

Peder

Mike  
Kelley

Kandors

November 19, 2022 - February 4, 2023



Lund



Mike Kelley (1954-2012)  
Kandor 14  
2011  
Mixed media  
177.8 × 109.2 × 86.4 cm  
Unique



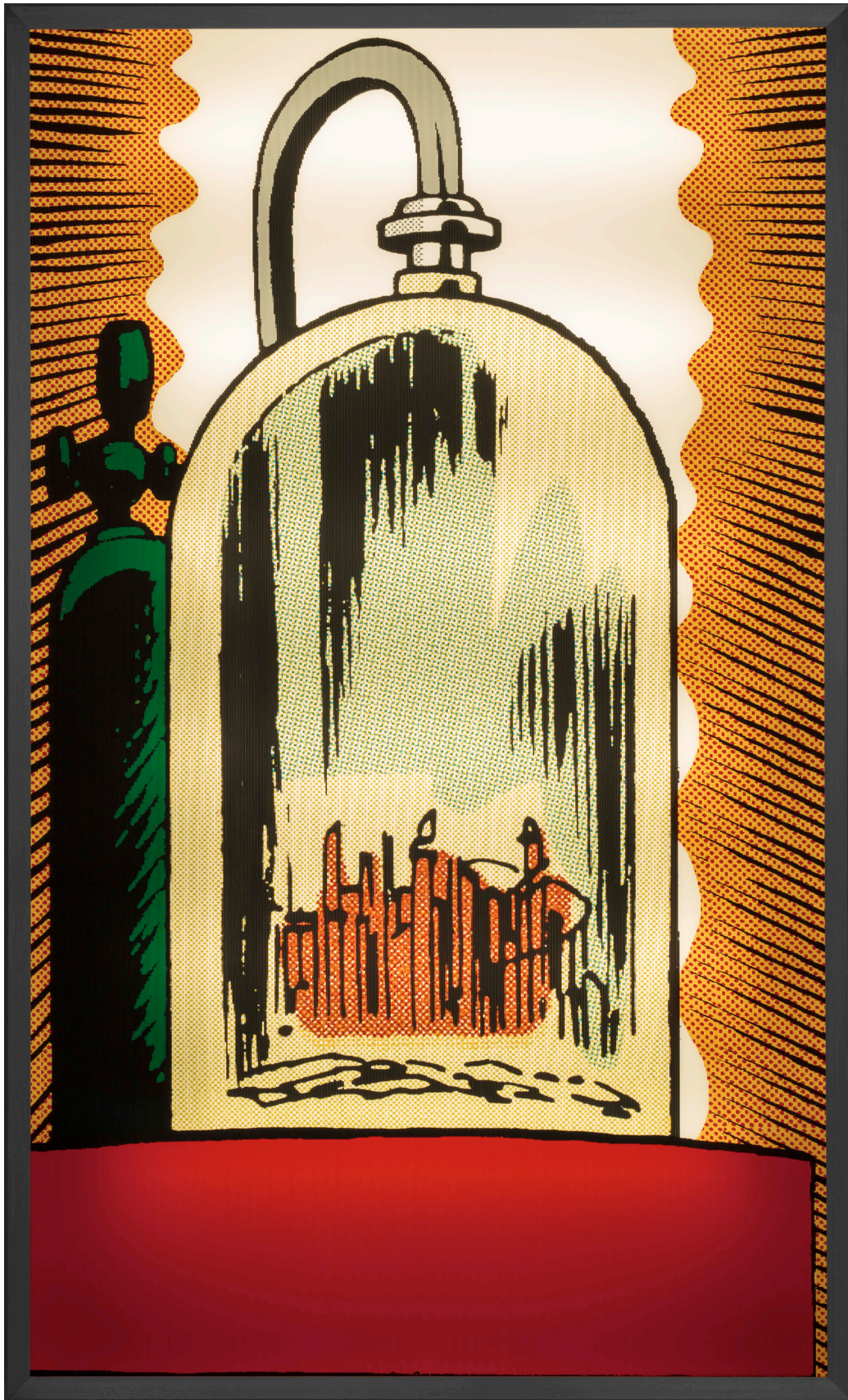
Mike Kelley (1954-2012)  
Kandor 16B  
2010  
Mixed media  
241.3 × 100.3 × 113 cm  
Unique



