

DEM PASSWORDS

LEE JAFFE
"LEGALIZE IT"
September 8 - October 6,
2012

OPENING RECEPTION
Saturday, September 8
from 7 to 10 PM



Dem Passwords is pleased to present, "Legalize It," a photo and video exhibition by Lee Jaffe.

Bronx born Jaffe's narrative unfolds out of filmmaking, performance and conceptual art into music and photography through the lens of an itinerant activist insider. Politicized as a product of the Vietnam War and Civil Rights era and in league with a transgressive milieu of artists extending from the United States to the Caribbean, down to Brazil and overseas to West Africa, Jaffe has hewn a path for rebel expressionism into and outside of the mainstream since the late 1960's.

From 1972 to '76 Jaffe traveled with and contributed to the energy of the Reggae music explosion led by Bob Marley and company. What remains is their spirit embedded in images rich in modern celebratory energy, ordered by Jaffe's rural topophilia, but more exotic for their rawness. Peter Tosh rides a donkey. Bob and Peter hang out by a window in a long-take video. Peter poses in a red clay ganja field. These are young men in touch with a dangerous energy that at the time these images were captured, was only beginning to manifest.

The 1974 international breakthrough of "Natty Dread" crystallized their contemporary impact, fertilizing the marketplace for Tosh's solo output and the advancement of their revolutionary politics.

Jaffe's collection captures Peter Tosh in the Spring of '76 just months before the release of his now classic debut solo album "Legalize It", 11 years before his assassination.

"...the divine spirit that we was born and raised with, it teaches us to multiply nothing with nothing and get something. Zero with zero and get one."

- Peter Tosh

What follows is a condensed interview with Lee Jaffe conducted on August 23rd, 2012.

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"Peter, he had such a militant air about him. And at the same time you could be at his place and he'd roll you a spliff and say, 'here mon, a nice draw of herb.' He had this incredibly generous heart which became apparent once he accepted that you were on the side of the 'sufferers' and you were a part of the struggle.

Bob, Peter and Bunny at that time were so focused on the work and the necessity, the message in the music and the importance of it-- how it could be impactful. It was 24/7. It didn't really let up. Even the fun parts of it. And they could be really funny through difficult times--humor making difficult times sweeter. No matter how hard things were, you know, you were in Jamaica, you could find a good spliff and drink a coconut, so there was that part of it. Never taking that for granted.

Peter was living in Spanish town and we were all into recording the 'Legalize It' album. The song had been recorded, we had done most of the overdubs, I think we had done just about everything except mixing and we were working on a deal with Columbia, but it was in the air and to me... in the US at that time, nobody grew herb. It didn't exist and nobody knew what it looked like. Herb was something that came in bricks or something like that. So the first time I saw an herb field was with Bob because I used to go to the country with him all the time. I used to love to go to this little village where he was born, Nine Mile it's called. So one time we went there and it's in the mountains and we took this hike and you go down in this valley and you go up the mountain and down another valley and up the mountain, like a half hour. We were on top of this valley and I look down and it's glowing this iridescent green and it was this whole valley of herb. It was the first time I ever saw that. It was so mystical.

'Legalize It' ...it has so many meanings. First it's about herb and herb is about everyday existence. And to have it illegal means you're illegal all the time. It means you're always outside the law if you're a Rasta. And the Rasta's were at the vanguard of changing the culture, of changing the mentality of slavery, of deconstructing neocolonialism. And it's why the music and lyrics are still resonating today. Because those problems still exist. It's not just about legalizing herb. Once the herb is criminalized then your whole existence is criminalized. Your whole way of life. It's a way of trying to kill your inspiration. It's saying this incredibly potent medicine, you can't use that. And that's the weapon we use to fight the guns."

Lee Jaffe was born in 1950 in The Bronx, NY. His work has been exhibited internationally at museums including the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Sweden and The Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin Ireland. His collaborative legacy includes works with venerable artists including Vito Acconci, Gordon Matta-Clark, Helio Oiticica and Jean-Michel Basquiat.

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