

# Money for Nothing

Felix Melia

Opens Thursday 30th March 2023, 6-9pm

31st March - 4th June

Open 12-6pm Thursday-Saturday

London-based artist Felix Melia's solo exhibition *Money for Nothing* brings together the first exhibition presentation of his ambitious 35-minute film *Money for Nothing* (2021), with selections from *Stages* (2022 - ongoing), a new series of cyanotype patchworks.

A portrait of Melia's friend Tim Akister, *Money for Nothing* follows Akister as he looks and finds, trawling scrap metal and salvaging bric-a-brac. Directing the viewer's gaze through the negative spaces in fencing, zooming into the spectacle of an excavator plunging towards the earth, or framing animated hands, Melia reveals Akister's image gradually. First, we get to know his voice. Versions of biographical accounts run together, taking on the qualities of rehearsed fiction.

Stitching Akister's tall tales to their material traces, Melia excavates and reassembles a history that moves rhythmically from the 1970s to the present under the City of London's steel and glass skyline—a looming presence on the East London horizon of Akister's life. Skirting the politics of urban regeneration and gentrification, access to housing, and constructions of personhood beyond property ownership or employment, *Money for Nothing* guides our focus back to Akister's gestures and expressions. Deliveroo drivers, market holders, street cleaners and city slickers meet in the background as Akister continues to work, always on the move. Wearing a suit jacket, hi-vis construction trousers, or stetson hat, he is a part of the flow. It has mysterious undercurrents; water gushes through *Money for Nothing*, overwhelming and transforming its subjects.

Accompanying the film, selections from Melia's series *Stages* connect imagery of undeveloped plots gone to seed, places that no longer exist and other sites of potential. Exposed using sunlight and sensitive to further transformation, the cyanotypes attend materially to cycles of destruction and renewal. Emptied of human inhabitants, the series holds the absence of people in tension with someone's arrival, whilst moments of abstraction in the images signal a different way of looking at urban space—a consideration of the dynamics beyond a place's face value. A den of snakes slithers across the patched scenes. Appearing to move between the canvases, they mark thresholds, cross boundaries.

In Cell's Reading Room, materials selected from MayDay Rooms' archive by curator Jessie Krish reflect a historical context for Akister's stories. Taking inspiration from the Tower Hamlets Research, Resource and Information Centre's 1985 publication *Taking Stock: The State of Housing in Tower Hamlets* (on display), the archival materials expand its purview, mapping accounts of the politics shaping access to housing in Tower Hamlets and intersectional community-led housing mobilisations between the mid-1970s and early 1990s.

Taking action in the early days of the docklands gold rush, the East End Docklands Action Group demanded that 'people's needs are put before profits and homes be built before hotels'. Today Canary Wharf coolly blinks, a pivotal case study for the public-private partnerships that drive almost all UK urban regeneration projects, symbolic of an economy in which local housing has become a global financial instrument. Reflecting evolving policy, including Thatcher's landmark 1980 and 1988 Housing Acts, the ephemera on display highlights claims made in service of a right to housing. Exposing local memory and forgetfulness in relation to how unequal access to housing shapes community, these materials open a conversation that widens the scope of how we might take up this basic right again.

Curator Jessie Krish

*Felix Melia combines moving image, writing, installation and performance to address notions of public and private space, intimacy and agency. He explores the ways we perceive, move through and dwell in our environments. Selected presentations include Money For Nothing (screening), TOWNER Eastbourne, 2022; Public Displays of Affection, Jupiter Woods, London, 2017; Moving Sickness, De Ateliers, Amsterdam, 2017; Writer in Residence, Whitechapel Gallery, London, 2016; Ozu's Arsehole, Interstate Projects, New York, 2016; The Inhalation Show, ANDOR Gallery, London, 2016; Shoulder Blades (commissioned by Serpentine Galleries), Hackney Picture house, London and Govett Brewster, New Zealand, 2016.*

