

HAUSER & WIRTH

This resource has been produced to accompany the exhibition 'Mike Kelley. Vice Anglais' at Hauser & Wirth London.

Although Mike Kelley's proposal to create a video for every day of the year was never fully realized, it did yield a substantial body of work known as the 'Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstructions' or 'EAPRs' for short. As this exploration of two of the works in the series reveals, video turned out to be but one of various mediums that constitute these elaborate theatrical (re)constructions, which include sets, costumes, music, scripts, sculptures, drawings, photographs and holograms. Drawing on his archive of folkloric and often decidedly weird Americana, Kelley based each of the 'EAPRs' on a single photograph found in a high school student yearbook or a smalltown newspaper. As he explained of the process: 'I have to write a whole scenario for it, like a play, and then do the music and everything else. Each one is just based on the look of a photograph that tells me what style it has to be done in.' Apparently 'English-style' was the visual cue when it came to loading 'Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction #36 (Vice Anglais)' and 'Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction #36B (Made in England);' both 2011, with cultural references that range from the Romantic poets and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood to Ken Russell's countercultural cinema look at them both, British cult Hammer Horror movies and punk. Conveyed throughout is Kelley's deeply informed deployment of the transgressive power-and disturbing fun-of the carnivalesque.

'Mike Kelley. Vice Anglais':

Counterculture, Travesty and Kelley's Carnavalesque

Tanya Barson

'His stance was dissident and transgressive; he aligned himself with adolescence. More specifically, his practice can be construed as an outgrowth of the carnivalesque youth- and countercultures of the 1960s and 70s...'

John Miller, 2015

'Not only education but social reality itself has become schooled...Rich and poor alike depend on schools and hospitals which guide their lives, form their world view, and define for them what is legitimate and what is not. Both view doctoring oneself as irresponsible, learning on one's own as unreliable, and community organization, when not paid for by those in authority, as a form of aggression and subversion...Everywhere not only education but society as a whole needs 'deschooling.'

Ivan Illich, 1971

Taking as its starting point 'Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction #36 (Vice Anglais)' and 'Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction #36B (Made in England),' both 2011, by Mike Kelley, and gathering a discrete group of related works to show alongside, this exhibition focuses on the way that Kelley's work addresses the relation of establishment culture to counterculture, and specifically the origins of the latter in late 18th- and 19th-Century England. It evokes the resonances of this culture in the 1960s and 1970s and its more recent legacy in the context of Kelley's art. It also explores his ongoing investigation of memory and of institutionalized education and its impact on society, as well as themes of punishment, abuse and the resulting (repressed) trauma. These videos are two of the final parts of Kelley's overarching, multipart 'EAPR' series, which he had begun in 2000 and conceived as a 365-part gargantuan work, a somewhat absurdist version of a Romantic-era 'gesamtkunstwerk', but which he never completed. The videos are shown alongside a suite of never-before exhibited works, large scale drawings for each of the characters in 'EAPR #36 (Vice Anglais),' who are featured in 'EAPR #36B (Made in England)' transformed into a group of decorative ceramic objects. These works will be joined by a lenticular light box, and two related sculptures, 'Bumper Car and Hobby Horse' (2011) and 'Black Rock Back House' (2011).

The Educational Complex and the Carnavalesque

'EAPR #36 (Vice Anglais),' as with the other works in Mike Kelley's 'EAPR' series, was inspired by a still image of an amateur dramatic production, from which the artist freely imagined his own back story or loose, narrative scenario in an act of 'completely subjective projection on found images...a mixture of biographical information and remembrances of mass culture information which for me there's no difference between.'² The image is drawn from a larger collection Kelley assembled as part of a fascination with archival photos, largely drawn from high school yearbooks and local newspapers, which provided him with a visual record of amateur theatrics and other 'extracurricular' activities.³ In the lenticular lightbox, the hologram image is refracted so that from some angles it reveals the original source photograph, and from others a scene from Kelley's restaging or 'reconstruction' in 'EAPR #36 (Vice Anglais),' oscillating between the two as the viewer moves. Kelley's fascination with archival images of extracurricular activities began with a project called 'Timeless, Authorless' (1995), comprising 15 panels of newspaper front pages invented by the artist. These were first shown in the exhibition 'Towards a Utopian Arts Complex' at Metro Pictures in New York in 1995, alongside Kelley's pivotal project 'The Educational Complex.' A model of all the buildings in his past where he had been educated, both formally and informally, with all the parts he could not remember left blank, 'The Educational Complex' was meant as a response to the cultural obsession with repressed memory syndrome and assumptions about Kelley's own supposed, repressed trauma.⁴ Kelley explained the 'EAPR' series as a way to fill in the blanks revealed by 'The Educational Complex'—the punning title combining architecture with neurosis—and the means or triggers to achieve this were the archival photographs. So, following 'Timeless, Authorless' he moved towards using the photographs as the basis of dramas of his own devising. Kelley said that his concern with the pictures, was not so much inspired by an interest in high schools per se, but that these educational contexts were one source of imagery of a folk culture that otherwise went under-recorded—manifestations of an American carnivalesque. He said:

