

## Mark Leckey

TATE BRITAIN

Amazingly, a life-size section of the M53 motorway bridge—complete with massive pillars, a ramp, and an overhead road—has been reconstructed in a darkened, hangar-size gallery at Tate Britain. Beneath such a bridge, located in the hinterlands of Liverpool, Mark Leckey played with his boyhood friends back in the 1970s. And there, he says, one very strange day, he encountered an inexplicable, spritelike magical creature.

This supernatural encounter lodged indelibly in Leckey's psyche and has loosely become the subject of *Under Under In*, 2019, one of three video works that comprise "Mark Leckey: O' Magic Power of Bleakness." Spread mostly across two giant wall projections and five brightly pixelated vertical flat screens, *Under Under In* compiles disjointed snatches of commentary ("Smells like something died in here"; "His face is all wrinkly, and his eyes are funny") and half-lit nocturnal glimpses of smartphone-style footage. We never actually catch sight of the phantasmic goblin. Adolescents dressed head to toe in black, their bodies often reduced to glowing Adidas logo stripes and magically dematerialized into unrecognizable shadowy beings, cavort on-screen.

*Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore*, 1999, an homage to Britain's heady dance-club scene of the '70s through the '90s, which dominated the artist's formative decades, comes next, followed by *Dream English Kid, 1964–1999 AD*, 2015, an autobiographical collage drawn from online videos. Throughout both works, moving images drawn from across the artist's lifetime flash deliriously: the Beatles playing live in 1964, the year of Leckey's birth; a moon landing; a lingerie-clad 1960s blonde primping at her modernist dressing table. Leckey seems to disclose all of his deepest, most recurring, most unresolved memories. Forgotten friendships, manic dances, confused sexual awakenings, and desolate squatted rooms whiz past. A computer-generated animation in *Under Under In* tunnels downward through multiple underground layers, drilling into long-buried places; I remembered Freud's archaeological metaphor of therapy as an excavation of the mind. This exhibition is an artist's museum survey repurposed

as a psychoanalytical magical mystery tour. Viewers wander in the dark as if strolling through Leckey's unconscious, reliving his past pleasures and puzzling over his childhood ghosts. While surface thoughts race unseen on the road above, a turmoil of emotions and half-remembered stories flickers unstoppably below.

Pictures repeat like compulsive thoughts, the cyclical return literalized in the many circular things on view: plastic wheels turning inside a VHS, a Frisbee, a reel-to-reel tape recorder, a turntable, gyrating 1980s ravers wearing big flares. Boys' bodies arch into crab-like postures, resembling semicircular human bridges. A giant floating bubble circles the earth while the moon shines like a planet-size disco ball—spinning satellites in Leckey's own private galaxy. I experienced "Mark Leckey: O' Magic Power of Bleakness" (there's even a circle in the title, "O' Magic . . .") completely riveted, like a "trespasser," to use a word often repeated in *Under Under In*, wandering into another human being's—the artist's—vast inner world: a place as unknowable as an unearthly changeling, as exhilarating as the dance floor.

Toward the end of *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore*, a young boy is seen in silhouette from the back, overlooking a faraway gray landscape of highways and cheap, low-rise buildings. I thought of Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*, ca. 1817, relocated in a polluted corner of England. In fact, Leckey's nostalgic reveries have often been connected to Romanticism. Still reeling from his dizzying triple feature, I visited the William Blake exhibition downstairs; the pairing of Leckey's enchanted journeys with Blake's hallucinatory visions is an inspired art-historical blind date. On my way out, I passed the central Duveen Galleries and watched a crew of men, equipped with chains and forklifts, deinstall Mike Nelson's weighty, warehouse-like sculptural labyrinth *The Asset Strippers*, 2019, whose weathered doors and ancient machinery evoked England's lost industrial past. This looked like hard work, and I was sad to see the piece go, but obviously the time had come to dismantle this particular British male romance and make room for other fantasies.

— Gilda Williams