

# GLADSTONE GALLERY

Nadja Sayej, "Mark Leckey: the raving artist goes large at MoMa PS1 in New York," *The Guardian*, October 27, 2016

## The Guardian

**Mark Leckey**

### Mark Leckey: the raving artist goes large at MoMA PS1 in New York

Inspired by the 90s rave scene, the artist has filled the Queens space with footage of sweaty nightclubs, trippy images and soundsystems blasting fart sounds

**Nadja Sayej**

Thursday 27 October 2016 12.33 EDT



Mark Leckey: 'Everything in the show is a kind of container; a fridge, sound systems, objects that contain something' Photograph: Pablo Enriquez/MoMA PS1

In 1988, the British artist Mark Leckey spent the summer in Brighton. He was 24 and looking for work, but he found play – specifically at the front doorstep of the Zap nightclub, which essentially kicked off his art career. "I literally walked into this rave where it was full of dry ice," says Leckey on the phone from PS1, where he opened an exhibition on Sunday. "This guy just loomed out of the dry ice with this smiley face mask on. I thought, here we go."

If there was ever an artist who uses leftfield pop music as the altar of inspiration, it's got to be London-based Leckey, who won the Turner Prize in 2008. The title of his new show *Containers and Their Drivers* is probably the first museum exhibition ever to be named after a song by Mancunian postpunk legends the Fall.

For his first US survey, Leckey may seem like an art world superstar – he showed with Damien Hirst in 1990 at ICA's *New Contemporaries* show, is collected in the Tate and the Centre Pompidou and is even married to the head of programs at Serpentine Galleries, Lizzie Carey-Thomas. But that's not to categorize him. The song *Containers and Their Drivers* is about the shipping industry, which resonates with the setup of Leckey's exhibition. "Everything in the show is a kind of container; a fridge, sound systems, objects that contain something," he said.

But what container does Leckey fit into? This show is basically a retrospective, but he gets a different label. "The art world is cautious with the word 'retrospective,' it's a 'mid-career survey,'" he said, with a chuckle. "They're not wholly convinced yet that I'm around for keeps. You don't get a retrospective until everyone is absolutely certain. There hasn't been full consensus."

# GLADSTONE GALLERY



Leckey: 'The art world is cautious with the word 'retrospective,' it's a 'mid-career survey,' Photograph: Pablo Enriquez/MoMA PS1

While his introduction to the Zap marked Leckey's foray into rave culture, it didn't stop there. "Raves were in warehouse parties, illegal raves, things you can't do now in London," he said.

The memories are now immortalized in a 1999 video collage called *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore*, (named after the Italian clothing brand, popular with the fashion-and-football obsessed "casuals" subculture), a euphoric and strangely poignant work which stitches together footage of clubbers dancing from the days of Northern Soul in the 70s to the raves of the 90s.

Looking back on this fine showcase of British nightlife, there may be countless rave compilations on YouTube today, but he made it in a time before social media. "The internet was in its early stages," said Leckey. "You couldn't email people, I would write people and request VHS tapes and get them converted from analogue to digital. It was a long, involved process; everything became precious and special. It became more about video than rave."



Cheesy quavers: a half-deflated Felix the Cat, the cartoon character who often pops up in Leckey's work Photograph: Pablo Enriquez/MoMA PS1

*Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore* celebrates the era of boundary-breaking electronic music made on cheap equipment in bedrooms, raves in warehouses and fields, the joy of a young generation seizing upon new technologies to express themselves through dance. "The same happened to me with video," said Leckey. "It was only when I was able to make and edit video at home on a computer that I started making art properly."

And then, of course, there were the drugs, the first explosion of acid house in 1988 fuelled by the widespread availability of ecstasy which, legend has it, made the football casuals who would fight the supporters of rivals teams on the terraces start hugging and dancing with them in the clubs. "Rave is a diminishing attempt to find the experience of ecstasy again, not the drug but through other means," says Leckey. "That's the part of the reason to make work, that moment of psychedelic bliss."

# GLADSTONE GALLERY

His love of sound is personified in his Sound System sculptures from 2001 to 2012, as Leckey has built five functioning sound systems which spew out sporadic, intermittent sounds and songs in the gallery space, from bassy soundscapes to gurgling stomach sounds, “and farting”, adds Leckey. “Basically, I have a huge library of found sounds and I throw them on the speaker systems to see what works best, conceptually and acoustically,” he said. “I knew they had this quality of being both sculptural and sonically powerful.”

Probably the most truth-telling piece in the show is a new, expanded presentation of his 2015 short film *Dream English Kid 1964–1999 AD*, a sort of autobiography told through TV clips, props that play out personal memories and YouTube videos, like clips of a 1950s housewife trying LSD, videos by the Beatles and a documentary on David Hockney. “I did it to exorcise stuff that was lingering too long inside of me,” said Leckey. “As a 52-year-old man, there are things I haven’t resolved and am trying to fathom, it’s a self-diagnosis.”



Another view of the PS1 show: ‘As a 52-year-old man, there are things I haven’t resolved’  
Photograph: Pablo Enriquez/MoMA PS1

It’s full circle from the challenging time he had in art school, a place he went to meet like-minded people but ended up getting ensnared in the academic concepts. After reading Roland Barthes and Hal Foster, he says, “I got militant about critical theory, I became a little neo-Nazi in terms of critical theory policing everyone else.” After taking a break from art, Leckey started making work about his life. “I make things that mattered to me with my immediate experience, that’s why I made work relating to rave,” he said.

Leckey is still a fan of happy hardcore, the technicolour, cheesily euphoric, breakbeat-powered dance music which soundtracked hundreds of early-90s club nights. “It’s brilliant,” he says, divulging the contents of his iTunes library: “The Frozen musical soundtrack meets happy hardcore from 1992 are the two biggest influences in my life.”

Leckey has dabbled with making his own music in the past and will soon return to his home studio. “When I go back to London, I will make more music again,” he says. “I think music works best when it’s stupid, that’s why I like rave; I want to make stupid music where you’re not thinking, you’re reacting to what’s immediately in front of you and you’re trying to do it quickly. Fast music.”

*Mark Leckey: Containers and Their Drivers runs at the Museum of Modern Art PS1 until 5 March 2017*