

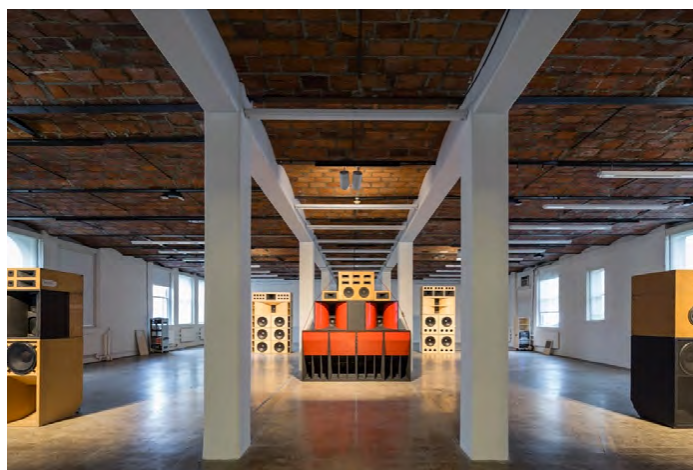
# GLADSTONE GALLERY

Nicholas O'Brien, "At MoMA PS1, Turner Prize-Winning Artist Mark Leckey Searches for the Lost Rites of Underground Culture," *Artsy Editorial*, October 25, 2016



## At MoMA PS1, Turner Prize-Winning Artist Mark Leckey Searches for the Lost Rites of Underground Culture

ARTSY EDITORIAL  
BY NICHOLAS O'BRIEN  
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Installation view of Mark Leckey, *Sound Systems* series, 2001–2012, at MoMA PS1.  
Photograph by Pablo Enriquez, courtesy of the artist and MoMA PS1.

On the top floor of MoMA PS1, Mark Leckey's *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore* (1999) shakes the foundations of the building with its powerful, floor-to-ceiling, custom-fabricated speakers. Leckey's breakout work, a montage of clips pulled from pre-YouTube-era VHS tapes of raves and club culture across the U.K., is made, according to the artist, as a kind of homage to the "death of the underground." It meditates on movement, dance music, and the dissonance—both sonic and spiritual—that comes from a good party dying at daybreak. As with many of the Turner Prize-winning artist's video and installation works in this comprehensive yet fresh new exhibition, "Containers and Their Drivers," *Fiorucci* pulses with life.

Elsewhere in the exhibition, similar sound systems are on display, placed like monolithic totems in the museum's large second-floor space. But the sounds that emanate from these speakers are a combination of low-end rumblings and gurgling, bodily sounds that suggest a kind of synthesis between the mechanical and the organic. This soundtrack traverses the speakers like a swelling wave, shifting from tweeter to subwoofer.

The experience of walking among these behemoths is powerful, surfacing instant memories of standing too close to speaker systems at house parties and feeling your body reverberate with energy. The electricity hums, quite literally, in the space, the vibrations echoing in your chest. In this installation, as with *Fiorucci*, the provocation is not necessarily to dance, but instead to internalize the sound. You, as a viewer and listener, are part of the network of this sonic sensation; one node within the temporary web woven between DJs, their music, and strangers in the dark.

That longing for feelings of association, however loose or abstract, is contained in other works on the second floor. Leckey's *GreenScreenRefrigerator* (2010–2016) is an installation, soundscape, performance, and video in which the artist attempts to identify with and embody a brand new, matte black Samsung "Smart" fridge. Speaking as a kind of shaman or psychic medium, Leckey performs a séance to mythologize the "smart" capabilities of this appliance. Calling it "A Dark Mirror" and a "Spirit Rhino," he channels the advertising-speak used to sell this technology in order to understand what separates it from its less-intelligent predecessors.

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Installation view of Mark Lecky, *Dream English Kid 1964-1999 AD*, 2016, at MoMA PS1. Photograph by Pablo Enriquez, courtesy of the artist and MoMA PS1.

In a past performance in this series, Lecky inhaled freon coolant (the cooling agent in a refrigerator)—an effort, perhaps, to address the distance between the alluring veneer of the object and its internal workings. Though of course ill-advised, the gesture circles back to the themes of identification that permeate much of Lecky's work. Where he tries to *become* more fridge-like, the reality of his body reinforces how he is different from the objects—and systems—of the world. Using the innocuous metaphor of the fridge, he forces us to consider how we identify ourselves through the objects we consume and desire.

That sense of self-identification is a repeated impulse throughout many of the works at PS1. This includes “the fullest iteration to date” of *UniAddDumThs* (2014), a copy of Lecky's earlier exhibition, “The Universal Addressability of Dumb Things.” These works are arrangements of common objects purchased from eBay and Amazon, assembled in thematic dioramas alongside more rarified and unique items and set pieces. The methodical categorization of the objects further structures Lecky's practice as a process of creating spaces of association.

During the opening remarks of the press preview, Lecky, who is now 52 years old, indicated that much of the work has taken on new meaning for him as he has aged. Witnessing the decline of various underground U.K. dance subcultures, for instance, is but one of many ways in which his work has shifted from poetic reflection to necessary documentation. Though Lecky didn't wish to reconcile those changes, he recognized that some of the projects were “unplaceable...creating a kind of confusion.”

I'd argue, though, that these shifts are testament to the richness of his work's content. Many of the works in the exhibition are full of playful metaphors, requiring viewers not only to stretch their imaginations, but also to consider the ways in which the initial significance of the work has taken on new meaning over time. This is precisely the case for Lecky's ongoing fascination with Felix the Cat, who appears both as a room-size inflatable and, elsewhere, in diminutive form. Where the initial interest in Felix lay in his link to technological history—a statue of the cartoon being the first image to ever air on broadcast television—Lecky's use of the black-and-white cat grows ominous in other areas of the exhibition.



Installation views of Mark Lecky, *UniAddDumThs*, 2016, at MoMA PS1. Photograph by Pablo Enriquez, courtesy of the artist and MoMA PS1.

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The maturation of the work may prompt viewers to subtly reflect on the ways in which the symbols, objects, and sounds of their everyday lives also accrue new meaning over the course of their lives. But I wouldn't say that Leckey is trying to lecture viewers on relishing the past, or even fetishizing what will soon become obsolescent. Instead, "Containers and Their Drivers," at its best moments, tries to find passionate and humanistic ways to reclaim the art of idiosyncratic association in the face of mass monocultures.

Leckey shows audiences how images, sounds, and cultures have been absorbed—refrigerated as it were—into mundane packages for easy consumption. But the underlying complexity of these cultural devices is not lost on the artist, and his attempts to unearth origins, significance, and meaning mark his practice as one of the most influential of his generation.

—Nicholas O'Brien



Mark Leckey  
*Performance view of GreenScreenRefrigeratorAction*, 2010  
MoMA PS1



Installation view of Mark Leckey, *Felix The Cat*, 2013, at MoMA PS1.  
Photograph by Pablo Enriquez, courtesy of the artist and MoMA PS1.