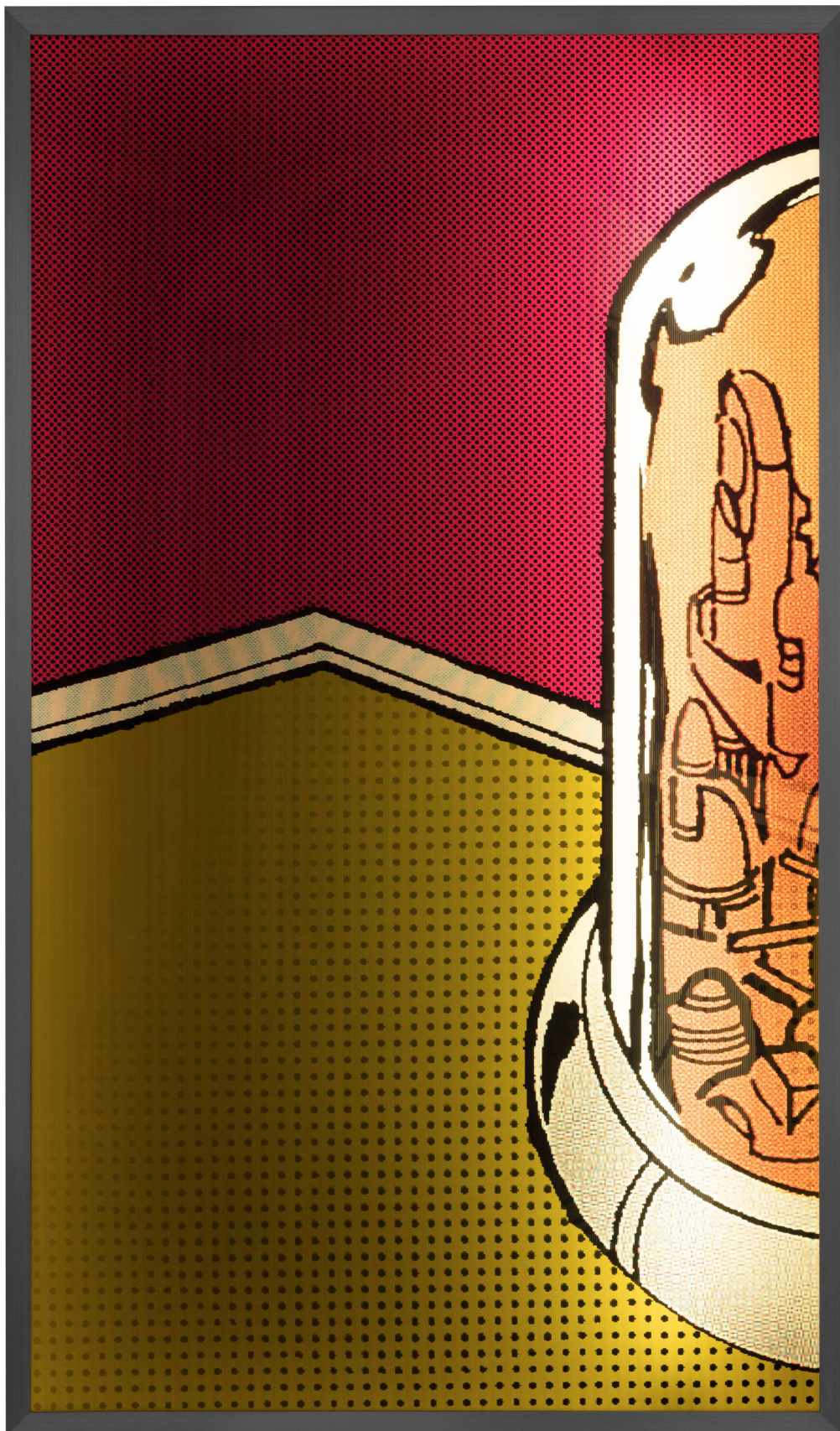
Mike Kelley (1954-2012)  
Lenticular 8  
2007  
Lenticular panel, lightbox  
128.6 × 124.5 × 10 cm  
Ed. 2/5 + 2 APs



