

# LITTLE DEATHS

**Jackson Farley** explores how we can shed outdated versions of ourselves—one cultural burial at a time.

WORDS | JOSEPHINE MEAD

Playing with the absurdities of the archaic power structures that inform our social and global consciousness, artist **Jackson Farley** employs humour and irony to urge the viewer to consider where they are—socially, politically, generationally and personally. It's often said that to be a good comedian one needs to be intelligent. This generalisation rings true of Farley as an artist. His tongue-in-cheek humour and chaotic montages, playing to history's absurdities, are underscored with deep thinking and a commitment to dismantling harmful binaries.

Farley responds to entrenched power structures by way of three pillars: colonialism, religion and masculinity. As he explains, "My past works were a fuck-you to those structures. It then became less about the individual and more about collective experience. I began to use the pillars to discuss history, religion, social grief and cultural landscapes. Humour and irony became important tools to diffuse these loaded topics."

Earlier works broke down tropes of toxic masculinity—a tribute to Farley's late "gorgeous" dad and testament to the effects of generous and sensitive men raising boys to become generous and sensitive men. When creating *every kingdom was born to die* (2020), Farley realised that the masculinity he wanted to embody as a man was different to the forms of toxic masculinity he saw

being drip-fed to children. Art became a way to write love letters to the soft and nurturing sides of masculinity.

Farley's current work is informed by his parents working in the "self-work" sphere. You can feel the associated affirmation rhetoric that accompanies this through his use of satire. "Self-work" generally refers to activities aimed at growth and self-improvement. For Farley's forthcoming exhibition *HAVE A GOOD DEATH* at *THIS IS NO FANTASY*, he has employed digital techniques and AI to create large and small tapestries and "endurance" sculptures, considering the "little deaths" we experience along journeys towards self-growth. An 8-metre-long tapestry, *HAVE A GOOD DEATH* (2025), will be the "beating heart" of the show and displays a hero's journey from left to right of the image. It features a cast of historical and current public figures overcoming the graveyard of cultural residues and colonial histories we find ourselves within. The work suggests an opening of sorts and encourages viewers to "move beyond their context and the social weight of the world." Farley notes, "I'm a digital artist, but think of myself as a failed painter. I'm trying to work out how to bring the digital back into the real." The characters in the tapestry traverse game-like scenes, attempting to graduate to higher realms.

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OPPOSITE: Jackson Farley, *ur all gonna end up like me*, 2023. Archival Pigment Print on premium photo paper with painted frame, 170 x 138 cm paper size, 174 x 142 cm frame size.

COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND THIS IS NO FANTASY, NARRM/MELBOURNE.



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OPPOSITE: Jackson Farley, *ooopa! so sorry*, 2025. Woven Jacquard tapestry, metal chain. 200 x 133 cm

ABOVE: Jackson Farley, *every kingdom was born to die pt. iii*, 2024. Dye sublimation on suede, 160 x 143 cm.

COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND THIS IS NO FANTASY, NARRM/MELBOURNE.

THIS IS NO FANTASY co-directors Dianne Tanzer and Nicola Stein explain that Farley “treads the line between fantasy and reality through tongue-in-cheek nods to the Gen Y experience.” The 3D-printed, life-size “endurance” sculptures are shrines to that which we have endured: a cheerful colonial figure; a zombified Donald Trump; and a man in a picnic chair, personifying outdated modes of masculinity. Farley explains, “They each represent a different hierarchy that has shaped and trapped us.” Small, inverted tapestries will act as voyeurs, in counterpoint to the narrative landscape scenes of the larger woven works. Farley describes them as “onlookers to the personal-growth journey.” The exhibition will speak to the moments where we let go of outdated versions of ourselves, breaking free of personal histories.

Through warping historical imagery and cultural references, Farley aims to create new narratives for a utopian ideal. He questions how cultural content can come to die in our global consciousness, while considering how the traces of these memories and histories have an impact on the way we move through the world.

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Jackson Farley, *HAVE A GOOD DEATH* is showing from 29 August - 20 September 2025 at THIS IS NO FANTASY, Narrm/Melbourne.

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