

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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Performa 09: Mike Kelley's Extracurricular Activity

By ROBERTA SMITH



Photo by Paula Court, Courtesy of Performa A scene from "Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction #32, Plus."

Mike Kelley's invigorating occasionally hilarious 75-minute performance piece "Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction #32, Plus," will play twice more (Thursday at 8 and 10 p.m.) at the Judson Church on Washington Square Park South. If you want to see the half-time entertainment at a high school basketball game through a

glass darkly, or at least dimly, accompanied by a medley of popular musical styles, avail yourself.

Review

The piece was inspired by “Day Is Done,” Mr. Kelley’s 2005 show at the Gagosian Gallery in Chelsea, where high school was manifested in films and videos of amateur theatricals that Mr. Kelley cleverly extrapolated from photographs found in high school yearbooks. The videos were shown on sculptural tableaus spotlighted in the dark, like carnival night.

This time around Mr. Kelley has gone for something more immediate in terms of noise, sweat and moving bodies and in the perfect setting, a small basketball court in the Judson basement that even has bleachers. The gamut of the half-time genre seemed covered, with Mr. Kelley jumping up from the sidelines to happily participating at regular intervals.

Basketball drills were executed by four women who also paired up to rehearse as horses, without the usual horse costume (those came later). A woman in a blue cape and flowered wreath drifted in and out, a fusion of the Virgin Mary, Primavera and a prom queen. The section titled “Co-Workers” (the fourth of 14) introduced a brass band, marching single-file in everyday (office) clothing and ugly man-wigs. They were led by a man in a tuxedo who shouted a kind of motivational alphabet, from “Act on!, Act off! Actors!” all the way to zip and zippers, as if reciting something by Bruce Nauman.

The brass players arranged themselves in a pyramid on a tall ladder set up by four buff, intermittently tattooed nude men – altogether a nice switch on the usual pyramid of sexy cheerleaders. There was more, but the main event was the music, written by Scott Benzel, a frequent collaborator of Mr. Kelley’s, and performed primarily by eight musicians playing everything from harp to slide guitar. They crashed and churned

through rock and roll, heavy metal, and music that conjured up films noirs, horror movies, game shows, bowling alleys and even the avant-garde.

Mr. Kelley detailed his sources, on all fronts, in the program's lengthy notes, indicating that he doesn't have to make this stuff up. Wearing jeans and a rather too-casual gray tank top he functioned at different points as basketball coach, Foley artist and stagehand. But the best moment came early in the evening when he donned a floppy, flowered, straw hat and trailed the brass band, smiling at the audience, arms spread wide. It was as if he were saying "Welcome, you're in my clutches." The words "prisoners of Mike" crossed my mind.