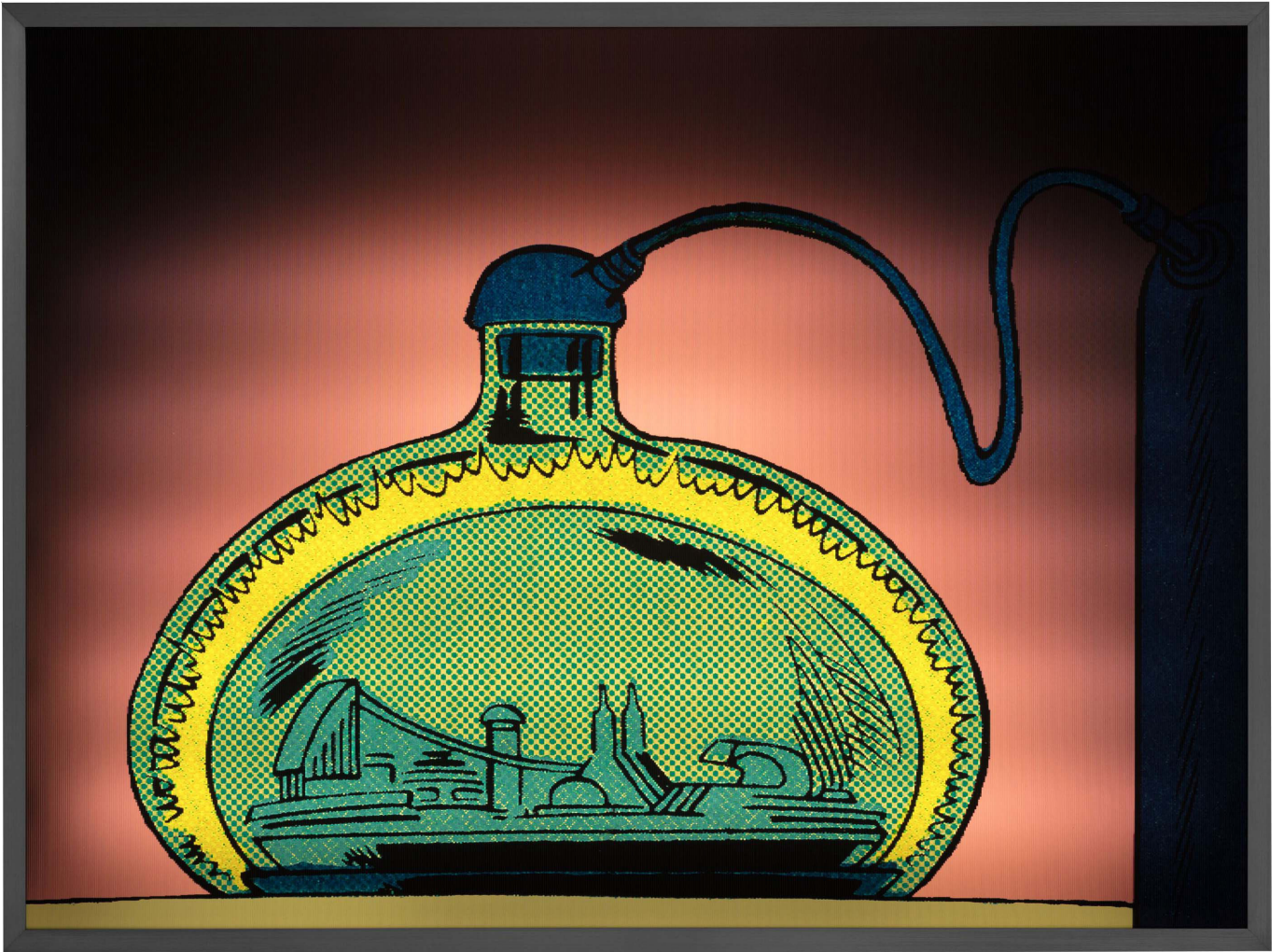
Mike Kelley (1954-2012)  
Lenticular 11  
2007  
Lenticular panel, lightbox  
126.4 × 111.1 × 10.5 cm  
Ed. 1/5 + 2 APs



Mike Kelley (1954-2012)  
Lenticular 14  
2007  
Lenticular panel, lightbox  
154.9 × 93.4 × 10.5 cm  
Ed. 1/5 + 2 APs



