

FRIEZE

Mark Leckey's Displeasure Beach

In Margate, a group exhibition 'edited' by the artist evokes a pervasive mood of dread surrounding class and capitalism



BY JOE BOBOWICZ IN UK REVIEWS | 11 DEC 23



Organized by Mark Leckey, the group show 'In the Offing' features works by 13 artists, musicians and videographers that respond to the exhibition title – a nautical expression denoting the meeting of sea, sky and shore – alongside a new video by the artist.

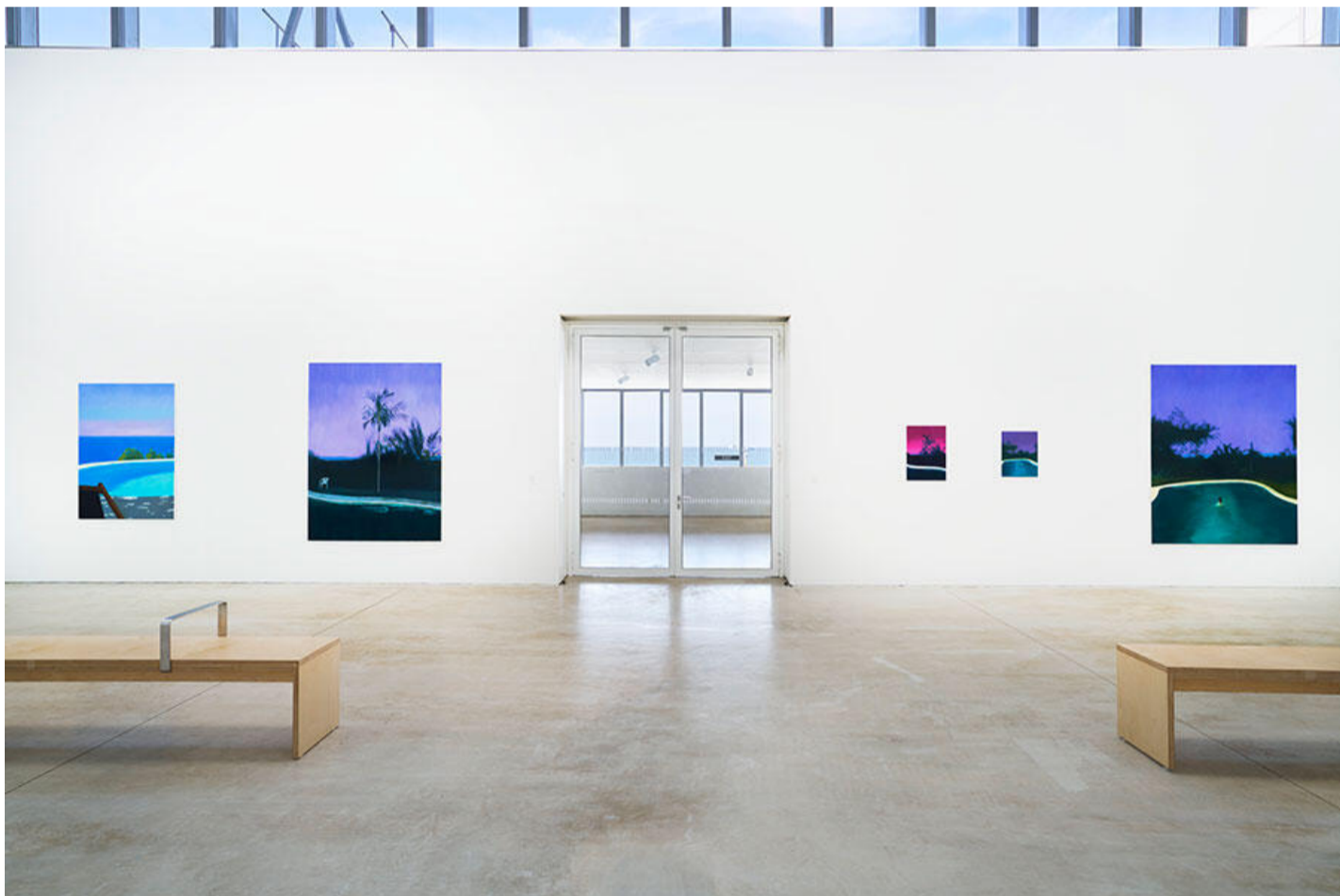
At the press preview, Leckey discussed the town's two symbolic poles: Turner Contemporary, a gallery founded in 2011, often cited as a gentrifying force, and Dreamland, a fairground established in 1880. Using the latter to unpack his working-class past, the artist suggested that – inculcated in a middle-class, art-world sensibility – he no longer felt like visiting the amusement park. The dichotomy Leckey evoked between Dreamland's crudeness and what he described as 'difficult' fine art is a gap he seeks to bridge here, reckoning with his own class ascendance. While unspoken, his usual musing on the capitalist structure underpinning this cultural distinction was communicated in the show through a mood of dread.



