

REVIEW OF EXHIBITIONS



View of Mike Kelley's exhibition "Day Is Done," 2005; at Gagosian.

NEW YORK

Mike Kelley at Gagosian

Mike Kelley's transformation of this ordinarily sepulchral space was a technical feat, but the visual and auditory barrage of "Day Is Done," the artist's first show at Gagosian, was equaled by the humor and pathos of its subject and the intelligence of its design. Immersion in this walk-through, multimedia extravaganza was exhilaratingly uncomfortable, as the 28 works (all 2004-05), most of which included a video projection of a few minutes' duration, sifted residue of high-school dramatics to conjure that period when a young person recognizes the power of ritual—and the rituals of power.

Anchoring the show were the "Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstructions," restagings of photographs from the artist's collection of high-school yearbooks paired with the originals. In works like *Fresno* and *Structuralist Mimes*, Kelley extrapolates from sometimes subtle visual cues in the yearbook photos to spin awkward and hilarious conjectural versions of the production numbers they presumably document. Far more complex is *Devil's Door*, based on a photograph

of a goateed Satan mugging for the camera in a lavatory. This engendered an eight-minute video of preadolescent trauma at the hands of a pair of deviant barbers obsessed with facial hair; we also see their other customer, a bearded, pipe-sucking weirdo, and the unsavory magazines they keep around. *Candle Lighting Ceremony* conflates three photos: a zaftig blonde lighting fat candles at a dimly seen rite, a slim brunette solemnly lighting tapers, and a pair of young men clowning around in Nazi regalia.

In the video precipitated by these images, Kelley imagines a weight-loss seminar during which the plump Aryan girl becomes a "svelte Jewish butterfly," despite the Nazi duo's rap-style celebration of big girls in which they implore the blonde to "be our chunky Samson/bring the temple down." Throughout, the (uncredited) performers faithfully mimic the self-infatuated overacting familiar from high-school drama clubs.

Many of the videos' props reappear as sculpture, giving the show a material focus.

In a small, darkened room behind a pink curtain was *Pink Curtain*: spinning around on a low platform and occasionally reversing direction, a wheeled armature that looked like a huge garment rack animated a low-budget theater curtain, which trailed its twin lengths of fabric like witches' capes. Raking across it was a projection of a silhouetted "exotic dancer" who, aided by a full-length mirror, became insect, reptile and alien. The soundtrack was feedback and garbled radio transmissions, suggesting an approaching tornado. Though its main business is extending the show's theme, *Pink Curtain* is also, considered in isolation, an unfathomably beautiful image.

A map of the show was helpfully provided, but a satisfying experience didn't depend on making narrative sense of it. Kelley has recently written of his interest in the formal characteristics of the movie musical and of pornography, and "Day Is Done" borrows from both, featuring vivid episodes tethered to a near-undetectable plot. The initial "Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction," which included a half-hour video, was first shown in 2000 (it was included in a January exhibition at PaceWildenstein gallery on 57th Street). Allegedly, a total of 365 individual pieces is planned. It is dizzying to think that "Day Is Done" was just the beginning of this astounding project.

—Stephen Maine

View of Mona Hatoum's *Mobile Home*, 2005, steel, str...