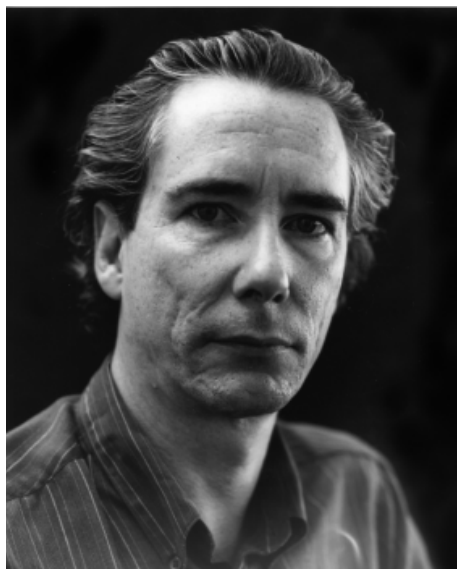
Mike Kelley (1954-2012)  
Lenticular 16  
2007  
Lenticular panel, lightbox  
128.3 × 75.6 × 10.5 cm  
Ed. 2/5 + 2 APs



Mike Kelley (1954-2012)  
Lenticular 18  
2007  
Lenticular panel, lightbox  
93.35 × 124.46 × 10.48 cm  
Ed. 2/5 + 2 APs



Mike Kelley (1954-2012)  
Bottle 1  
2007  
Video projection, color/sound continuous loop, 20 minutes  
Dimensions variable  
Edition 3/5 + 2 APs



Beginning Saturday, November 19, Peder Lund is honored to welcome the public into the world of the American artist Mike Kelley (b. 1954, Detroit, MI; d. 2012, South Pasadena, CA). *Mike Kelley: Kandors* marks the artist's first solo exhibition in Norway, and the selected works are key examples from Kelley's highly acclaimed *Kandors* and related *Lenticular* series, which explore Kelley's interests in spatial memory and the nature of trauma as a recurrent trope in popular culture. Shown alongside the sculptures and lenticulars in the gallery will be a swirling, atmospheric video projection depicting Kelley's *Bottle 1*, accompanied by an otherworldly soundtrack composed by the artist. Starting 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. His projects made use of a vast range of media and forms, illustrating the artist's versatility, and underscored a number of the recurrent themes central to Kelley's artistic praxis—repressed memory, sexuality, adolescence, class, and Americana. 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. Widely considered one of the most influential artists of his time, Kelley's expansive body of work continues to inspire young generations of artists today.

Mike Kelley is broadly seen as an artist who discovered a potent way to pick up where Pop art left off and push its concepts and aesthetics into new and highly original directions. When he was growing up in the suburbs of Detroit, the art establishment heralded Andy Warhol's capitalist and media-centered consumerist screenprints. But by the time Kelley reached adolescence in





the 1970s, Detroit's car factories were shuttering, and popular culture's enchantment with and glorification of Americana was experiencing a shift.

Attuned to the mythical and dystopian nature of contemporary culture, Kelley's work scrutinized and revealed society's underbelly. The multimedia artist Tony Oursler would say of Kelley, "He looked at Pop and thought, 'Why did they stop there? Why is it all so tasteful? Why didn't they go all the way down because there are plenty of sublevels in society to explore.'"<sup>1</sup> The multimedia artist Sterling Ruby, a former teaching assistant to Kelley, would give credit to Kelley for inspiring him to move to Los Angeles, previously seen as a kind of sleepy alternative to the more career-making environment of New York, and as a pioneer of a kind of "thrift-store aesthetic" that has remained highly influential to a generation of artists working today.

Michael Kelley was born in 1954 in Wayne, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit. His exposure to art-making began at an early age when he befriended the child of two glassblowers whose studio quickly became Kelley's creative refuge and encouraged his interest in art. Though Kelley's parents did not immediately approve of his artistic passion, he would stubbornly persist: after high school, he went on to study art at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

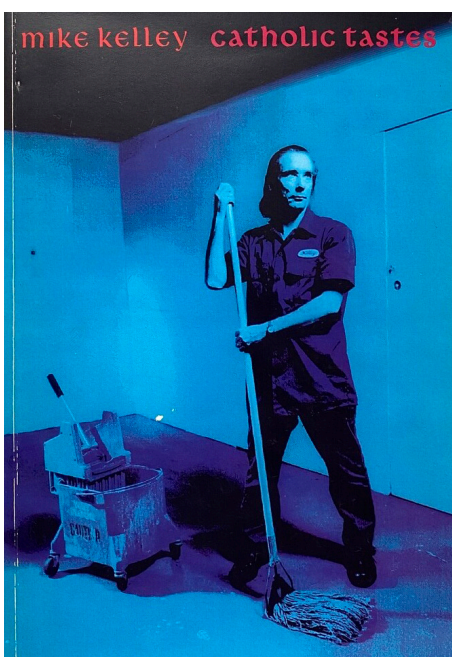
In college, Kelley met artist Jim Shaw and formed a fast friendship. During their classes together, they studied Abstract Expressionism and by night formed a proto-punk noise band with their group of friends called Destroy All Monsters. During their first concert, at a comic-book convention, they took to the stage and played a violin, coffee can, saxophone, and a vacuum cleaner — according to all accounts they were asked to leave about ten minutes later.

Three years later, Kelley attended the California Institute of the Arts—a Los Angeles art school whose faculty included successful conceptual artists like John Baldessari and Douglas Huebler as well as maverick performers like Laurie Anderson. At Cal Arts, Kelley pushed against the established modes of performance art



– the provocations of Vito Acconci, Chris Burden, and Marina Abramovic. Kelley's style was steeped in "Freudian and Jungian misnomers with a punk overtone to it all - he was chaos and utter brilliance."<sup>2</sup>

In the 1980s and 90s, Kelley's reputation as a prestigious artist grew—he joined some of America's top young galleries, his work began to be acquired by important patrons, he was included in the 1985 Whitney Biennial, he began teaching at the Art Center College of Design in 1987, and the Whitney Museum gave him his first mid-career survey in 1993. Kelley called the show *Catholic Tastes* and posed on its catalogue cover dressed in a janitor's jumpsuit, mop in hand — a reference to his father's profession and critics' psycho-autobiographic interpretations of his artwork.



In 2007, Kelley would premiere his ambitious body of work centered around the fantastical world of the Silver Age mythology of Superman. Kelley's *Kandors* and wall-mounted *Lenticular* light boxes relate to the fictional city of Kandor, the capital of Superman's home planet Krypton. According to the Superman mythos, Kandor was shrunk and bottled by the villainous Brainiac in advance of the planet Krypton's explosive obliteration, and was later rescued by its most famous son and sequestered for protection under a bell jar in Superman's fabled Fortress of Solitude. The city first appeared in the story "The Super-Duel in Space", published in Action Comics #242 (July 1958), written by Otto Binder and drawn by one of the most prolific Superman artists of the 1950s, Al Plastino. For almost a quarter-century of comic-book time, the

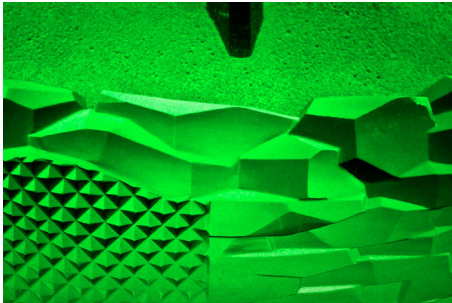
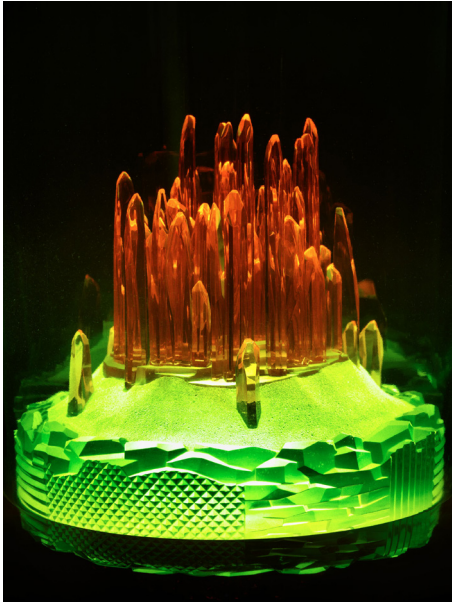


city and its tiny citizens survived under Superman's watchful eye, sustained by air tanks replicating Krypton's native atmosphere.

Despite its importance in Superman lore, the image of Kandor was never codified, and the numerous representations of its futuristic skyline in the comic book throughout the years vary widely in appearance. Kelley was attracted to this malleability and he sought to amplify and isolate these "continuity errors" from the diverse array of artists tasked with illustrating the city over the course of such a long time. Kelley's *Kandors* translate into sculptural form the consistent inconsistencies of the city's renderings in the actual comic books.

