

MIKE KELLEY

2 MAY – 5 AUGUST 2013

The Centre Pompidou is presenting the first retrospective in France devoted to Mike Kelley, with a hundred-odd works produced between 1974 and 2011, coming from Europe and the United States. The American artist, who died prematurely in 2012, was born in the suburbs of Detroit (Michigan) in 1954 and moved to California during the Seventies. He left a prolific body of unsettling, protean works drawing on both “high” and “low” culture. The exhibition is structured around key stages in the artist’s output, including what is probably his best-known series of works, *Half a Man*, staging stuffed toy animals and rag dolls.

Throughout the circuit, major installations, in which the artist makes use of every technique (such as video, photography, painting and disparate objects), are confronted with groups of more intimist works, particularly on paper.

The erudite, somewhat irreverent work of Mike Kelley unfolds in a striking visual and sound circuit ranging from his first performances, staged when he was a student at the famous Los Angeles art school CalArts, to graphic work of astonishing richness, and spectacular multimedia set-ups. It all expresses a caustic critical commentary on art and society.

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Before entering the exhibition, visitors are met by **Horizontal Tracking Shot of a Cross Section of Trauma Rooms**, whose formal obviousness – large, vertically-juxtaposed coloured panels – is deceptive. Behind the work we get intermittent glimpses of very short, obscure and unsettling video footage found on the Internet, interrupting colour bars passing on three screens in succession. This to-ing -and fro-ing between a highly codified formal proposal and trivial imagery is characteristic of the tensions present in Mike Kelley's work.

#1

The exhibition starts with the first performances Mike Kelley staged in the second half of the Seventies while he was a student at CalArts, an art school well-known for its experimental daring. Sound and humour are omnipresent in these pieces, part of which have been regrouped under the term "Poetry in Motion". The artist makes use of object-sculptures with elementary forms (tubes, cones, etc.), with a touch of the futuristic or minimalist, made of ordinary materials, and which play the role of brokers of ideas, amplifiers or decoders of language. The large installation in the exhibition, **Performance related objects, 1977-79**, is a selection of these objects, soundtracks and photographs of performances, displayed by the artist. These are echoed by the **Birdhouses**, accompanied by an ironic instruction sheet: made using models found in DIY books, they parody not only sculpture and architecture but also the emotional investment that goes into items made by amateurs.

#2

Plato's Cave, Rothko's Chapel, Lincoln's Profile is a project for which Mike Kelley invented a text, a series of paintings and objects – a group of which is presented here –, an installation and a performance presented in 1986 at the Artists Space in New York. Kelley forms mental and verbal associations, in a direct line from the writer Raymond Roussel, between three figures in history in principle completely unrelated: Plato, Rothko and Lincoln. They support a performance for which he sets up scenery like a rock concert stage, with the group Sonic Youth providing the musical aspect. The attributes associated with

the three chosen names (cave, chapel and profile) serve as a pretext for critical thinking about the relationship of possession. The works produced for this performance based on the idea of the idol, with varying techniques and styles, reflect the composite nature of cultural references employed by Kelley.

#3

This interest in popular musical culture can be found in the evocation of the punk rock group Mike Kelley formed with Tony Oursler in 1977, **The Poetics**. Its history, still known to few, is put into perspective by the two artists in a magnificent installation, **The Poetics Project**. This was shown at Documenta X in Kassel in 1997 before being acquired by the Musée national d'art moderne. Visitors are encouraged to walk around this sound and visual environment, a huge collage where paintings mingle with sculptures and projections, representing not so much the evocation of a group as an attempt to reactivate an unlisted landmark in the official history of this musical genre. The rehabilitation of "minor" histories is one of the core themes in Mike Kelley's work, which makes constant play with fixed or linear accounts to recompose other systems of reference that elucidate the course of things in another way.

#4

A large section of the exhibition is devoted to what made Mike Kelley famous – not without a whiff of scandal – in the early Nineties: the series entitled **Half a Man**, which he began in 1987. Recuperated stuffed toy animals and hand-made cloth dolls hang on the wall or are placed on small woven mats or blankets: reminiscent of childhood, these objects can be interpreted on several levels. Their wear-and-tear, craft-linked and derisory aspects gives them an emotional dimension directly opposing the rational criticism of conventions found in minimalist sculpture or the ready-made. Mike Kelley stigmatises the instrumentalisation of emotions and their commodification. What he shows is not in the least an autobiographical comment, but a set-up that is both tragic and comic, arousing empathy and rejection alike in a tension that induces a certain malaise.

#5

The **Half a Man** series also includes large drawings of parts of the body (lungs, kidneys and so on), often associated, in a linear display giving them a relationship of equivalence, with drawings of dustbin bags or rag dolls. Other large paintings on panel focus on intestines coupled with eyes and brains, where the introduction of symmetry serves as an ironic comment on deviant sexual models. The radicality of the gesture, which consists in levelling out the representation of organs, and their function at the same time, is part of the de-hierarchisation at work in Mike Kelley. Uturning the established order with amazing audacity, it is meant to enable other viewpoints and open out the field of interpretation.