'I started to collect a lot of pictures out of high school yearbooks of extracurricular activities. Now, I didn't collect them because I cared about high school. Or teenage mindsets, or any of that. I collected them because that was the only archive I could find where these kinds of American folk art theatrical traditions were pictured. That and small-town newspapers...I collected these because I thought of them as...carnavalesque activities, that would take place in an institutional forum, like say the school, or the job. Say like Dress-Up Day, Hillbilly Day at the bank. You know, and this was a kind of American folk-art form. And you couldn't find pictures of this any place. This was a kind of carnivalesque activity that was allowed within your normally mundane existence...the one day when you could do somethin' wacky. And so, for me, these were the kind of activities that I wanted to use because they were so carnivalesque and so much about taking place within a very strict, structured reality, to stand as screen memories for my abuse. So, if all

² Mike Kelley, with John Welchman, lecture at the Walker Art Centre, June 3 2005, at <https://walkerart.org/magazine/mike-kelley-with-john-welchman> accessed December 2024. The very idea of a projective reconstruction (as per the title of the 'EAPR' series) and of repressed trauma (which is also played out in Kelley's interest in the uncanny) are rooted of course in Freudian thinking which Kelley freely utilized as methodology, and as material and subject in his work, in an ironic reflection on American popular culture and its obsessions.

³ The idea of the extracurricular immediately evokes school or educational settings, or at the very least and more broadly, contexts outside the normal activities and temporalities of daily life.

⁴ This work was a reaction to the overwhelming interpretation of his previous work, particularly the works he made using soft toys and stuffed animals, that these were about child abuse. Thus, Kelley abandoned that previous body of work to consciously explore instead his own biography and issues of repressed memory and abuse, in which he also included what he termed 'aesthetic abuse' rooted in his arts training.

the blank areas in the 'Educational Complex' I had to fill in with some kind of narrative, ... and I decided right away I wanted to do videos or plays or something that would fill in for all the missing information. But, what could it be? Screen memories, standard cultural production. But it had to be carnivalesque.⁵

The fact that 'EAPR #36 (Vice Anglais)' is among those works inspired by such a found image, makes it also a part of this investigation of carnivalesque culture in the USA, especially related to the folk cultures of the working class, Midwestern America of the artist's own childhood. Kelley's use of carnival and the carnivalesque could be seen in the light of the theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's radical view of carnival as not merely comedic but deeply political, reflecting social and cultural dynamics, and representing a countercultural force that upends, at least temporarily, official authority and the rigidity of sanctioned, establishment culture and dogmatic thought.⁶ Bakhtin's reading highlights the freedoms of carnival license and the centrality of the grotesque body within carnival, especially what he calls 'the material bodily lower stratum,' as well as a generous and inclusive laughter that undermines hierarchy.⁷ In carnival, high and low merge and authority is mocked, and the grotesque body is celebrated in its exaggerated, open, material/scatological and generative forms, emphasizing cycles of renewal and degradation, and refusing to be confined by strict and inflexible structures of solemn morality. Bakhtin wrote that this folk culture and humor 'developed outside the official sphere of high ideology and literature, but precisely because of its unofficial existence, it was marked by exceptional radicalism, freedom and ruthlessness.'⁸ Bakhtin's view of carnival thus contributed to the wider countercultural context of the 1960s, and the later punk carnivalesque of the 1970s and 1980s, which both form a background to Kelley's works.

⁵ Mike Kelley, with John Welchman, lecture at the Walker Art Centre, 3 June 2005, at <https://walkerart.org/magazine/mike-kelley-with-john-welchman> accessed December 2024. Elsewhere he said 'I only picked the ones [photographs] that were extremely carnivalesque, that weren't normative. I didn't pick sports unless they were wacky sports. I chose artsy stuff or Dress-Up Day or hazing rituals.' Later in this Walker Art Center lecture, Kelley comments on his filing system for the vast archive of images he collected, which focused on themes, with files such as the vampire file and the dress up day file. He also talks about how these carnivalesque theatre actions and activities are often rooted in ancient pagan traditions and rituals, and that they demonstrate how American culture has taken these traditions and emptied them of significant content, as Kelley explains they have been 'cleaned up and turned into empty fun.' The best examples, he says, being Halloween and Christmas. He then employs this cultural and material deconstruction, recycling and (ironic) reconstruction as a subject and formal methodology for himself.

⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Rabelais and His World', Indiana University Press, 1984. First published in English by MIT in 1968, Bakhtin's reading of Rabelais was the context for his in-depth expression of his theory of carnival, originally developed in the 1930s era of totalitarianism. I don't know if Kelley read Bakhtin but his view of carnival aligns with some of the fundamentals of Bakhtin's thought, so that it's possible to see a relation if not direct then through the circulation of these ideas after their publication in English.

⁷ Bakhtin devotes an entire chapter to laughter in his study of Rabelais. Ibid, pp.59-144. Carnival laughter is generous, universal, inclusive, subversive and levelling, and is ultimately a form of sagacity. Rabelais' 'Gargantua and Pantagruel' (c.1532-64) is the origin of the concept of joyful wisdom which was later developed by Friedrich Nietzsche in 'The Gay Science' (1882).

⁸ Bakhtin, op cit., p.71

Punk Counterculture

Kelley stressed this relationship of his own work to ideas of carnival and the carnivalesque, particularly as it related to a range of popular, amateur, underground, alternative, sub-, counter- and 'folk' cultures of the US. He was aligned with these subcultures in part through his early involvement in the punk scene and the anarchist White Panther Party. As John Miller has commented, 'his practice can be construed as an outgrowth of the carnivalesque youth- and countercultures of the 1960s and 70s, exemplified by the Diggers, the Yippies, Sun Ra or John Sinclair's White Panther Party. Through his association with Sonic Youth, viewers identified his work with grunge, especially with that sensibility's anti-technique and its gender bending.'⁹ Miller continues by pointing out how Kelley's work addresses 'standards of taste as an invidious social logic that stigmatizes working class values' and that 'he had made work that was an outgrowth of the countercultural vernacular of the late 1960s to the 1970s. Via political and aesthetic imperatives, this earlier work embraced a carnivalesque inversion of social hierarchy practiced by that period's grassroots, activist collectives.'¹⁰ In this way, while Kelley's work does not deal overtly with politics, it is political in a similar way to Bakhtin's reading of carnival is political. The connections between counterculture and carnival, the subversive potential of the latter and its political efficacy, come through the introduction of an interpretation of carnival as radical liberation from everyday social norms and officialdom. To an extent, this carnival outlook evokes the 'total assault on culture' proposed by John Sinclair.¹¹ These considerations mean that Kelley not only evoked carnival but through his work he adopted carnivalesque strategies and a carnivalesque attitude, poking fun at official cultural forms and engaging with popular laughter; in Kelley's 'EAPR #36 (Vice Anglais)' and 'EAPR #36B (Made in England)' we see this in action. This use of the carnivalesque and of sub- and folk cultures becomes a means to dismantle the norms of social hierarchy, to challenge establishment power structures and to critique its institutions.

Vice Anglais and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood

Whilst 'EAPR #36 (Vice Anglais)' is a film without language (it has music by Mike Kelley and Scott Benzell, but is enacted mutely, with non-verbal utterings from the characters, and various portentous sound effects), Kelley did in fact write a complete dialogue script for the film. This is used instead for the related 'EAPR #36B (Made in England)'. In the manuscript of the play, however, 'EAPR #36 (Vice Anglais)' is described as 'a low comedy written in response to Robert M Cooper's 'Lost on Both Sides, Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Critic and Poet' (1970).'¹² The dramatis personae or cast of characters, six parodic archetypes, are 'M'Lord' described as 'a poet (sic) maudit and leader of a gang of perverts; Pile Driver, his brutish sidekick; Skank, a mean spirited young woman; Poof, a dim-witted clown, without voice, the bottom-boy of Pile Driver; Golden Rod, a mysterious, aloof being, the muse of M'Lord; and Josette (real name

⁹ John Miller, 'The Educational Complex', Afterall Books, 2015, p.10. Elsewhere, Miller states that Kelley was not so much interested in counterculture as protest but as a positive, creative force and was interested in the manifestations of counterculture influenced by Surrealism and Dada: the Diggers in San Francisco or Bread and Puppet Theatre or Sun Ra, the Afrofuturist musician, which offers another circling back moment to the Romantics and their obsession with Egypt, but one that also provides a model of the combination of the arts together in Kelley's work, in particular in his late magnum opus presentation of the 'EAPR' series, 'Day is Done' (2006). John Miller on Mike Kelley's Educational Complex, lecture at Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit, 31 March 2016, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37GMtCW9q9A> accessed December 2024.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p.10.

¹¹ John Sinclair, 'Guitar Army: Rock & Revolution with the MC5 and The White Panther Party' (1972). Sinclair was one of the key theorists of counterculture. He was a co-founder of The White Panther Party and manager of the proto-punk band MC5.

¹² Manuscript for 'EAPR #36 Vice Anglais', archive of the Mike Kelley Foundation for the Arts, unpublished and unpaginated. Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882) was a poet, illustrator, painter, translator and co-founder of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in 1848, a year of revolutions and republican revolts against Monarchy that occurred across Europe (in Sicily, France, Germany, Italy and the Austrian Empire). The PRB were a loosely associated group of English painters, poets and art critics who were inspired by Medieval culture, early Renaissance (Quattrocento) Italian art and Romanticism in art and poetry, embodying a reaction to industrialization and a rebellion towards Victorian morality.

Sally Cornforth) mistaken by M'Lord as his dead lover: a bride, kidnapped on her wedding day. M'Lord finds pleasure in torturing her.'¹³ The group proceed through a dark cave, stopping to observe a glowing, sculptural iteration of the city of Kandor (a cross reference to the Kelley's works inspired by Superman comics¹⁴), kept under a bell jar (a reference to Sylvia Plath¹⁵), before proceeding on to enact a scene of sexualized punishment, inflicted first by Pile Driver on Poof (but with the most 'problematic' scenes, replaced with a 'filler' of flower arranging) and then by M'Lord on Josette. It is a dramatization of the interaction between and interdependence of abuse and victimhood, and a testament to these as widespread cultural obsessions expressed via a 'literature of Repressed Memory Syndrome.'¹⁶

In line with Cooper's concentration on the literary Rossetti, the conception of M'Lord here as a 'poète maudit' makes especially clear the relation of Kelley's character to the Pre-Raphaelite painter and poet. Along with that of his associates, William Morris and Algernon Charles Swinburne, Rossetti's poetry was (in)famously characterized by the critic Robert Buchanan as 'The Fleshly School' in 'The Contemporary Review' in October 1871. Buchanan accused the group of immorality owing to the sensuality of their poetry and sexualized nature of its inspiration and themes. Rossetti and M'Lord are both then identified as versions of the *poète maudit*, literally meaning 'accursed poet', one who is living estranged from society, outside or against it.¹⁷ The lifestyle of a *poète maudit* is characterized by sin and frequently encompasses crime, violence, insanity, depravity, abuse of alcohol or other drugs, or generally any societal evil, often resulting in an early death. The subtitle 'Vice Anglais' in this context is a euphemistic reference to the alternate side of Victorian morality, the supposed predilection of the English for corporeal punishment, in education but also as a source of sexual pleasure (and therefore also an indication of English hypocrisy).¹⁸ More specifically it is a term used to indicate sadomasochistic sexual practices such as spanking, flagellation and sodomy. English vices, and particularly sexual practices, evoke histories of sexual license that span the long pre- and post-Victorian era (1830s-1950s); from the bawdiness of the Restoration to the mid to late 20th-Century British sex scandal.¹⁹ Elsewhere in Kelley's notes, the group of Sadean protagonists is described as M'Lord's 'gang of Eurotrash perverts.'²⁰ This description links the presentation of a group of characters inspired by the later Romantic era, with 1980s and early 1990s pop culture, when the term 'eurotrash' originated and then migrated from the US to Europe.

¹³ Ibid. A further short note saying '1862-1868 poems, 7 years ripened' seems to refer to the fact that Rossetti notoriously buried his poems with the body of his wife Elizabeth Siddall when she died in 1862 but dug them up again in 1869 and published them in 1870.

¹⁴ Kandor, Superman's home city on the planet Krypton, was feared destroyed but was in fact shrunk by the evil Brainiac, then rescued and kept safe by the superhero, under a bell jar, in his sanctuary, the Fortress of Solitude.

¹⁵ Jeffrey Sconce points to Superman and Plath as 'two gendered forms of adolescent alienation, the Man of Steel (a figure still revered by misfit adolescent teenage boys around the world) ... and the eventually suicidal poet Sylvia Plath (a figure still revered by morose teenage girls around the world)'. This pairing was originally established by Kelley in the video 'Superman Recites Selections from The Bell Jar and Other Works by Sylvia Plath' (1999). Jeffrey Sconce, 'When World's Collide', in 'Mike Kelley: Exploded Fortress of Solitude', Gagosian Gallery, 2011, p.159.

