

Jenny Wu, "Mark Leckey *3 Songs from the Liver*," *ArtReview*, January/February 2025

ArtReview

Mark Leckey *3 Songs from the Liver*

Gladstone Gallery, New York 21 November – 15 February

Apart from a few spotlights and the glow of the videos, this solo exhibition by Mark Leckey is submerged in darkness, evoking the black box experience of cinemas and concert venues. The exhibition is an audiovisual spectacle that loops roughly every 20 minutes. Each of its three movements comprises a video accompanied by dramatic sound that fills Gladstone's ground-floor gallery, which is, for this show, reduced by a partition wall to around half its usual size. The lighting, sound and architectural intervention operate theatrically: shrouded, confined and surrounded by screens, visitors are yoked into following a series of associative leaps from viral online content to Leckey's digital fabrications with rapt attention.

To the Old World (Thank You for the Use of Your Body) (2021) is the exposition. In this video, which plays on two screens making up the opposing ends of a structure resembling a bus stop, a young man runs headfirst into the side of a shelter like the one reproduced in the gallery, crashing through the glass. The seconds-long video – culled, according to the exhibition materials, from a viral video repository – is interspersed with slow-motion CGI renderings of the moment

of impact and loops for nine minutes. On the wall opposite the installation hang six oak panels gilded like Byzantine icons, two of which – *Spidey with Spidey-Self* and *Spidey at the Windows* (both 2024) – contain images of the vigilante. The rest depict views of a rocky landscape devoid of human figures, save for a blocky avatar tumbling in the sky of *Found a Way to Fly Out the Map* (2024). By association, the man in the video comes to resemble an airborne superhuman – albeit an antisocial one whose stunt betrays a destructive impulse towards the urban environment, a desire to disrupt the status quo of civil society.

Riffing off these implications, *Carry Me Into The Wilderness* (2022), a vertical video embedded in the partition wall that begins as *To the Old World* ends, blends phone footage taken in Alexandra Park, London, with a virtual desert landscape. Here, Leckey can be heard giving a keyed-up account of encountering the sublime in nature. His speech is musicalised and accompanied by subtitles, which read, 'O man... / I just walk out into the wilderness / and I just well up / I just fill up... O Jesus / O God'. The dissonance between the vocative expression one

reads – 'O God' – and the secular colloquialism one hears – "Oh god" – encapsulates the exhibition's sense of humour, the presence of which makes one uncertain if the speaker's elation is fully sincere. Leckey seems committed to the bit in the third movement, *Mercy I Cry City* (2024). Here again, the tone of the audio and visuals is grandiose. The partition, punctured with small windows, separates viewers from a projection on the gallery's (real) back wall, which pans over a city rendered in a hand-drawn style of animation and bright comic book colours. Amid towers and battlements, a brown cross sits atop a blue dome in the city centre.

Whether *3 Songs from the Liver* represents a religious turn for Leckey is ambiguous, thanks to the humour that hedges the exhibition's sincerity. Regardless, one gleans from the evocations of virtual, fictional, premodern and preindustrial settings a set of blueprints for escaping a parochial, looping present. The best course of action, however, seems encrypted in Leckey's cheeky juxtapositions of dumb stunts and life-altering epiphanies. The key to deciphering these 'songs' may be to take them all completely seriously. *Jenny Wu*



To the Old World (Thank You for the Use of Your Body) (still), 2021, two-channel 9:16 video installation, aluminium, steel, 7.1 surround sound, 8 min 39 sec (loop), dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist