

Press Release

Mike Kelley. Vice Anglais

Hauser & Wirth London
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‘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

Over the course of his four-decade career, Mike Kelley (1954 – 2012) consistently addressed the relation of establishment culture to counterculture. He shed light on social rituals and subcultures, whilst simultaneously parodying the imposition of institutionalized power and instruction. With his Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction (EAPR) series (2000 – 2011), Kelley set out to make 365 videos and video installations, one for each day of the year. The EAPR series came to an early end with ‘Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction #36 (Vice Anglais)’ (2011), one of the last videos Kelley ever made. In collaboration with Mike Kelley Foundation for the Arts, the exhibition centers on this final EAPR, which will be shown alongside related works. These include a series of never-before exhibited paintings of the cast of transgressive characters, as well as a lenticular lightbox from this EAPR and sculptures made using props from the video. The show will also present ‘Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction #36B (Made in England)’ (2011), a companion video to ‘Vice Anglais.’

This exhibition runs concurrently with the major retrospective ‘Mike Kelley: Ghost and Spirit’ at Tate Modern, on display until 9 March 2025.

About the Exhibition

The EAPR are a series of ‘video narratives’ that were often accompanied by sculptural installations of partial or full stage sets. Kelley drew his inspiration for each video from his large collection of found archival images and high school yearbooks depicting amateur extracurricular activities that have a strong relationship to popular and folk entertainments. Kelley’s work can be viewed as drawing on a carnivalesque or subversive spirit at odds with the institutional nature and officialdom of the education system. In light of this, these EAPR works can be seen as evoking concepts that belong to counterculture, including ideas of ‘deschooling society.’ A

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precursor to the EAPR series is Mike Kelley's 'Educational Complex' (1995), which comprises an architectural model of all the educational institutions he attended rendered from memory, with forgotten spaces left empty. Exploring the public fascination with repressed memory syndrome, the inability to recall traumatic events, Kelley produced his EAPR videos to fill in these blank spaces.

'Vice Anglais' centres on six parodic characters, M'Lord, Pile Driver, Skank, Poof and Josette, alongside an allegorical personification, Golden Rod. These characters appear individually in the costume paintings for the video, drawing on the tradition of theatrical character and costume studies. In the video, these protagonists are depicted in a series of scenarios that explore power relations and masculinity and suggest rather than show sexual violence.



Whilst elements of violence are implied, the video's title overtly refers to sadomasochism or the sexual pleasure gained by corporal punishment. Violence only becomes explicit towards the end of the video in a scene focused on M'Lord, a kerchief-carrying fop, and Josette, a damsel who is dressed in a white wedding dress and handcuffed. M'Lord is seen thrashing the bared buttocks of the captive Josette with a horsewhip until she bleeds. Using props from his videos, Kelley made sculptural forms such as 'Bumper Car and Hobby Horse' (2011), the composition of which echoes the final scene. Rather than exploring sexual license as an end in itself, Kelley's video uses this pantomime-farce portrayal of sexualized threat and violence to explore the pervasiveness of repressed trauma and to parody the imposition of patriarchy, institutionalized power and corrupt instruction.

Kelley's last two videos, 'Vice Anglais' and 'Made in England' (2011), are exemplary of the way in which, toward the end of his career, he produced works that increasingly involved an elaborate web of references and associations. 'Made in England' presents the script for 'Vice Anglais,' spoken by voice-over actors and 'performed' by a still-life arrangement of British decorative objects, like a puppet show. These are both in part based on a free interpretation of the life of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, co-founder of the Pre-Raphaelites, taking inspiration from Robert M. Cooper's book 'Lost on Both Sides, Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Critic and Poet' (1970).' As well as being influenced by feature films by British film director Ken Russell, Kelley's videos are reminiscent of gothic 'Hammer Horror' films and the comic travesty and bawdiness of the 'Carry-On' films, both produced in the UK from the 1950s to the 1970s and which represent expressions of anti-establishment and popular subcultures.

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As early as 2009, Kelley began to conflate his two major ongoing projects, the EAPR and Kandors series (1999 – 2011). Through large-scale installations, miniature sculptures, videos and lightboxes, the artist sought to recreate the fictional city of Kandor—the birthplace of Superman. Works produced as part of this series often provided a place for Kelley's late EAPR narratives to unfold. In 'Vice Anglais,' Kelley's group of sadists reside in the immense installation 'Kandor 10B (Exploded Fortress of Solitude)' (2011), a cave-like environment that includes a glass bell jar housing a sculptural depiction of Kandor. Deriving from this installation, the exhibition also includes the sculpture 'Black Rock Back House' (2011). The images Kelley gathered from the comics as sources for his Kandors series revealed an inconsistency in representations of the city, which he embraced and explored as part of his wider fascination with the vagaries of memory. As with the lenticulars (lightboxes with three-dimensional effects) produced for his Kandors, Kelley layered his source material with his own reproductions as part of his EAPR works. This is represented in London through a lightbox presenting the characters from 'Vice Anglais.'

With the video 'Vice Anglais' as a foundation and starting point, the works on view reveal the artist's versatility while underscoring a number of key recurrent themes central to his artistic practice, such as adolescence, class, sexuality and subcultures, as well as his multifaceted engagement with the nature of memory.

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Gallery hours:

Tuesday to Saturday
10 am – 6 pm

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Mike Kelley
Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction
#36 (Vice Anglais)
2011
Lenticular panel, light box
Edition of 5 + 2 PPs, 3 APs
82.6 x 122.6 x 9.2 cm / 32 1/2 x 48 1/4 x 3 5/8 in
Photo: Genevieve Hanson

Mike Kelley
Photo: Cameron Wittig for Walker Art Center

Mike Kelley
No Title (character painting of Golden Rod for
EAPR 36/Vice Anglais)
2011
Acrylic on paper
101.6 x 81.3 cm / 40 x 32 in
Photo: Fredrik Nilsen

Mike Kelley
Bumper Car and Hobby Horse
2011
Wood, silicone, plastic, and carpet
193 x 139.7 x 139.7 cm / 76 x 55 x 55 in
Photo: Fredrik Nilsen