¹⁶ Mike Kelley, 'Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction #1 (A Domestic Scene)', in John Welchman (ed.), 'Mike Kelley, Minor Histories: Statements, Conversations, Proposals', MIT Press, 2004, p.238.

¹⁷ Coined in 1832 by the French Romantic Alfred de Vigny (1797-1863); Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Artaud and the Comte de Lautréamont are considered examples.

¹⁸ See for example Ian Gibson's study 'The English Vice: Beating, Sex and Shame in Victorian England and After' (1978). Gibson's study traces the history to medieval roots, a premodern world of folk culture that parallels that of Bakhtin's study of carnival license.

¹⁹ While the British sex scandal is exemplified by the Profumo Affair of 1963, perhaps more illustrative of 'Vice Anglais' is the 1994 death from autoerotic asphyxiation of the unfortunate Conservative MP Stephen Milligan, found dead on his kitchen table wearing nothing but stockings and suspenders, with his head covered and an orange in his mouth.

²⁰ Loose, handwritten notes, archives of the Mike Kelley Foundation for the Arts, unpublished and unpaginated.

Ken Russell's Romantics

Kelley's last two videos are exemplary of the way that towards the end of his career, he produced works that increasingly involved elaborate webs of references and associations. Alongside the influence of Cooper, they are also an encapsulation of the impact of the British film director Ken Russell on Kelley's late work.²¹ Russell was known for his flamboyant, risqué and often controversial feature films and documentaries which frequently concentrated on the biographies of countercultural precursors from the Romantic movement. In particular the late works by Kelley are influenced by Russell's riotous, dramatized documentary 'Dante's Inferno: The Private Life of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Poet and Painter' (1967). Russell's film is focused on the painter's liaisons and familial relations, stressing aspects of class drama, and the dialectics of Victorian morality. It sets this against the context of the incendiary rebellion of 19th-Century society, most specifically that of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, alongside their petty intrigues.²² Russell's depiction of Rossetti and the PRB circles stresses the educational gulf between Rossetti (and family) and his models, stemming from their differences in economic class, and expressed in their somewhat exaggerated accents. It is also notable for the portrayal of John Ruskin, and his sterile Puritanism, since he keeps his belongings under glass bell jars (another source perhaps for Kelley's presentation of his Kandors), typical of Victorian cultures of collecting and display: 'Gabriel says Ruskin keeps his personal effects under glass,' narrates the voiceover alongside images of rock specimens under an array of jars, 'since he never has occasion to use them.'

Kelley's 'EAPR #36 (Vice Anglais)' can also be related however to Russell's horror film 'Gothic' (1986), centered on the group of literary romantics (Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Shelley, Dr. John Polidori and Claire Clairmont) who assembled in Switzerland at the Villa Diodati on the shore of Lake Geneva in the summer of 1816. There they held an informal story-writing competition that resulted in the tales of both 'Frankenstein' (by Mary Shelley) and 'The Vampire' (by Dr. Jon Polidori).²³ Russell's work highlights these Romantics as predecessors of the mid-20th-Century counterculture, and focuses on the inner demons of Byron, Shelley and Mary Shelley. Likewise, 'EAPR #36 (Vice Anglais)' and 'EAPR #36B (Made in England)' address the early Romantic literary tradition, characterized as the original counterculture, emerging in the aftermath of the French revolution, and suggest its continuation in aspects of 19th-Century culture such as the pre-Raphaelite circle (related in family terms through Rossetti being the nephew of Polidori).

²¹ Russell (1927-2011) passed away in the year of their making.

²² They positioned themselves in opposition to industry, state religion and official art, and instead focused on notions of honor, truth and beauty. They also drew heavily on pre-modern and medieval romantic precedents, and a fascination with knights and damsels.

²³ Polidori (1795-1821) was Byron's close friend and personal physician. While folk stories of vampires can be traced back centuries, Polidori's tale originated the aristocratic vampire as a satire of Byron. Polidori is also the link between the two generations of Romantics; his sister Frances was the mother of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, making him Rossetti's uncle. As Polidori died aged 25 however, they never met.

The Characters

In both the videos and the large scale works on paper, the characters and their respective costumes blend these and other diverse sources and influences, combining historical figures and traditions with American youth and folk subculture and countercultural icons. The drawings appear in the tradition of theatrical character costume and make-up studies detailing the attributes of each character. While M'Lord is notionally Rossetti, as poet and libertine, with his aristocratic name, as well as the suggestion of vampiric blood at the edges of his mouth, he also evokes Lord Byron, and as such an 18th- or early 19th-Century rake—perhaps a member of one of the notorious Hellfire Clubs.²⁴ In the painting however, he perhaps more closely resembles Russell's prettier and androgenous Shelley, played by Julian Sands, than his butch Rossetti, played by Oliver Reed.²⁵ In the video, the addition of a longer, curly wig makes this figure more reminiscent of the 18th-century fop or rake, but also of a rock star figure, perhaps a member of MC5 or John Sinclair. He is also a kind of kerchief-carrying New Romantic come high-school jock and heartthrob, characterized by his flamboyant and sexualized costume. Kelley's Josette meanwhile is a blend of Rossetti's working-class models and lovers Fanny Cornforth, Jane Morris and his wife Elizabeth Siddall. Josette, at first seemingly based on Rossetti's deceased wife Elizabeth Siddall, is the subject of mistaken identity and is actually Fanny Cornforth, something that is revealed most clearly in the female character's protestations in 'EAPR #36B (Made in England)'. As in Russell's portrayal, the class aspect is emphasized by Kelley especially through the exaggerated accents—'EAPR #36B (Made in England)' is most clearly a play for voices. Nevertheless, in 'EAPR #36 (Vice Anglais)' Josette also resembles Russell's depiction of a white, diaphanous nightdress-wearing Mary Shelley, played by Natasha Richardson, and the 18th-Century romantic depictions of damsels in white maidenly dresses or nightgowns, such as the Swiss-born artist Henry Fuseli's painting 'The Nightmare' (1781), which was used on the poster for Russell's film. The first of the 'EAPR' series, 'EAPR #1 (A Domestic Scene)' (2000) featured a depiction of the ghost of Sylvia Plath in a similar white flowing dress which implies that this too could be another reading of this figure. Kelley plays with the heightened eroticism of these depictions, the power-dynamics and both implied and actual violence. In contrast, the lascivious and sadistic Pile Driver seems to derive his costume from anywhere between the Middle Ages to the 18th Century (he would be at home in a Brueghel painting, appearing as if he had walked out of the battle between carnival and lent, or else in a Rabelaisian battle of sausages—a personification of a visceral and earthy comedy), and M'Lord, Skank and Poof have elements of late 20th-Century teen dress, particularly derived from the high school culture that fascinated Kelley. M'Lord for example sports a bright red jock strap (or codpiece) that is also reminiscent of the lead of funk group Cameo, and Poof wears a sports jersey, but his costume blends this with the attributes of a clown.²⁶ Golden Rod is named after a plant that symbolizes wealth but also growth and encouragement, simultaneously appears to be a corn cob—a slang reference to anal sex—or a gilded, and glowing, scatological-excremental image.

²⁴ Adrian Searle, 'Mike Kelley: It Came From Planet Bunkum,' in 'The Guardian,' 7 September 2011, see <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/sep/07/mike-kelley-exploded-fortress-solitude> accessed January 2025.

²⁵ Kelley's depiction, with his pale countenance and androgenous features also recalls Henry Wallis's painting 'The Death of Chatterton' (1856) – an image of another 18th-century 'poete maudit' and who became a Romantic archetype and tragic hero, the artist as a rebel, outcast or marginal and a martyr of society. This Romantic model of course informs later rock and roll, punk and grunge youth culture.

²⁶ This ensemble might also be thought of as a kind of alternate Commedia dell'arte troupe – the tradition that had its origins in carnival and which gave us the literal slapstick (the Italian 'bataccio'), the comedic equivalent of the sadomasochistic paddle – which evolved in different ways into the pantomime and Punch and Judy traditions that have a key place in British culture. The presence of a group of stock character types, with exaggerated actions and moral positions, and the presence of comedy, violence and sexual themes, as well as the appearance of a 'Zanni' or fool in the form of Poof, contribute to this. These popular manifestations fuse comedy, violence and gendered roles and interactions. In addition, Poof does also somewhat recall West-Coast punk band the Dead Kennedys character Rambozo the Clown but is an inversion of the machismo of this figure.

