

NEON

PRESS RELEASE

Mike Kelley: *Fortress of Solitude*
NEON at the Museum of Cycladic Art, Athens
16 November 2017 – 25 February 2018

Curated by Douglas Fogle
Presented by NEON

NEON is proud to present the first monographic exhibition of Mike Kelley (1954-2012) in Athens, curated by Douglas Fogle. *Fortress of Solitude* brings together a range of seminal works from across Kelley's career in order to reflect on the uncanny psychological homelessness of the contemporary world.

Whether using found stuffed animals as emotional effigies of long lost childhood memories or evoking the psychic homelessness of Superman in the form of Kelley's reconstructive exploration of the superhero's inaccessible home city of Kandor that he kept in his *Fortress of Solitude*, we are reminded that no matter how hard we try, we can't go home.

Over the course of more than three decades, Kelley used a wide variety of media from painting and sculpture to drawing, video and performance, to explore and critically engage various incarnations of the repressed side – or dark underbelly – of the American cultural unconscious. Kelley often used abject materials and images to attempt to analyse anonymous institutional powers such as the bureaucracy of schools while evoking a certain kind of empathy for the human subject. Whether arranging hand-made thrift store rag dolls in a kind of quasi-psychotherapeutic exercise, creating a mash up architectural model from memory of his high school and childhood home, or creating twisted psychedelic music videos based on photographs of odd extracurricular activities as depicted in American high school yearbooks, Kelley sought to explore how we constantly attempt to create ourselves from our unreliable and unstable memories of our own past.

Kelley grew up in the working class suburbs of Detroit where he was involved with the counterculture scenes of noise and punk rock. Moving from the Midwest to California for graduate school at CalArts, Kelley brought the gritty and contrarian energy of that music scene into a Los Angeles art scene that he helped define in the 1980s, alongside Paul McCarthy, Raymond Pettibon, and many others. In Kelley's mind, no matter how hard we try, we can't get back to what Bruce Springsteen ironically called our "glory days."

In one of his last bodies of work Kelley dealt with homesickness by exploring the mythology around the comic book hero Superman with whom the artist was obsessed. In his *Kandors* series the artist created a group of sculptures built around hand blown glass jars reminiscent of the one that Superman kept in his *Fortress of Solitude*, his lonely frozen palace in the Arctic. In Superman mythology, Kandor was the capital city of Krypton and had been miniaturized by a villain and encased in a vitreous prison. Superman was able to steal back this reduced version of his home city and keep it as a memento of the world to which he could never return. In Superman's world, Kandor was an acknowledgement of both the desire to return home and the utter impossibility of achieving that desire.

17 of these historical works are exhibited alongside videos and biographical material researched from the archives of the Mike Kelley Foundation in Los Angeles.

In collaboration with the U.S. Embassy in Athens.

NEON would like to thank the Hellenic Ministry of Culture & Sports for their collaboration.

Notes to editors

NEON, founded in 2013 by collector and entrepreneur Dimitris Daskalopoulos, breaks with the convention that limits the contemporary art foundation of a collector to a single place. NEON's space is the city. It acts on a multitude of initiatives, spaces, and civic and social contexts. It seeks to expose the ability contemporary culture has to stimulate, inspire, and affect the individual and society at large. NEON collaborates with cultural institutions and supports the programs of public and private institutions to enhance increased access and inventive interaction with contemporary art.

Douglas Fogle is an independent curator and writer based in Los Angeles. His most current exhibition, *Andy Warhol: Dark Star*, opened at Museo Jumex in June 2017 and is a major survey of the first ten years of Warhol's career from his earliest hand painted pop works through his Mao series. From 2009-2012 he served as Deputy Director, Exhibition and Programs and Chief Curator at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles where he organized a variety of exhibitions including Ed Ruscha: *On the Road*, (2011), an international group exhibition *All of this and nothing* (curated with Anne Ellegood, 2011), Mark Manders: *Parallel Occurrences/ Documented Assignments* (curated with Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson, 2010), and Luisa Lambri: *Being there* (2010). Previously, he served as curator of contemporary art at the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh from 2005-2009 where he organized *Life on Mars*, the 55th Carnegie International in 2008. Prior to that, Fogle was a curator in the Visual Arts Department of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis from 1994-2005 where he curated a wide array of exhibitions such as *Painting at the Edge of the World* (2001), *The Last Picture Show: Artists Using Photography 1960-1982* (2003), *Andy Warhol/Supernova: Stars, Deaths, and Disasters 1962-1964* (2005), and solo exhibitions with Catherine Opie and Julie Mehretu.

Museum of Cycladic Art opening hours:

Monday - Wednesday - Friday - Saturday: 10:00 - 17:00

Thursday: 10:00 - 20:00

Sunday: 11:00 - 17:00

Tuesday: closed

Press Enquiries

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