Press Release

Mike Kelley: Jerry Meandering

12 November 2026 – 16 January 2027
Hauser & Wirth New York, 18th Street



New York...This November, in collaboration with the Mike Kelley Foundation for the Arts, Hauser & Wirth will present 'Mike Kelley: Jerry Meandering,' an exhibition focused on the artist's works on paper, some of which will be shown publicly for the first time. Bringing together prints, mixed-media drawings and collages created during Kelley's undergraduate years at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor (1972 – 1976), the exhibition—which takes its name from a suggestive print of Gerald Ford and his wife made in 1976—offers a rare look at his earliest experimentations with form, material and the unstable meanings our culture assigns to images. The presentation also features a selection of Kelley's Untitled (Collages 1974 – 2011) works, a series he revisited and altered near the end of his life, reflecting his enduring interest in memory, repression and the construction of personal and cultural histories.

As a student, Kelley worked across a range of mediums and techniques including etching, aquatint, lithography, acrylic, ink and collage. Compositions such as 'Elegy to the Symbionese Liberation Army' (1975) demonstrate how he mixed different materials and subjects on a single surface. In a 1995 lecture, Kelley highlighted this work as an example of his interest '...in trying to merge popular and subcultural imagery into a kind of formalist painting methodology.' Drawing on the formal language of modernist abstraction while incorporating politically and culturally charged imagery, works like this one point to Kelley's early adoption of appropriation and cultural critique.





At the heart of the exhibition is Kelley's playful engagement with printmaking and interest in repetition, variation and reproduction. In 'Ascension of Stravinskian Resemblance into a Field of Alice Coltrane Music' (c. 1975 – 1976), a six-pointed star frames a portrait of the Russian composer. By overlaying the etching with spray paint, Kelley combines the reproducible graphic with the immediacy of a hand-applied gesture. The star motif seen here recurs throughout many of his early works, either framing the picture within the composition or forming the frame itself. A quartet of black and white lithographs on view demonstrate Kelley's ability to move seamlessly between meticulous draftsmanship and deliberate crudity, weaving together influences ranging from Egyptian mythology and the Vietnam war to the cartoons of Basil Wolverton. Prints such as these anticipate the abject aesthetics, anti-form strategies and mingling of modernist artistic conventions with imagery and tropes from popular culture that would characterize Kelley's mature practice.

The exhibition follows these ideas back to their earliest manifestations in a vitrine of mixed media drawings from Kelley's student years (1973 – 1976.) Using impressions of the artist's own arms and U.S. coins alongside grid-like structures, text and various other symbols, these compositions provide a glimpse into Kelley's developing visual language and the intellectual and material concerns that would come to shape his practice.

Rather than treating his formative works as fixed points of origin, Kelley repeatedly brought them back into circulation, allowing their meanings to shift over time. This process became central to some of Kelley's most ambitious projects, including 'Missing Time,' in which he used repressed memory theory as a darkly ironic framework for reconsidering his student work, and his seminal installation 'Educational Complex' (1995), in which he reconstructed the sites and spaces associated with his education from memory, leaving blank those he could no longer recall. This impulse to revisit and revise his own history is also evident in the artist's Untitled (Collages 1974 – 2011), a series in which he returned to a selection of paintings on paper he made as a student, cutting away sections of their original compositions to create new shapes and voids. In doing so, he transformed the works while preserving traces of their earlier forms, making the passage of time and the process of revision integral to their meaning.

Following his 1993 mid-career survey exhibition and publication, 'Catholic Tastes,' Kelley framed the series as a rejection of his own historization: 'After my retrospective, I became painfully conscious of myself as a historical construct. I decided I had to start screwing with that…so I went back to the paintings I did in college and started painting on them again. Not to make them look different, but to relearn my collegiate skills. It was like going home in shame. Like going back to live in your own bedroom.'



Taken together, the works on view in 'Jerry Meandering' reveal a window into Kelley's way of thinking, illuminating the conceptual and material framework that underpinned his broader practice. His facility with graphic and material forms allowed him to move fluidly between media and strategies, using each to probe culture, institutional power and the self.

About the artist

Mike Kelley is widely considered one of the most influential artists of our time. Originally from a suburb outside of Detroit, Kelley attended the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, before moving to Southern California in 1976 to study at California Institute of the Arts from which he received an MFA in 1978. The city of Los Angeles became his adopted home and the site of his prolific art practice. In much of his work, Kelley drew from a wide spectrum of high and low culture, and was known to scour flea markets for America's cast-offs and leftovers. Mining the banal objects of everyday life, Kelley elevated these materials to question and dismantle Western conceptions of contemporary art and culture.

Starting out in the late 1970s, Kelley became known for performance and installation based works; he came to prominence in the 1980s with a series of sculptures composed of common craft materials and stuffed animals. His work later widened in scope and physical scale, exemplified by 'Educational Complex' (1995), the Kandors series (1999 – 2011), the Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction series (2000 – 2011), and the posthumously completed public work 'Mobile Homestead' (2006 – 2013). These projects invoked a vast range of media and forms, illustrating the artist's versatility, and underscored a number of Kelley's recurrent themes, such as repressed memory, sexuality, adolescence, class and Americana, which were central to his artistic praxis. Throughout his career, Kelley also worked on curatorial projects, collaborated with many artists and musicians and produced a formidable body of critical and creative writing.





About the Foundation
The Mike Kelley Foundation for the Arts advances the artist's spirit of critical thinking, risk taking and provocation in the arts. Established by Kelley in 2007, the Foundation seeks to further Kelley's philanthropic work through grants to arts organizations and artists for innovative projects that reflect his multifaceted artistic practice.

The Foundation also preserves the artist's legacy more broadly and fosters the understanding of his life and creative achievements through educational initiatives including exhibitions, educational events, publications and the preservation and care of the Foundation's art collections and archives.

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Untitled (Collages 1974 – 2011)
1974 - 2011
Mixed media and collage on paper
61 x 91.4 cm / 24 x 36 in
Photo: Fredrik Nilsen

Sunset
c. 1975 –1976
Unconfirmed, possibly lithograph combined with other technique
32.4 x 24.8 cm / 12 3/4 x 9 3/4 in
Photo: Roger Edwards

Ascension of Stravinskian Resemblance into a Field of Alice Coltrane Music
1975
Unique print, etching with spray paint
46.4 x 62.2 cm / 18 1/4 x 24 1/2 in
Photo: Fredrik Nilsen

Elegy to the Symbionese Liberation Army
1975
Acrylic, ink, and graphite on paper
61 x 91.4 cm / 24 x 36 in
Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography Zürich

Untitled (Student Drawing)
1973-1974 ca.
Mixed media on paper
17.8 x 15.9 cm / 7 x 6 1/4 in
Photo: Fredrik Nilsen

Jerry Meandering / Mr. and Mrs. Ford at Play
1976
2 color etching with aquatint
48.3 x 30.5 cm / 19 x 12 in
Photo: Roger Edwards