Hammer Horror and Kandor

Kelley's 'EAPR #36 (Vice Anglais)' similarly draws on the pop-gothic 'Hammer Horror' films (and perhaps also the comic travesty and bawdiness of the 'Carry-On' films which were made in parallel). They were produced in Britain from the 1930s but had their heyday in the post-war era from the 1950s to the 1970s, and represent expressions of B-Cinema cult film, anti-establishment and popular subcultures.²⁷ Kelley included an image of the poster for 'Lust for a Vampire' (1971) in the catalogue for his 2011 show Exploded Fortress of Solitude. Kelley also references Hammer in the notes for 'EAPR #36 (Vice Anglais)' and Ken Russell, especially his 'Gothic,' was also heavily influenced by Hammer film, providing a further indirect influence. In his notes Kelley comments on the highly stylized and rather exaggerated and unnatural acting of the Hammer films, calling them 'flat un-psychological sadistic films (un-Gothic)' and he relates them to '60s Pop art, on sets, wooden, action-oriented.'²⁸ He continues with his intended use of this in the context of 'EAPR #36 (Vice Anglais),' highlighting the deliberate looseness of the narrative in the video and giving the direction that his work would be 'made more stylish—clothes...perm, post-Helmut Newton fashion sense. More 'artsy' art direction...fragmented action, Rock video compressed pseudo-narrative.'²⁹ The reference to the fashion photographer Helmut Newton here gives a sense of the kind of artsy-ness Kelley was aiming for; Newton was known for his provocative, erotically charged images, and in 1976 was nicknamed 'The King of Kink' by Time Magazine.

The 'EAPR' series of video installations moreover are accompanied by partial or full stage sets, often drawn from the original photographs, which Kelley said provoked in him an interest in fantasy architecture. As the series progressed however, this developed and information from the photographs and their setting, blended in Kelley's works with other kinds of popular culture information, such as his interest in Superman, his Fortress of Solitude (Superman's cave-like lair) and the fantastical city of Kandor. The 'Kandors' series, which Kelley initiated in 1999, are sculptural depictions of Superman's birthplace, Kandor. Instead of their original context from the archival photograph, the group of characters in 'EAPR #36 (Vice Anglais)' reside in the large-scale, rocky installation 'Kandor 10B (Exploded Fortress of Solitude)' (2011), thus this setting suggests a kind of 'mise-en-abyme' or play within a play. A final element of the exhibition is the sculpture 'Black Rock Back House' (2011), originally shown as an associated work to the installation 'Kandor 10B', importantly it reinforces the ways in which the 'EAPR's' and 'Kandor' series overlap in these late works.

The dark, volcanic and subterranean character of 'Kandor 10B' moreover evokes Plato's Cave but revisited for the Cold War era comic fan audience. The underlying allegory of education

²⁷ Hammer Film Productions Ltd was founded in 1934 but is best known for a series of relatively low budget Gothic horror and fantasy films made from the mid-1950s to the late 1970s. They featured key horror characters such as Frankenstein and Dracula (which are both rooted in British Romanticism), and a range of types such as werewolves, witches, gorgons, devils and vampires. Alongside these Hammer also made numerous psychological thrillers. The company eventually ceased production in the mid-1980s. An indication of the influence of Hammer and the neo-Gothic of the late 1970s is Kate Bush's song 'Hammer Horror' (1978).

²⁸ Loose, handwritten notes, archives of the Mike Kelley Foundation for the Arts, unpublished and unpaginated.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ The title is not a mistake, it is likely a reference to the Victorian periodical 'The Hobby Horse', published by the Century Guild of Artists from 1884 to 1894. It was influenced by the Pre-Raphaelite's, William Morris and John Ruskin. As a mouthpiece of the Arts & Crafts Movement and the later Aesthetic movement it was, like the Pre-Raphaelites themselves, both steeped in tradition and deeply revolutionary.

³¹ Bakhtin comments that 'the grotesque gesture of displaying the buttocks is still used in our day...this is one of the most common uncrowning gestures throughout the world.' Op cit. p.373.

³² Drew Zeiba, 'Mike Kelley's final paintings are character studies of the lost self', in 'Document' Journal, 8 November 2024.

³³ Ibid.

featuring a shackled humanity, prisoners of ignorance, in Plato, resurfaces in 'EAPR #36 (Vice Anglais),' de-sublimated as an S&M scene (Josette is handcuffed after all). M'Lord is seen thrashing the bared buttocks of the captive Josette with a horsewhip until she bleeds, and the majority of the remaining cast, except Golden Rod, become covered in a bloody spray that is in keeping with Hammer Horror schlock-aesthetics. The scene is echoed in the composition of 'Bumper Car and Hobby Horse,' a sculpture incorporating a folk-artsy rocking horse³⁰ that evokes childhood, alongside prop-like body parts that hark back to the video—both sides of the sculpture display 'false' bare buttocks, one with bloodied flagellation marks.³¹ Drew Zeiba points out the concentration on the dynamics of punishment in 'EAPR #36 (Vice Anglais)' and sets his interpretation within the classroom, but focuses on the punishment of Poof, rather than that of Josette: 'The class clown disrupts the classroom's status quo and in doing so—by pointing to the arbitrariness of its rules—affirms its punitive power. But Poof is no class clown. He doesn't disrupt, he abides...Poof's very identity is his to-be-punishedness.'³² Zeiba continues 'in 'EAPR #36's' chthonic perversion of *The Breakfast Club*, aesthetic chaos prevails: a dirty woman in a wedding dress, a clown in which might approximate a football uniform, a European lord with a sportswear codpiece. Like the 'types' of a US high school—jock, popular girl, prep—we have a sense these costumes are meant to stand in for identities...yet they are sullied, incoherent. Their wearers do not articulate their relationships to one another with words but by giving and receiving violence: these power structures emerge as the true source of their identities.'³³ The implied pun on the word 'class' here is clear, conflating the different meanings of 'class hatred,' and amalgamating Kelley's critique of education and social structures.

