

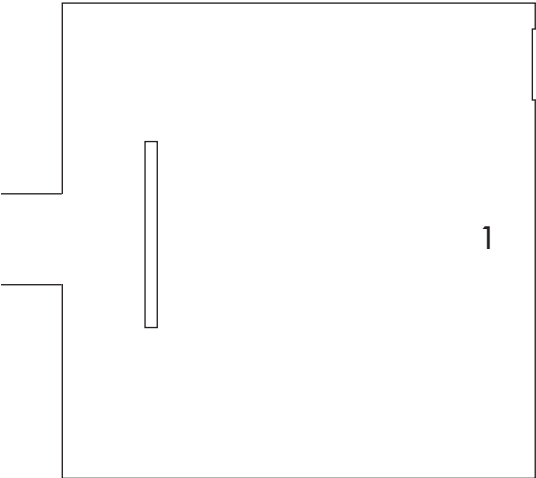
Charles Atlas

Hail the New
Puritan



CAG

Alvin Balkind Gallery



1 *Hail the New Puritan*, 1985–86
16mm film on video, 85 minutes
Courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York

During Atlas' time as filmmaker-in-residence at the Merce Cunningham Dance Company – from the early 1970s through 1983 – he and Cunningham pioneered the field of “media dance”: choreography developed and performed specifically for the camera. In these works, the camera moves in concert with the dancing body rather than remaining static, giving viewers a more dynamic view of a performance than is typically afforded by the theatrical stage.

In the decades since, Atlas has established himself as one of the leading interpreters of performance for camera, collaborating with a range of artists, dancers, musicians, and poets to produce works in film and video. *Hail the New Puritan* is Atlas' first feature-length project after concluding his residency with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, and among the first of his collaborations with dancer and choreographer Michael Clark – a working relationship that has continued since, with Atlas designing the stage lighting for all of Clark's stage works over the past 40 years.

Originally produced for British public broadcaster Channel 4, *Hail the New Puritan* takes the form of a fictionalized documentary, following Clark and his company as they prepare for a performance of Clark's 1984 work *New Puritans*. Loosely modeled after The Beatles' film *A Hard Day's Night* (1964), Atlas has also spoken of Andy Warhol's underground film *Chelsea Girls* (1966) as a touchstone for this project, noting that the landmark work made him “realize you could make something out of your own world.”

At the time of production, Clark was relatively unknown, though the film portrays him as an icon, a status he would soon come to assume. Capturing the anarchic energy of East London at a time of significant social upheaval, Atlas zeroes in on the cultural discordancies of the 1980s, whose myths, contradictions and styles play out through Clark's choreography. Seamlessly merging the energies of dance, drag and nightlife, the film traces a thriving queer counterculture amid both the conservatism of Thatcherite Britain and the burgeoning AIDS crisis.

Masterfully harnessing colour, costuming and choreography, Atlas edits the film in a style that disrupts the “authenticity” of the documentary form, presenting physical movement as both personal expression and social defiance – a means of imagining otherwise. As artist Jordan Strafer has noted, Atlas' work has always insisted that “the horizon of another world is not an impossible ideality... it's constructed in and through the stuff of performance.”

October 3, 2025
February 28, 2026

Contemporary
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Admission always free