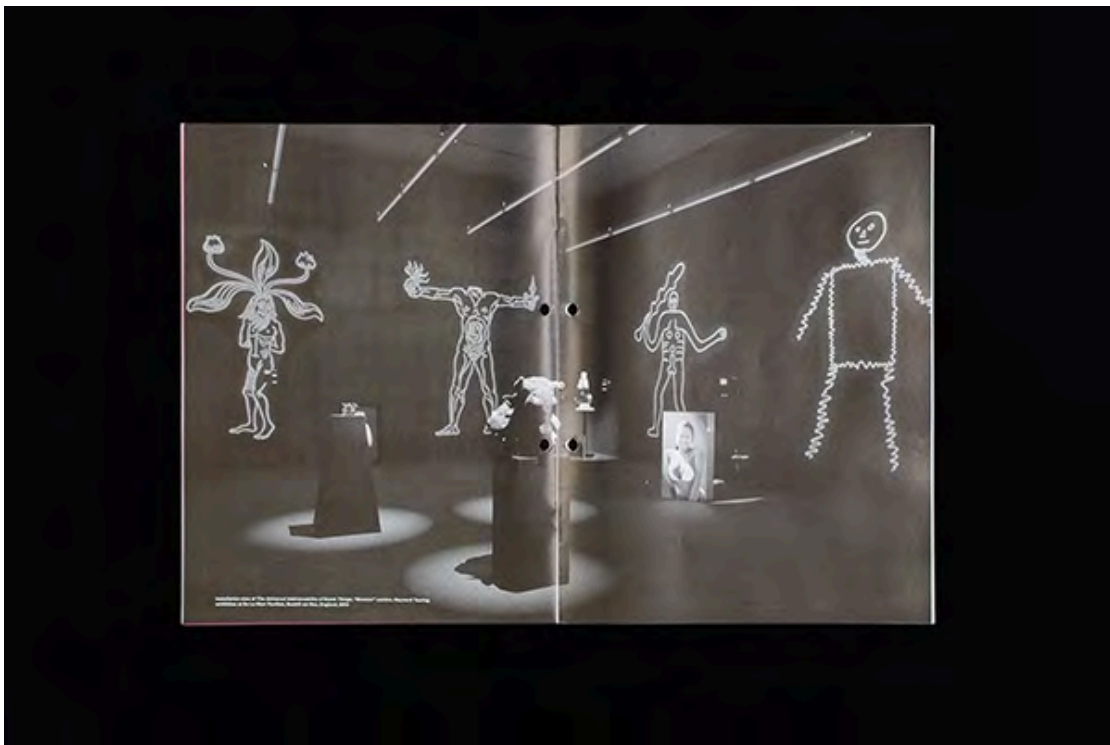


GLADSTONE GALLERY

Elena Filipovic, " Mark Leckey, 'UniAddDumThs' 2014-2015," *Mousse Magazine*, August, 2015

Mousse Magazine

Mark Leckey, "UniAddDumThs," 2014- 15 – THE ARTIST AS CURATOR #8



Installation view of *The Universal Addressability of Dumb Things*, "Monster" section, Hayward Touring exhibition at De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill-on-Sea, England, 2013

Mark Leckey, *UniAddDumThs*, 2014-15

by Elena Filipovic

from THE ARTIST AS CURATOR #8 – in Mousse #49

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The spectacular rise of the Internet and contemporary technological advances, from bionics to cybernetics, has created a world that is changing rapidly regarding new materials, and also generating an entirely new sense of materialism. All of this constitutes the backdrop to Leckey's post-digital, late-capitalist exhibition. Call it a bachelor-machine-as-exhibition [1]. Things (real and their avatars) and a long-ing to touch and possess them—indeed, to find some sort of intimacy with them (as the artist himself would be the first to tell you)—are the gas that fuels this machine. So, too, is a certain promiscuous relationship to originality and an endless desire, as it were, to reproduce. And indeed, from *The Universal Addressability of Dumb Things* emerged the actual subject of this essay: the ambiguous, unpronounceable thing that is *UniAddDumThs* (2014–15). Somewhere between an artist-curated exhibition and an eerie, substitute, life-size copy of an artist-curated exhibition, not to mention paradoxically an artwork in itself, *UniAddDumThs* is ontologically unstable to the extreme. Titled to acknowledge both its filiation with *The Universal Addressability of Dumb Things* and the digital world that made it possible (“UniAddDumThs” reads as a sort of file-name-extension version of the original title, like “jpeg” or “mp3,” or even the abbreviated speech of the digital world, with its LOLs and WTFs), it even more profoundly and certainly more troublingly tackles the questions of the real and its simulacrum at the heart of the “original” from which it sprang.

