

Widely regarded as one of the most influential artists of our time, Mike Kelley (1954–2012) created a protean body of deeply innovative work, which mined American popular culture, modernism and alternative traditions alike for purposes of a relentless, dark and delirious examination of self and society. In the largest presentation of this achievement ever organized—the first comprehensive survey since 1993—the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam has brought together almost 200 of the artist's works, spanning the entirety of his 35-year career, in the exhibition *MIKE KELLEY*, on view December 15, 2012, through April 1, 2013.

A native of Detroit, Michigan, who lived and worked in Los Angeles from the mid-1970s until his tragic death at age 57, Kelley made use of every conceivable medium—drawings on paper, sculpture, performances, music, video, photography and painting—as he explored an equally diverse set of themes, including American class relations, sexuality, repressed memories, systems of religious belief and transcendence and post-punk politics. He brought to these subjects both an incisive critical intelligence and abundant, self-deprecating humor.

*MIKE KELLEY* is the first major international traveling exhibition the Stedelijk has organized and presented in its newly expanded and renovated building. After being shown at the Stedelijk, the exhibition will t

ravel to the Centre Pompidou, Paris (May 2– August 5, 2013), MoMA PS1, New York (October 7, 2013–January 5, 2014) and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (March–June 2014, exact dates to be confirmed).

*MIKE KELLEY* is organized by Ann Goldstein, Director of the Stedelijk Museum, in cooperation with the Mike Kelley Foundation for the Arts. The curator of the first exhibition concept is Dr. Eva Meyer-Hermann.

According to Ann Goldstein, the exhibition took on a new significance following the artist's death in early 2012. "His remarkable oeuvre was suddenly complete," she stated, "and so this exhibition, which was being planned with his direct participation, became a retrospective in the full sense of the word. We now have the responsibility to begin to think about his voluminous, wide-ranging, generative accomplishments as a completed body of work. I know that the process of discovery and reconsideration that we begin at the Stedelijk will surely be taken up by other curators, historians and institutions, extending far into the future."

The exhibition, which is organized in loosely chronological order, fills virtually all of the galleries

in the Stedelijk's new wing. The presentation begins in the dramatically large lower level galleries, where visitors encounter Kelley's works from the late 1980s until the 21st century, and then go back in time to explore the early work from his art-school days in the 1970s. On the first floor the exhibition continues with Kelley's most recent works, including the last work he exhibited before his death.

As visitors move through this chronology, it becomes apparent that Kelley's art did not develop along a straight line. Instead, he returned again and again to certain underlying themes—buried memories from childhood, disjunctions between the self and social structures, the fault lines between sacred and profane—which might be compared to the shapes that lurk beneath the carpet in some of his best-known works. *MIKE KELLEY* demonstrates how his achievement was marked not only by critical reflection and sharp self-examination but also by a creative and surprising repurposing of ideas and materials.

“Mike Kelley's brilliance was rooted in his ability to dig critically into a world of cultural productions, representations and constructions in all their messy contradictions, using a combination of incisive wit, poetic insight and uncanny associative power,” Ann Goldstein commented. “Nothing is sacrosanct in his work—not so-called high culture, history, literature, music, philosophy, psychology, religion or education. In bringing together his interest in so-called low culture—from crafts to comic strips—with a reconsideration of identity and sexuality, he was nothing less than revelatory.”

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