²⁷ Hammer Film Productions Ltd was founded in 1934 but is best known for a series of relatively low budget Gothic horror and fantasy films made from the mid-1950s to the late 1970s. They featured key horror characters such as Frankenstein and Dracula (which are both rooted in British Romanticism), and a range of types such as werewolves, witches, gorgons, devils and vampires. Alongside these Hammer also made numerous psychological thrillers. The company eventually ceased production in the mid-1980s. An indication of the influence of Hammer and the neo-Gothic of the late 1970s is Kate Bush's song 'Hammer Horror' (1978).

²⁸ Loose, handwritten notes, archives of the Mike Kelley Foundation for the Arts, unpublished and unpaginated.

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³³ Ibid.

Made in England

As a partner piece, 'EAPR #36B (Made in England)' presents the alternative scripted version of the characters and scenario of 'EAPR #36 (Vice Anglais),' spoken by voice-over actors and 'performed' by a still-life arrangement of English decorative and kitsch objects—a cutting deployment of the apparently whimsical. Each of the objects is given an identity corresponding with a character from 'EAPR #36 (Vice Anglais)'; M'Lord is a Toby mug and Josette a floral milk jug. The dialogue being drawn in part from 'critical texts on the poetry of D. G. Rossetti.'³⁴ Kelley's notes continue that these works present 'PRB [Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood] loftiness + idealized beauty pushed towards sublimatory acts of S&M. Pseudo-Shakespearean language: Disembodied, barely followable narrative.' His notes also reveal he considered voicing the piece himself, but that he wanted to aim for something deliberately 'actorish.' In his notes, Kelley himself calls it a Sadean scene, and says that it has an English setting, identified as London. At one point however the knick-knacks break out into a scatological and sadistic reimagining of a well-known Cole Porter song, combining comedy and travesty, a contemporary revisiting of the 'material bodily lower stratum.' As Bakhtin comments, 'debasement is the fundamental artistic principle of grotesque realism.'³⁵

'The Educational Complex' on one hand and 'EAPR #36 (Vice Anglais)' and 'EAPR #36B (Made in England)' on the other, bookend the second half of Kelley's career. 'The Educational Complex' inaugurated a new phase in Kelley's career which began after he abandoned making the soft toy 'folk-art' sculptures he had become well-known for in the 1980s and early 1990s. Less neatly, because it marks a premature end to the 'EAPR' series, is seeing 'EAPR #36 (Vice Anglais)' as a terminus, but it is an end point of sorts and, circles back round to some aspects raised in 'The Educational Complex'. Kelley deploys carnival subversion and travesty in his final videos, drawings and sculptures, and he uses this pantomime-farce portrayal of sexualized threat and violence to explore the pervasive societal obsession with repressed trauma and to parody the imposition of patriarchy, institutionalized power and corrupt instruction as forms of abuse—especially perhaps in relation to the formal, establishment culture of England. These important late works by Kelley, whilst seemingly among his most transgressive, nevertheless fit within his overall project and further inform his attitude to mainstream or official culture vs folk and subcultures, as well as his investigation of the impact of formal education, and its failures.³⁶ These works are not only an expression of Kelley's long engagement with the pervasiveness of Freudian ideas within society, adopted as methodology and material, they can also be seen as a broader exploration of counterculture and its roots and conflicts. They are an expression of a subversive Bakhtinian interpretation of carnival applied to grass roots American culture. Ultimately, they are expressions of Kelley's carnivalesque.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Bakhtin, op cit. p.370. Such imagery is directly related to the idea of mudslinging and muck-slinging.

³⁶ Thus, Kelley's works also deal with ideas that are central to counterculture including ideas of 'deschooling society': author Ivan Illich's approach to disestablish normative education and its alienating institutionalisation, developed in his alternative educational community founded in 1965 in Cuernavaca, Mexico. Illich was a Catholic priest, theologian, philosopher and determined social critic.