“I hate you, I hate this house, and I hate Christmas!” says Divine as teenage delinquent Dawn Davenport in *Female Trouble* (1974—Sep 28) who wants nothing more than a pair of cha-cha heels and embarks on a criminal rampage when they’re not under the Christmas tree. Another rousing exercise in high trash, Waters’ follow-up to *Pink Flamingos* and self-proclaimed favorite of his films is “one of Divine’s finest moments and arguably one of the 10 best American films ever made” (Travis Jeppesen, *Artforum*).

Waters’ campy rom-com musical *Hairspray* (1988—Oct 2) was by far his most accessible collaboration with Divine and their biggest commercial success. Set in the early 60s, the film follows a Baltimore teenager (Ricki Lake) who becomes a dance sensation on a local television show and uses her newfound fame to campaign for desegregation. Playing both her adoring...
mother and the racist TV station owner, Divine steals the show. Pauline Kael wrote in The New Yorker: “When she’s onscreen, the movie has something like the lunacy of a W.C. Fields in drag.”

Also screening in I Am Divine are Waters’ Sirkian satire Polyester (1981—Sep 29) and Joseph Losey’s Boom! (1968—Oct 3), an adaptation of Tennessee Williams’ play The Milk Train Doesn’t Stop Here Anymore, starring Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. Waters has cited the film as a major influence on his work with Divine, calling Taylor’s portrayal of a wealthy woman on the verge of death “the ultimate drag queen role.”

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I Am Divine Schedule

Wed, Sep 25
7:30pm: I Am Divine

Thu, Sep 26
4:30, 7, 9:30pm: Pink Flamingos

Sat, Sep 28
2, 4:30, 7, 9:30pm: Female Trouble

Sun, Sep 29
2, 4:30, 7, 9:30pm: Polyester

Wed, Oct 2
4:30, 7, 9:30pm: Hairspray

Thu, Oct 3
8pm: Boom!

Film Descriptions

Boom! (1968) 113min
According to John Waters, “It’s the best failed art film ever. It’s a ridiculous re-title of the Tennessee Williams play The Milk Train Doesn’t Stop Here Anymore with Elizabeth Taylor as the richest woman in the world. It is the ultimate drag queen role... It really influenced Divine and I. Elizabeth Taylor was Divine’s idol... I used to show it on first dates. If they didn’t like it I could never go out with them again.”

Thu, Oct 3 at 8pm

Female Trouble (1974) 89min
Directed by John Waters. With David Lochary, Mary Vivian Pierce, Mink Stole, Edith Massey.
“I hate you, I hate this house, and I hate Christmas!” All that Dawn Davenport (Divine) wants for Christmas is a pair of cha-cha heels. When Santa fails to deliver, she embarks on a path of felony and depravity that ultimately leads to an electrifying demise. Never funnier, Waters still revels in trash, but embraces narrative coherence as never before, and with a dazzling performance by his plus-size diva Divine, crafts a moving piece of melodrama about American society’s sordid underbelly.
Sat, Sep 28 at 2, 4:30, 7, 9:30pm

Hairspray (1988) 92min
Directed by John Waters. With Ricki Lake, Divine, Debbie Harry, Sonny Bono.
Waters and Divine scored their biggest commercial success with this high trash, pop art musical satire. In 1960s Baltimore—in which the bouffant rules and every week a new dance craze is launched—
overweight teen Tracy Turnblad becomes a local dancing sensation on *The Corny Collins Show*—and uses her newfound celebrity to become a crusader for civil rights. As Tracy’s mother, Divine (in her final film) steals the whole glorious, retro-schlock shebang. "When she’s onscreen, the movie has something like the lunacy of a W.C. Fields in drag," wrote Pauline Kael.

**Wed, Oct 2 at 4:30, 7, 9:30pm**

*I Am Divine* (2013) 90min **NY Premiere!**

_Directed by Jeffrey Schwarz._

This new documentary charts how Harris Glenn Milstead, a chubby, misunderstood, gay teen from Baltimore, transformed himself into cult icon Divine, John Waters’ muse and the star of *Pink Flamingos*, *Female Trouble*, and *Hairspray*. Through interviews with Divine’s collaborators and friends, including the ever-entertaining Waters, Ricki Lake, Tab Hunter, and Mink Stole, *I Am Divine* shows how Milstead’s brash, boldly confrontational style broke barriers and gave a voice to outcasts everywhere.

**Wed, Sep 25 at 7:30pm Q&A with Jeffrey Schwarz and friends**

*Pink Flamingos* (1972) 93min

_Directed by John Waters._ *With David Lochary, Mary Vivian Pierce, Mink Stole, Danny Mills, Edith Massey.*

Waters’ incendiary adventure in bad taste showcases the battle between two factions as they compete for the title of Filthiest People Alive. Divine does her part to come out on top, doing everything from licking furniture to, in an infamous scene, eating dog excrement. No matter how squeamish, everyone should see this film at least once.

