

Skarstedt Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of Mike Kelley's Arenas. The exhibition will be comprised of seven out of the eleven works from this series, all of which were originally exhibited at Metro Pictures Gallery in 1990.

In this series of sculptures, found handmade and machine fabricated afghans and blankets are flanked with stuffed animals and displayed on the floor. Each sculpture, all of varying sizes, contains one specific motif and focuses on the assembly of stuffed animals in an "arena" for anthropomorphic observation. In the Arena #7, for example, four sides of a machine made blanket are surrounded with teddy bears and monkeys. One can imagine them holding a meeting or even attending a picnic.

Prior to creating the Arenas, stuffed animals played an integral role in Kelley's oeuvre. He sought to explore the commodification of gifted craft objects and the question of how one repays the "gift". In an interview with John Miller from 1992, Kelley states, "Basically, gift giving is like indentured slavery or something. There's no price, so you don't know how much you owe. The commodity is emotion. What's being bought and sold is emotion." Kelley takes the emotion one step further with this series by stripping the nostalgia of these childhood toys and confronting the "real emotion" and making people look at these toys as objects in the present tense. They are man-made, and project the intent of the maker, not the child who owned the object.

When creating the Arenas, Haim Steinbach's artwork became the primary source of motivation. In Steinbach's work, pristine objects and trinkets are placed on shelves and left alone. These objects symbolize the exchange of gifts and expose them as commodities to be shown off and never used. The Arenas counteract this sterilization of the "gift" and shows us what really happens to these toys. They are played with, slobbered on, soiled, tossed around and thrown on the ground. Displaying these sculptures on the floor actively obliterates the concept of pristine museum or gallery objects.

Mike Kelley was born in Detroit, MI in 1954 and currently lives and works in Los Angeles, CA. His work has been exhibited extensively, with solo shows at Musée du Louvre, Paris (2006); Tate Liverpool (2004); the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (1993). Upcoming shows include a major retrospective organized by the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam in 2011 and will travel to MOCA Los Angeles in 2012.

A fully illustrated catalogue will be produced in conjunction with this exhibition and available this Fall 2010.

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