

ZERO...

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Tommy Malekoff, b. 1992 (USA)

The Bluffs

10th October > 13th November, 2024

Tommy Malekoff's new two-channel video, *The Bluffs*, looks at three American cities, all of which have a complicated history of decline after showing signs of potential growth and prosperity. These places also share a common feature of their urban landscapes - an isolated architectural structure in the skyline that looms like an incongruous icon of forgotten promise. Widely regarded as eyesores by the public, the landmarks glow unnaturally in the video, suggesting an unearthly power or spiritual energy. Furthering the sense of unreality and confusing the continuity of the landscape, the three buildings were composited in certain shots to appear in places where they don't actually exist.

Inspired by the imaginary landscape of Frederic Edwin Church's 1873 painting *Syria by the Sea*, which melds Roman, Islamic and European elements, Malekoff evokes a fictional place of disparate architectural styles, seemingly caught between decay and resurrection. Pillars are a recurring motif, signaling either an erosion of the built environment back to its foundation, or the start of a new cycle of construction. Shot almost entirely at night or twilight, many scenes evoke a sense of foreboding, underscored by base tones of the soundtrack. Anonymous figures navigate the dark environments surrounding the skyscrapers with handheld spotlights as if to decipher a lost sense of purpose or progress. Even among abandoned and deteriorating relics of past industry, the wonder of discovery persists.

The three cities in *The Bluffs* - Detroit, MI, Memphis, TN, Galveston, TX - are all located on water, a liminal space and an untamed elemental force. The water's depths are eternal, but reflections from illuminated speedboats and mysterious light beams free the imagination to envision new future realities. In an exhilarating scene, luminescent dolphins breach the water, accompanied by soaring electronic chords, perhaps beckoning the unappreciated icons and their cities to unmoor and float toward a future Atlantis.

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The Bluffs features original music by Rafael Anton Irisarri

Additional sound design by Joe Williams

Visual effects by Zahid Jiwa

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4k video and sound

7:37 min, continuous loop