**Thu, Sep 26 at 4:30, 7, 9:30pm**

*Polyester* (1981) 86min

_Directed by John Waters._

After bursting on the scene in 1972 with the bad taste manifesto and midnight cult classic *Pink Flamingos*, Waters gradually refined his craft while losing none of his brilliantly subversive wit. In 1981 he released *Polyester*, with its resurrection of Smell-O-Vision, foot-fetish teenagers, and Divine as a housewife trapped in a suburban nightmare. Waters’ outrageousness meets Douglas Sirk’s melodrama in Reagan America, resulting in one of his most entertaining films.

**Sun, Sep 29 at 2, 4:30, 7, 9:30pm**

**About BAMcinématek**

The four-screen BAM Rose Cinemas (BRC) opened in 1998 to offer Brooklyn audiences alternative and independent films that might not play in the borough otherwise, making BAM the only performing arts center in the country with two mainstage theaters and a multiplex cinema. In July 1999, beginning with a series celebrating the work of Spike Lee, BAMcinématek was born as Brooklyn’s only daily, year-round repertory film program. BAMcinématek presents new and rarely seen contemporary films, classics, work by local artists, and festivals of films from around the world, often with special appearances by directors, actors, and other guests. BAMcinématek has not only presented major retrospectives by major filmmakers such as Michelangelo Antonioni, Manoel de Oliveira, Shohei Imamura, Vincente Minnelli (winning a National Film Critics’ Circle Award prize for the retrospective), Kaneto Shindo, Luchino Visconti, and William Friedkin, but it has also introduced New York audiences to contemporary artists such as Pedro Costa and Apichatpong Weerasethakul. In addition, BAMcinématek programmed the first US retrospectives of directors Arnaud Desplechin, Nicolas Winding Refn, Hong Sang-soo, and, most recently, Andrzej Zulawski. From 2006 to 2008, BAMcinématek partnered with the Sundance Institute and in June 2009 launched BAMcinemaFest, a 16-day festival of new independent films and repertory favorites with 15 NY feature film premieres; the fifth annual BAMcinemaFest ran from June 19—28, 2013.

**Credits**

*The Wall Street Journal* is the title sponsor of BAM Rose Cinemas and BAMcinématek.

Steinberg Screen at the BAM Harvey Theater is made possible by The Joseph S. and Diane H. Steinberg Charitable Trust.

Pepsi is the official beverage of BAM.

Brooklyn Brewery is the preferred beer of BAMcinématek.
BAM Rose Cinemas are named in recognition of a major gift in honor of Jonathan F.P. and Diana Calthorpe Rose. BAM Rose Cinemas would also like to acknowledge the generous support of The Peter Jay Sharp Foundation, The Estate of Richard B. Fisher, Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz, Brooklyn Delegation of the New York City Council, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, New York State Council on the Arts, Bloomberg, and Time Warner Inc. Additional support for BAMcinématek is provided by the Coolidge Corner Theatre Foundation, The Grodzins Fund, The Liman Foundation and Summit Rock Advisors.

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**General Information**

**Tickets:**
- General Admission: $13
- BAM Cinema Club Members: $8, BAM Cinema Club Movie Moguls: Free
- Seniors & Students (25 and under with a valid ID, Mon—Thu): $9
- Bargain matinees (Mon—Thu before 5pm & Fri—Sun before 3pm, no holidays): $9

BAM Howard Gilman Opera House, BAM Rose Cinemas, and BAMcafé are located in the Peter Jay Sharp building at 30 Lafayette Avenue (between St Felix Street and Ashland Place) in the Fort Greene neighborhood of Brooklyn. BAM Harvey Theater is located two blocks from the main building at 651 Fulton Street (between Ashland and Rockwell Places). Both locations house Greenlight Bookstore at BAM kiosks. BAM Fisher, located at 321 Ashland Place, is the newest addition to the BAM campus and houses the Judith and Alan Fishman Space and Rita K. Hillman Studio. BAM Rose Cinemas is Brooklyn’s only movie house dedicated to first-run independent and foreign film and repertory programming. BAMcafé, operated by Great Performances, is open for dining prior to BAM Howard Gilman Opera House evening performances. BAMcafé also features an eclectic mix of spoken word and live music for BAMcafé Live on select Friday and Saturday nights with a special BAMcafé Live menu available starting at 8pm.

**Subway:**
- 2, 3, 4, 5, Q, B to Atlantic Avenue – Barclays Center (2, 3, 4, 5 to Nevins St for Harvey Theater)
- D, N, R to Pacific Street; G to Fulton Street; C to Lafayette Avenue

**Train:**
- Long Island Railroad to Atlantic Terminal – Barclays Center

**Bus:**
- B25, B26, B41, B45, B52, B63, B67 all stop within three blocks of BAM

**Car:**
- Commercial parking lots are located adjacent to BAM

For ticket and BAMbus information, call BAM Ticket Services at 718.636.4100, or visit BAM.org.