

Alex Rigotti, "Arthur Jafa & Mark Leckey Show Off Their History-Making Videos - and DJ Skills - Together for First Time," *Billboard*, July 2, 2025

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Arthur Jafa & Mark Leckey Show Off Their History-Making Videos — and DJ Skills — Together for First Time

"I really want people to see this," says Jafa, who has directed music videos for Solange, Jay-Z and Kanye West.

By Alex Rigotti +



This summer, two of the world's best known and most music-obsessed contemporary visual artists are showing their seminal video works together for the first time in an unlikely setting: an empty store tucked away in a shopping mall in Croydon, in suburban South London.

And on opening night June 28, these two art-world icons — the Mississippi-born cinematographer Arthur Jafa and British video artist Mark Leckey — showed off their DJ talent as well, going back to back with epic sets at an afterparty that raged until 5 a.m.

The exhibition, "HARDCORE / LOVE," features Arthur Jafa's 2016 video essay "Love Is The Message, The Message Is Death," which is soundtracked by Ye's (formerly Kanye West) "Ultralight Beam" from *The Life of Pablo*, and draws on Jafa's lengthy career as a cinematographer (*Daughters of the Dust*, *Crooklyn*, *Seven Songs for Malcom X*). Exploring techniques Jafa has described as efforts to unite "Black cinema with the power, beauty, and alienation of Black music," he has since directed music videos for acts including Solange and Jay-Z.



American artist Arthur Jafa poses for a photograph during the press visit to the exhibition "Corps et Ames" or "Body and Soul" at the Bourse de Commerce, in Paris on March 4, 2025.

Ludovic Marin/AFP via Getty Images

Jafa's work is juxtaposed in the former electronics store against Leckey's 1999 *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore*, a pivotal video documenting the rise of rave culture from the 1970s to 1990s. The video is composed of footage from '70s discos, Northern Soul dances and British raves, while its audio references Kraftwerk and staple fashion brands such as Adidas, Burberry and of course, Fiorucci. Leckey's video has become a significant touchpoint for [dance](https://www.billboard.com/t/dance/) music today, having been sampled by the likes of Jamie xx, The Avalanches and referenced by 2025 Sound Of... nominee Barry Can't Swim, and was inspired by a conversation Leckey had at the time with then ICA director Emma Dexter and Gavin Brown, Leckey and Jafa's art dealer, about the potential for art within the genre of the music video.

Gavin Brown, currently a partner at New York's Gladstone Gallery, wanted to launch "HARDCORE / LOVE" off the beat path in Croydon, where he was born and raised, to bring the iconic works to a place more accessible to aspiring artists who may not be able to afford rent or studio space in bigger cities.

"I went to art school in England at the tail end of a golden age where you went for free — in fact, you were given a grant. People who went then [with] little means could not afford it now. I think that is a recipe for disaster for our culture," Brown told *Billboard* at the opening night reception. He hopes the exhibition in Croydon's Whitgift Centre — at a space operated by the local alternative art school Conditions — will help raise funds to provide underprivileged artists with low-cost studio space and education. The exhibition will run until Aug. 10.

Jafa says that the show's location jibed with his mission to make the art world accessible to as many people as possible.

"I really want people to see it," he said of the exhibition. "My family, they don't go to museums and stuff like that — it's not something they do on a regular basis. We would have never seen anything like this if there wasn't some way to deliver it to us. It's pretty straightforward: You want people to see it, you've got to go where the people are."



Mark Leckey attends Frieze London's 20th Anniversary Party in partnership with Stone Island at The House of KOKO on October 12, 2023 in London, England.
Dave Benett/Getty Images

Leckey, meanwhile, teaches at Conditions and has collaborated with the school as part of his residency on the music-radio platform NTS, where he has hosted his own show since 2017, spinning a wide mix of experimental genres every month. Jafa also curates music on NTS, recently broadcasting a set of chopped and screwed tracks along with his own edits.

At the opening reception, Leckey reflected on the legacy of *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore*, saying he thought that “rave was part of a set of conditions that were very particular to the 20th century, and once the 20th century had passed — which also coincided with the transference from analog to digital — those conditions that created subculture, the rave, rock n’ roll and the rest of it basically dissipated.”

Today, he says, rap, Soundcloud music and acts such as South London artist SHEIVA look to him like the future of music, noting that these sounds “feel like they could be here [at Conditions]. That’s the kind of energy that I’m looking for.”

After the opening, Jafa and Leckey held court at the afterparty at Ormside Studios in Bermondsey, along with many current and former Conditions students, as well as Conditions co-founder Matthew Noel-Tod and celebs such as director Edward Buckles Jr. (*Katrina Babies*).

Jafa and Leckey played back-to-back sets for around 130 partygoers, with Jafa taking to the decks around 10:15 p.m., spinning an entrancing mix of soul and jazz cuts including Tom Jones’ “I (Who Have Nothing.” Leckey then took over to unleash a selection of rave tracks including classic Dizzee Rascal bassline, ’90s jungle and hyperpop, finishing with visceral gabber music around 11:30 p.m. The night continued with DJs including TTB, Shauwdii, Nitetrax, 370JP and Tzekin fueling the dance party until the wee hours.