

## GAGOSIAN GALLERY

Mike Kelley goes home again

*The Michigan-born, Los Angeles-based artist talks about recreating his childhood home for Artangel's first US public art project*

By Ruth Lopez | Web only

Published online 11 Oct 10 ([News](#))



Kelley's "Mobile Homestead" in front of Detroit Central Station, built in 1913, abandoned in 1988

**CHICAGO.** Mike Kelley's *Mobile Homestead*, a recreation of his suburban Detroit childhood home, has a built-in trailer chassis and hitches to a semi-cab—fitting that a Motor City art project would end up having wheels. Four years ago, the London-based public art instigator Artangel contacted Kelley about working together. The result is Artangel's first US commission and Kelley's first public art project.

*Mobile Homestead* grew out of a 1995 work, *Educational Complex*, where Kelley built, from memory, a model of every school he ever attended. Kelley has lived and worked in Los Angeles since moving in 1978 from his native Michigan to attend graduate school. His work has centered, largely, on issues of personal history and memories and Detroit has provided raw material since the beginning.

For *Mobile Homestead*, Kelley attempted to purchase the suburban white ranch house he grew up in but the current owner had no interest in moving. Artangel and Kelley looked at plots of land, with the idea of building a replica, but it proved to be too big of a bureaucratic challenge. Then, the newly opened Museum of Contemporary Art of Detroit (MOCAD) invited Kelley to use the big lot adjacent to the museum. Kelley visited his old house in Westland several times, taking pictures and measurements, and recreated the house.

“Everything switched to downtown and the project really changed after that,” said Kelley. The idea to make it mobile was a way to hold on to the original idea. “I wanted to keep this connection out to the area where the house is,” said Kelley.

The house being able to travel opened up the possibility of performing community service. On its maiden voyage on 25 September, *Mobile Homestead* journeyed along Michigan Avenue, a major artery, on its way out to the suburb of Westland—Kelley’s home town—collecting food items along the way on behalf of various community organizations.

“When *Mobile Homestead* ended up downtown the social meaning changed a lot,” Kelley said. “It raises a lot of issues that would not have been there. If it had been built in the suburbs, I wouldn’t have bothered to address them.” For instance, *Mobile Homestead* portrays a reversal of “white flight” —a huge part of the white population left the city after the race riots in the 1960s leaving behind a devastated urban space.

The ranch house now sits amid shockingly different architectural styles of the city—large brick apartment buildings and Victorian houses—many vacant for decades. Since the project began there have been some signs, however small, of revitalization and gentrification.

Kelley said he has been working on plans for future additions to the *Mobile Homestead* but for now, the focus is on securing the longevity of the project. It’s an ambitious idea in an ailing city. “Will it be a ruin in itself or will it actually function,” said Kelley.