But where exactly is “the real” located for Leckey? And what is the difference between it and its ersatz simulation? Henry James, another Brit from another time, once wrote a short story titled “The Real Thing” about an impeccably mannered aristocratic couple, the Monarchs, who became suddenly destitute and proposed themselves—faces imprinted with the experience of luxury and regal demeanors gained from years of being served—as artists’ models for hire [2]. The lady and her husband, the artist at first supposed, were ideal subjects: actual exemplars of the very class he was trying to represent. He soon discovered, however, that the “real thing” didn’t make for the most convincing portrait, whereas his usual models, a Cockney servant girl and an Italian immigrant ice-cream vendor, were far better suited to the mimetic representation of nobility. It was a perfect parable for the 19th century: a response to a culture concerned as much with social status as with artifice, concluding that a copy might offer a more convincing experience of “the real” than the actual, authentic real.

A century and a half later, Leckey could be said to be advancing his own Jamesian inquiry into the contemporary real, questioning how its replication (whether actual or virtual, material or immaterial) might affect us more than any “original” could. Hardly a review of his exhibitions or an essay about his practice fails to mention how central to his work are the brands and the stuff of everyday life, as well as the affective associations they provoke. Fiorucci, Samsung, Jeff Koons, Henry Moore, and Felix the Cat are all recognizable “brands”—whether referring to industrially fabricated jeans or refrigerators, “signature” sculptures or a cartoon—and, within Leckey’s thinking, stand-ins for their wider cultural significance and embodiments of that ineffable thing called desire. By observing, consuming, and even realizing himself in those brands (remember that it was the Fiorucci clothing brand that made Leckey “hardcore”), the artist recognizes the pull they exert on us. He understands that the real is located as much in the physical nature of objects as in what we project onto them—the fantasies we associate with them, the covetousness they incite, the memories we might attach to them—any of which may or may not have a bearing on the way things “really” are, or ever were.

But if “the real thing” stands at least partly for something authentic and true, it should be said that Leckey has never shied away from its opposite: inauthenticity, copies, avatars, the fungible (a term he particularly likes), simulacra, counterfeits. The real and its simulation tangle doggedly, repeatedly, in Leckey’s work. His perfectly shiny copy of Koons’s *Rabbit* (itself a copy of an infinitely reproducible balloon object) is set in the meticulously faked backdrop of Leckey’s 7 Windmill Street apartment for *Made in 'Eaven* (2004). A simulation of the same apartment, and its progressive undoing, appears in *Shades of Destructors* (2005). The transvestite annarose’s attributes of an excessive and contrived femininity appear in various pieces, including *me and annarose* (2008). The imperceptible movements between an actual and a CGI drum animate the film *Pearl Vision* (2012). The list could go on.

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Installation view of *UniAddDumThs* (2014-15), showing "Machine" section), Kunsthalle Basel, 2015

Maybe it started with Leckey being a "casual" as a teen. To be a casual in the 1980s was to self-consciously pose as something you weren't: a moneyed youth, from a "good" family, with a golf or polo club to go to. Leckey and other casuals, mostly hooligans and street kids, were playing at having money through wearing the signs of it, for instance the designer leisurewear of Ellesse and Lacoste. The police were sometimes fooled (society, too), and this subversion of high and low appealed to the young Leckey. This autobiographical detail comes up again and again in interviews or essays about him, slipped in like a trivial but amusing fact. It is often associated with the artist's abiding interest in the popular—from the pastimes of ravers and the sartorial taste of youth culture to the elaborate homemade sound systems used in street parties—as the foundation of his work, as opposed to high-art forms or theory-backed ideas. And it surely *is* evidence of that. But I cannot help also reading into this "casual" anecdote that all along Leckey has been interested in the way culture relates to both the real *and* its imitation, and that simulation sits at the core of how he once practiced life and now practices art.

[1] Leckey's references to Duchamp over the years have been frequent, including repeated evocations of "bachelor machines" in his lecture performances; the cameo appearance of the *Chocolate Grinder*, an element in the "bachelor's domain" of *The Large Glass*, in the animation *Gorgeousness & Gorgeosity* (2005); the use of a text by Duchamp biographer Calvin Tomkins about *The Large Glass* in the voice-over of his *GreenScreenRefrigeratorAction* (2010-11); and the removal of Leckey's apartment door and its presentation as an artwork titled *7 Windmill Street* (1997-2010), echoing Duchamp's *11 rue Larry* (1927/1963). But perhaps the most explicit reference has been Leckey's proposition (in the 2010 video *Proposal for a Show*) that *The Universal Addressability of Dumb Things* should feature a number of works that either depict *The Large Glass* or depict Duchamp making it. The critic John Cussans perhaps captured it best when he said, "Mark's Ur-machine, the primary pleasure model, as it were, seems to be neither Fiorucci nor Felix, but Duchamp's *Large Glass*. Translucent diagram of impersonal desire, archetypal bachelor machine and future-art engine, it was perhaps the first organ-object and art-thing to strike the artist's fancy in a destiny-shaping way: the primary locus of a paradoxically hyper-personal yet social-machinic rhetoric of the hope for art." John Cussans, "Mark Leckey, Pleasure Model (After Pietz)," in *Mark Leckey: On Pleasure Bent*, 145.

[2] "The Real Thing" was first syndicated in 1892 by S. S. McClure in multiple American newspapers and then collected in *The Real Thing and Other Stories* (New York: Macmillan, 1893).