Mark Leckey, 'In The Offing', 2 23, installation view. Courtesy: © Turner Contemporary; photograph: Reece Straw

Leckey situates most of the works in the first of two darkened galleries soundtracked by several looped audio works. Iceboy Violet's *Marine Snow* (2023) features a floaty, spectral melody and bleary lyrics rapped like a stream of consciousness, evoking the raw energy of north Manchester's grassroots music scene. Lucy Duncombe's *SEAN R 1 YR AGO* (2023) combines drawn-out, ethereal vocals that crescendo, backed by a maudlin organ composition. Duncombe's work also reads as club-adjacent, exhibiting despair for the capitalist status quo via rave-inflected nostalgia and melancholy.

Throughout, video works also play across a circuit of screens. Blackhaine has contributed two films, *MIASMA/Hotel* and *MIASMA/Beach* (both 2022/23), produced in collaboration with Hannah Rose Stewart. *MIASMA/Hotel* unfolds like a stealth video game from the early 2000s, with Blackhaine imagined as a hitman, contorting in a claustrophobic, chintzy hotel room and evoking a user of the synthetic cannabis, spice. *MIASMA/Beach* sees the artist lurking on a darkened seashore, preceded with queasy footage of the water's swelling surface viewed from below, as though from the perspective of someone drowning. A trenchant but coded critique of post-industrial decline and poverty remains the musician's calling card.



Mark Leckey, 'In The Offing', 2023, installation view. Courtesy: © Turner Contemporary; photograph: Reece Straw

Also using video-game tropes, Theo Ellison's film *Fata Morgana* (2023) pans across a volcanic boulder, which levitates above stormy waves, topped by a citadel à la René Magritte's *The Castle of the Pyrenees* (1959). At intervals, mercurial title cards appear accompanied by a jingle, akin to a 'level complete' sequence. Archaic nautical jargon and a doom-laden score call to mind the sublime terror of a painting by J.M.W. Turner – who lived in Margate as a child from 1786–88 – only reimagined in an accelerationist, post-internet aesthetic, diagnosing capitalism's inevitability.

Leckey's own film, *DAZZLEDDARK* (2023), splices footage shot by the artist in Margate and its nearby coastlines with CGI Beanie Babies toys, carousel ponies and war ballasts. A CGI neon-lit horizon of fairground rides eventually fades into a mirage, a spectre of Leckey's childhood trips to the charmingly tacky Blackpool Pleasure Beach on Britain's northwest coast. Typical of the artist's work, these cloying, hauntological motifs – and their eventual collapse – felt poignant in the refined, institutional setting.



Mark Leckey, DAZZLEDDARK, 2023, production still. Courtesy: © the artist; Cabinet, London; Galerie Buchholz Berlin/Cologne/New York and Gladstone Gallery, New York.

Leckey's broad engagement with class and capitalism's engulfing nature seemingly goes amiss in the second gallery, dedicated entirely to Alessandro Raho's hyperrealist paintings. *Catherine in Roy's Pool* (2021) – a purple-skyed painting of Raho's wife, curator Catherine Wood, swimming in Raho's aunt and uncle's pool in the Bahamas – clangs against the para-institutional conceit and despondent tone. This says nothing of subculture's ability to bemoan capitalism, nor Leckey's class climb and the aesthetic chasm it brings. The first gallery, however, evidenced the underground avant-garde and Marxist disenchantment with a conflicted sense of defeat and defiance.

'In The Offing' is on view at Turner Contemporary, Margate, until 14 January 2024

Main image: Mark Leckey, DAZZLEDDARK, 2023, production still. Courtesy: © the artist; Cabinet, London; Galerie Buchholz Berlin/Cologne/New York and Gladstone Gallery, New York.



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