

NAGEL GALERIE DRAXLER

Mike Kelley & John Miller

Opening: Thursday, April 25, 2024, 6-9 pm

Exhibition: April 26 – June 22, 2024

PRESS RELEASE

Galerie Nagel Draxler is proud to present an exhibition of outstanding works by American artists Mike Kelley and John Miller. The two friends and colleagues, both born in 1954, studied at the California Institute of the Arts in Los Angeles in the late 1970s and maintained an intensive exchange on topics of art, politics and American popular culture and their roots in the American unconscious until Kelley's death in 2012.

On Mike Kelley's *Paintings in Time*

Rumor has it that Mike Kelley hated the time between Christmas and New Year because there was no one to distract him from the boredom, and because people were spending time with their families, which is a difficult time for those who don't have a family. This is also the reason why the last of his *Paintings in Time*, dated December 31, is cut in half. It is the day when life begins again.

In a chart illustrating the genesis of works on display in the exhibition *Educational Complex Onwards 1995-2008*, Mike Kelley describes the *Paintings in Time* as counterpart to the *Timeless Paintings* (1993-), an open series that directly refers to his art school education under the influence of Hans Hofmann's push and pull theory. Far from being timeless the *Paintings in Time*, created on seven consecutive days between Christmas Day and New Year's 1994, can be regarded as a key work in a period of transition between Kelley's yarn and fabric toy works to the *Educational Complex*, 1995. Citing typical motifs from his oeuvre like the beaver and the donkey (American Football mascots) and cartoon-like characters modeled after human intestines, the *Paintings in Time* are, as his early works, executed in black and white. Except for the first painting, dating from December 25th (Christmas Day), Kelley copied the same image every day with varying gestural patches of light grey. The last panel dated December 31st is cut in half. Oval in shape, the works evoke mirrors and at the same time point back to a previous work of transitional meaning, *Cosmic egg/brown Baby* from *Half a Man*, a body of work shown 1988 at the Renaissance Society in Chicago, introducing felt banners, stuffed animals and Afghan assemblages to a wider audience for the first time. Announcing a new turning point in Kelley's artistic biography in 1995, the *Paintings in Time* appear like a mystical conceptual exercise oscillating between staged conceptual rigor and ritual performative evocation.

Mike Kelley (b. Detroit, 1954, d. Los Angeles, 2012) is widely considered one of the most influential artists of our time. Irreverent but deeply informed, topical yet visionary, Kelley

worked in a startling array of genres and styles, including performance, installation, drawing, painting, video, photography, sound works, text, and sculpture. He also worked on curatorial projects; collaborated with many other artists and musicians; and left a formidable body of critical and creative writing. Throughout his career Kelley sought to understand the cultures around him from the bottom up, scouring yard sales and yearbooks for their cast-offs and leftovers. He mined popular culture and both modernist and alternative traditions, which he set in relation to relentless self- and social examinations, by turns dark and delirious. With an inimitable mix of caustic skepticism and temporizing respect, he engaged the languages and assumptions of education, adolescence, crafts and DIY, holidays, pop psychology, parades and rituals, fandom, newspaper reportage, and modes of public address—producing a uniquely sustained address to the conditions and implications of the American vernacular. (source: Mike Kelley Foundation For The Arts)

John Miller Brown (JMB)

John Miller (b. 1954 in Cleveland, Ohio, lives and works in New York and Berlin) embodies a singular position in contemporary art, representing a synthesis between a radical critique of representation and a post-conceptual return to the "real". In his extensive and multi-layered oeuvre, John Miller repeatedly counteracts the desires of Western consumer society. With his eclectic approach and his equally skeptical and ironic artistic strategy, he explores the autonomy of the artwork and questions the myth of artistic genius.

In the 1980s, Miller became notorious for his works that liberally employed a shit-brown acrylic paint. The brown paint covered and unified the various objects and materials that constituted his paintings, assemblages, reliefs, and sculptures. So much did the substance come to unify and symbolize his oeuvre that "John Miller Brown" or "J.M.B." became a trademark of sorts. As Bataille's bassesse countered Breton's high-flying optimism, so J.M.B. might be understood as a materialist antidote to the I.K.B. or "International Klein Blue" of Yves Klein's cosmic monochromes. (Roy Arden)