

Lending Enchantment to Vulgar Materials is the largest exhibition to date of Turner Prize winning artist Mark Leckey, bringing together new and older pieces in each of the media in which the British artist has worked. Taking his title from a letter by Guillaume Apollinaire, where he claims that he and the filmmaker Georges Méliès ‘lend enchantment to vulgar materials’, Leckey identifies a similar impulse at the heart of his own practice. That is precisely what the exhibition highlights by bringing together new and older pieces in each of the media in which the artist has worked. Spread across two floors of WIELS as well as the auditorium, the exhibition features nearly all of the artist’s videos, including his 1999 video of dance hall youth culture, *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore*, and others that have been rarely shown, alongside key sculptural works from the last decade, providing a long overdue survey of Leckey’s remarkable oeuvre. Together these works reveal the artist’s enduring fascination with things, both material and immaterial, precious and ‘vulgar’.

In addition to these works that look back and reveal how deeply influential the artist has been to a younger generation of artists, *Lending Enchantment to Vulgar Materials* includes a major new installation that acts an ersatz exhibition within the exhibition. Entitled *UniAddDumThs*, this newly commissioned work is a redux of *The Universal Addressability of Dumb Things* a traveling exhibition organised by Hayward Touring in 2013. It was as an extension of his artistic practice, in which collecting, sampling and appropriating digital images from the Internet are part and parcel of daily ‘research’, that Leckey curated the show based on his vast collection of digital images. Organizers working with him found, borrowed, or bought the actual, real world referents that corresponded to each of the digital images he had collected. *The Universal Addressability of Dumb Things* thus assembled an incredible array of archaeological artefacts, contemporary artworks and visionary machines on loan from numerous institutions, estates and artists around the world. Included, for example, were a medieval stone gargoyle, an Egyptian cat mummy, a mandrake root, a uterus-shaped vase and a Cyberman helmet. These rubbed shoulders with works by Louise Bourgeois, Ed Atkins, Pierre Molinier, Allen Jones and Toyen, to name a few.

UniAddDumThs, on the other hand, returns the ‘real’ borrowed artworks of *The Universal Addressability of Dumb Things* to their status as digital information (from whence they started on his computer desktop) to create an installation of ontologically liminal stuff. Hollow or flat, oddly textured, and often looking like the cheap substitutes that they are, Leckey likes that his copies appear weirdly lifeless as they sit between worlds, belonging as much, if not more, to the digital as to the material world. This might also explain the various other hybrid objects he includes as part of *UniAddDumThs*: 3D prints of any two original objects are ‘mashed up’ to become one new monstrous artifact. And their status as mere copies is made all the more evident given that alongside them, Leckey includes a single ‘original’ borrowed object – a shimmering, undeniably precious

hand-shaped thirteenth-century silver reliquary. The hand piece stands as the only truly auratic thing in Leckey's new artwork-as-ersatz- exhibition. It is as much an ur-representation of the real (the relic containing a bit of actual saintly bone fragment) as it is a metaphor for the digital (literally, the digits of the hand) as it is a symbol of the longing to touch things that undergirded the project from the start: the real, the digital, and desire lying at the very center of nearly all of Leckey's work. As in his practice more broadly, where he explores the tenuous boundaries between the simulacral, the virtual, the ersatz and their real world referents, Leckey's undertaking exemplifies a persistent interest in how technology creates desires, memories and fantasies.

Background on the artist

Mark Leckey is one of the most significant figures in a generation of artists that emerged in the late 1990s, a recognition that was confirmed when he was awarded the prestigious Turner Art Prize in 2008. Following a decade of near-abstinence from art making and a protracted absence from the art world after his studies at the Newcastle Polytechnic from 1987 to 1990, Leckey returned to making work, and by 1999 had made an indelible impression with his video *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore*. This ode to British dance culture – from northern soul to rave – is justly recognized as one of the most iconic works at the intersection of visual art and pop culture. And with it, the artist mapped the field of interests that would serve as the foundation for much of his later work.

In recent years, Leckey's avid exploration of the technological developments that shape the world have made him an extraordinary chronicler of what defines our times: a society transformed by the Internet and advancing technologies, in which the relations between people, things, and the world around them are subject to permanent renegotiation. His works reveal the artist's persistent fascination with things: brands, products, and digital images, and the affective pull that these have on us. These themes are addressed in Leckey's work in a reflection on our present condition that is as astute and critical as it is entertaining.

Lending Enchantment to Vulgar Materials is organised by WIELS in collaboration with Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Donnaregina – Madre, Naples and Kunsthalle Basel. The exhibition will be the subject of a *MADRESCENZA – Seasonal School* seminar in Naples in winter 2014-2015 and will travel in part to Kunsthalle Basel in 2015.

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