#6

This section is based on the theme of education, with **Educational complex**, a gigantic white model consisting of all the educational establishments that marked Mike Kelley's life. The smooth parts, where the architecture is not detailed, correspond to zones the memory is unable to restore: they are symptomatic of the occurrence of a trauma, according to the artist. The question of repressed memory and the creation of "screen" memories innervates a whole area of Mike Kelley's discourse, from this major work right through to the installations of the **Day is Done** corpus. This latter series stages fictions created from images of the extracurricular activities of college pupils or university students, such as dressing-up parties or other unconventional competitive rituals. Artistic education is also stigmatised through proposals condemning the ascendancy of models that curb creativity.

#7

In Mike Kelley's cosmogony, energies are at work, spirits that take over beings or vital sexual energy. The circulation of waves and fluids is a recurring motif in the artist's iconography, in the same way as stains, inkblots, shapeless mounds and aliens, for their ability to arouse all kinds of mental projections. The imposing sculpture **SS Cuttlebone**, with its undefined contours ornamented with metal jewellery, reflects this fascination for the formless. The **Memory Ware** series, to which it belongs, also develops in two dimensions, with pictures made of small found objects set in material to compose a highly appealing visual world, despite their derisory character.

#8

The circuit ends with a room devoted to a group on the **Kandors** series, inspired by the mythical home city of Superman. Mike Kelley provides numerous, versions of the different representations of the fictional city, ranging from large illuminated installations, seeking to render it in volume, to coloured microcosms evoking the miniaturised city owned by the hero. This series once again relates to the question of recollection, whose blanks distort the faithfulness of any representation. Kandor is never evoked in the same way in comic books, thus opening the way to a multitude of versions in terms of form, all equally valid, which the artist exploits with irony and humour, playing with the appeal of coloured environments, or exuding a criticism of modernist architecture.

EXHIBITION

CURATOR

Sophie Duplaix
Chief Curator of Contemporary
Collections at the Musée national
d'art moderne

RESEARCH COORDINATOR

Annalisa Rimmaudo
with the collaboration of Sophie
Bensaid

PRODUCTION MANAGER

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ARCHITECT AND STAGE DESIGNER

Camille Excoffon

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Bastien Morin

This travelling exhibition is
organised by the Stedelijk Museum
Amsterdam and its director
Ann Goldstein in collaboration with
the Mike Kelley Foundation for
the Arts. The curator for the first
exhibition concept was
Dr. Eva Meyer-Hermann.

The "Mike Kelley" retrospective
on show at the Centre Pompidou
is curated by Sophie Duplaix,
Chief Curator of Contemporary
Collections at the Musée national
d'art moderne.

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made possible by lead support
of the Turing Foundation, with
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CATALOGUE

MIKE KELLEY

Edited by Sophie Duplaix
Somogy éditions d'art, Paris;
Éditions du Centre Pompidou,
Paris
144 p., 130 colour ill.
Price: €29.90

AROUND THE EXHIBITION

VIDÉO ET APRÈS

Special "Mike Kelley" event
Presented by Benjamin Thorel,
art critic and independent curator
Afternoon with Mike Kelley
Monday 13 May 2.30-6.30 pm,
Cinema 1
Free admission, subject to available
seating
Mike Kelley & Friends
Monday 13 May 7.00 pm, Cinema 1
Price: €6, reduced rate: €4; free
admission for Museum Pass holders

FILM

Erica Beckman
The Super-8 Trilogy
Wednesday 22 May, 8.00 pm,
Cinema 2
Showing with Erica Beckman
present
Price: €6, reduced rate: €4;
free admission for Museum Pass
holders

Mike Kelley

Film and Sculpture
Session introduced by Jean-Philippe
Antoine (Paris VIII University,
Vincennes/St Denis)
Wednesday 5 June, 7.00 pm,
Cinema 2
Price: €6, reduced rate: €4; free
admission for Museum Pass holders

INFORMATIONS

01 44 78 12 33
www.centrepompidou.fr

EXHIBITION OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

from 2 May to 5 August 2013
Galerie Sud, Level 1
Every day except Tuesdays
from 11 am to 9 pm
Ticket counters close at 8 pm

ADMISSION

**Access with the ticket
"Museum & Expositions"**
Valid throughout the day at the
Museum, for all exhibitions
and the View of Paris, for a single
admission in each space
€13, concessions €10
Free with the annual pass and for
under-18sw

Online ticket purchase and printing (full price only)

www.centrepompidou.fr/billetterie

TWITTER

More information on the exhibition
can be found via Twitter (hashtag
#Kelley) or via <http://www.twitter.com/centrepompidou>

Some works of art presented in
this exhibition may hurt the publics
feelings, particularly those of young
children

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