

Artnet  
January 28, 2011

## GAGOSIAN GALLERY

**Mike Kelley:**

### **SUPERMAN'S HAREM**

by Hunter Drohojowska-Philp

Eight years have passed since Mike Kelley's work was last featured in a large solo show in his hometown of Los Angeles. It was worth the wait. Like Clark Kent bursting from a phone booth with red cape flying, Kelley's first show at Gagosian Gallery in Beverly Hills is a triumph. Comparing Kelley with Superman is not the stretch it might seem, since the show is built around Kelley's sculptural recreations of the fictional Kryptonian city of Kandor, the one miniaturized by evil Braniac and saved in a glass bell jar by the superhero.

An house-sized grotto of gray artificial stone contains *Kandor 10A*, a group of golden skyscrapers in a rose-toned glass bottle with atmosphere piped in through a tube from large tank. The most expensive piece in the show, it is priced at \$950,000.

In a darkened gallery, four models of cities, made of urethane resin, glow in red, green, gold or gray from the lighting contained in their rock bases. Each city is unique, not due to Kelley's artistic license but a result of the fact that Kelley discovered a lack of continuity in the way Kandor was represented over the decades by Superman's illustrators. The *Cities*, as they are called, range from \$100,000 to \$200,000.

Kelley's fascination with Kandor, which dates back to 1999, stems not from an obsession with the superhero. It is a manifestation his interest in architecture as exemplifying the optimism and promise of the early modernists. The city of Kandor varies greatly over the six decades that it was drawn in the comic strip. Nonetheless, it is always a pristine city of the future with streamlined, circular or high rise structures.

For this exhibition, Kelley has designed lenticular wall panels depicting the city in a bottle motif that shifts as a viewer changes position. These range in price from \$50,000 to \$90,000.

In the center of the main gallery, a life-sized figure of Colonel Sanders stands before a stage painted with psychedelic swirls of limes and oranges and gazes down into a Plexiglas box holding a model of the stage and a small standing figure of Sigmund Freud holding a cigar. Freud figures in Kelley's lengthy interest in Repressed Memory Syndrome.

For the first time, Kelley has mixed the "Kandor" series with works from his ongoing "Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction" series that draws from pictures in high school yearbooks and other sources. On video screens mounted above piles of embroidered pillows and rolled oriental carpets, fetching young women clad in Middle Eastern costumes, apparently a harem, cavort and carouse with a young man. Though the two series are not specifically related, their coexistence in the gallery generates quixotic and intriguing connections. These carefree and attractive people could be residents of Kandor.

In the darkened rear gallery, *Extracurricular Activity Reconstruction #35* features a video of several gnomish women dressed in conical hats, baggy suits with big buttons and shoes with curled up toes. They bumble about slowly and without purpose. The video is shown within a schematic construction of a house where an electric fireplace glows and a set of chairs surround a table. Lying on the floor outside the house, the outfits of the gnomes are transformed into the shape of a large intestine wrapped around cases of Corona beer as *Mexican Blind Cave Worm*. While specific narrative is not Kelley's intention, one is tempted to see these grubby figures as dwellers in darkness outside the colorful and illuminated Kandor.

Haves and have-nots? Good and evil? The promising future tethered to an oppressive past? Science fiction, popular culture, memory distortion, a thousand additional sources

and potential interpretations, the exhibition once again shows Kelley to be an artist of unbridled invention.

Mike Kelley, "Kandor 10 / Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction #34 / Kandor 12 / Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction #35," Jan. 11-Feb. 19, 2011, at Gagosian Gallery, 456 North Camden Drive, Beverly Hills, Ca. 90210



Mike Kelley, [Kandor 10 A](#), 2010, at Gagosian Gallery, Beverly Hills. Photo by Fredrik Nilsen



Mike Kelley, [Kandor 10 A](#), 2010, at Gagosian Gallery, Beverly Hills. Photo by Fredrik Nilsen



Mike Kelley, [\*Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction #34\*](#), 2010, at Gagosian Gallery, Beverly Hills. Photo by Fredrik Nilsen



Mike Kelley, [\*Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction #34\*](#), 2010, at Gagosian Gallery, Beverly Hills. Photo by Fredrik Nilsen



Mike Kelley, "Kandor 10 / Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction #34, Kandor 12 / Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction #35," installation view, Gagosian Gallery, Beverly Hills. Photo by Fredrik Nilsen



Mike Kelley, "Kandor 10 / Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction #34, Kandor 12 / Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction #35," installation view, Gagosian Gallery, Beverly Hills. Photo by Fredrik Nilsen



Mike Kelley, video production still from [\*Extracurricular Projective Reconstruction #34\*](#), 2010, at Gagosian Gallery, Beverly Hills