

## GAGOSIAN GALLERY

# Interview

### Inside the Mind of Mike Kelley

Rachel Small



*Mike Kelley, Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction #1 (A Domestic Scene) (Detail), 2000. Black and White Photograph. François Pinault Foundation © Estate of Mike Kelley. All rights reserved.*

Detroit-born artist Mike Kelley left behind a complex, colorful multimedia body of work—hardly suitable for confined quarters. So when curator Emi Fontana organized "Mike Kelley: Eternity is a Long Time," in Milan's HangarBicocca, she took advantage of the massive, industrial space, making it so viewers could experience the full impact of Kelley's art. "They will be able to approach his work in a different way: seeing it first from far away, then coming closer," explains Fontana, who worked with Kelley for 15 years up until his death in 2012. "I think it will allow them to absorb the intensity of the work much better."

Pieces span from 2000 through 2006, a culminating period in his 30-year career. Beginning the exhibition is the film *Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction #1 (A Domestic Scene)* (2000), the first project Fontana and Kelley worked on together. The exhibition's title comes from this piece; it's a phrase one protagonist utters to the other before they commit suicide. *John Glenn Memorial Detroit River Reclamation Project (Including the Local Culture Pictorial Guide, 1968-1972, Wayne/Westland Eagle)* (2001), made of colored fragments collected from a river in Detroit, alludes to a monument of the astronaut John Glenn, after whom Kelley's high school was named. Ending the exhibition is *Profondeurs Vertes* (2006), which focuses around *Watson and the Shark* (1777) by John Singleton Copley and *The Recitation* (1891) by Thomas Wilmer

Dewing. The work refers to Kelley's youth, when the two paintings, which he viewed at the Detroit Institute of Arts, inspired him to be an artist.

An exception to the six-year time frame is *The Banana Man* (1983), which, as Fontana describes, represents themes that persist in Kelley's later oeuvre, including his attempts to fill memory lapses and the centrality of his physical presence. "It works like a manifesto," she explains.

Kelley's first Italian solo show was in 2000 at Fontana's gallery in Milan. Having the last one in Milan, Fontana says, "is like closing the circle." The show is arranged analogically, and Fontana hopes that juxtapositions will give rise to new questions, through "a glimpse of Mike's mind." What will they see? "They'll get scared!" she laughs. "It's a wonderful mind, for sure, but there is a dark side to it."

*"MIKE KELLEY: ETERNITY IS A LONG TIME" WILL BE ON VIEW AT HANGARBICOCCA IN MILAN FROM MAY 24 THROUGH SEPTEMBER 8, 2013.*