As the cultural historian, Jeffrey Sconce would write in his text, *When Worlds Collide*:

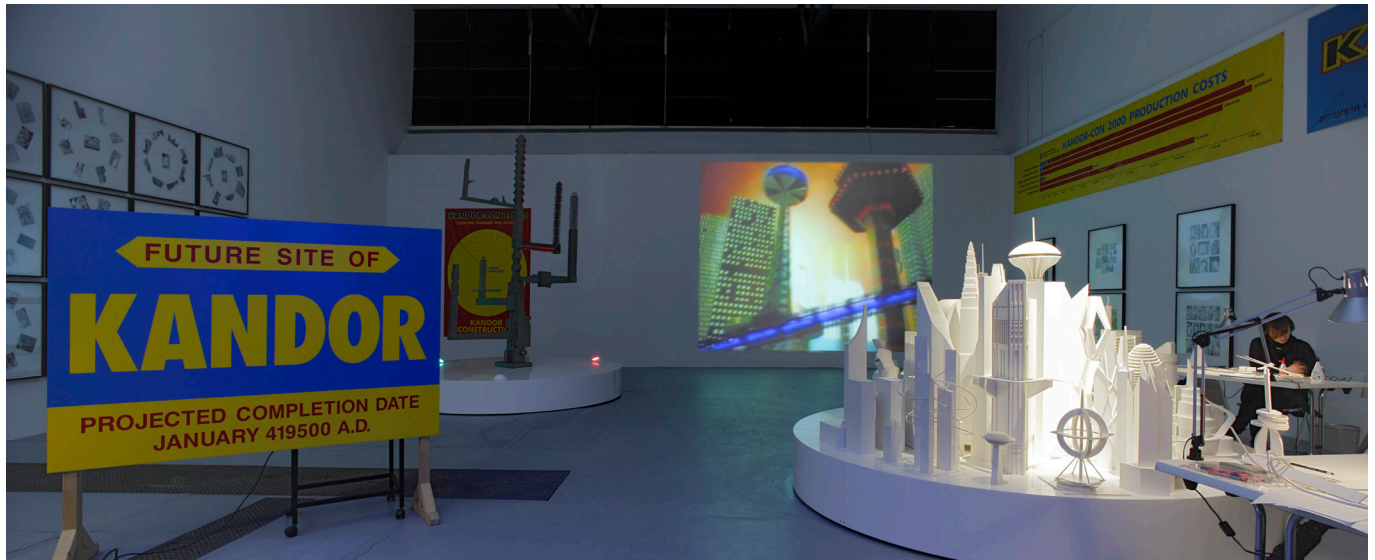
In effect, the series subjects Kandor to an ongoing process of "secondary revision," Freud's term for the process wherein the dreamer, upon awakening, attempts to make sense out of the irrational logic of a dream by "revising" it into a more coherent form, a process that, ironically, only serves to further distort the actual content of the dream itself. Who is the dreamer in this scenario? Who else but Superman himself, a figure who must confront his past, not as some phantom of memory, a figurative empire locked away in the mind, but as a literal city that has somehow stubbornly survived the obliteration of his planet of



origin. An uncanny miniature dislocated in time and space, here stands the arrested yet fundamentally unstable world of Superman's traumatic childhood.<sup>3</sup>

Kandor, in Kelley's handling, becomes an emblem of anxious dread, a restless symptom of Superman's horrifying psychic burden. Already saddled with the unending catastrophes besetting Metropolis and the Earth in his adult life, Superman presumably has to make time every so often to check on Kandor, regressing the Man of Steel to the anxious and vaguely shameful task of caring for a living diorama, one not unlike the creepy "ant farms" and "sea monkey" colonies frequently sold to little kids in the back pages of his own comic book.<sup>4</sup>

Kelley's interest in Kandor's ever-changing skyline began with a work titled *Kandor-Con 2000* (1999) that debuted at the group exhibition *Zeitwenden: Ausblick* at the Kunstmuseum Bonn. The show focused on the impending millennium by exhibiting contemporary art and historical objects with a special emphasis on the "new media" of the past. As Kelley wrote, "in response to these themes, I decided to create a project that centered on an out-of-date image of the future re-presented through recent technological developments. I chose to focus on the fictional city of Kandor from the Superman comics series." The presentation included an architectural model of Kandor, collages with clusters of original illustrations of the city, and a video in which an actor playing Superman recites various texts by Sylvia Plath. Kelley originally



conceived *Kandor-Con 2000* to be both an interactive convention space and online forum for Superman aficionados, but due to lack of funding, the public new media portions were never realized.<sup>5</sup>

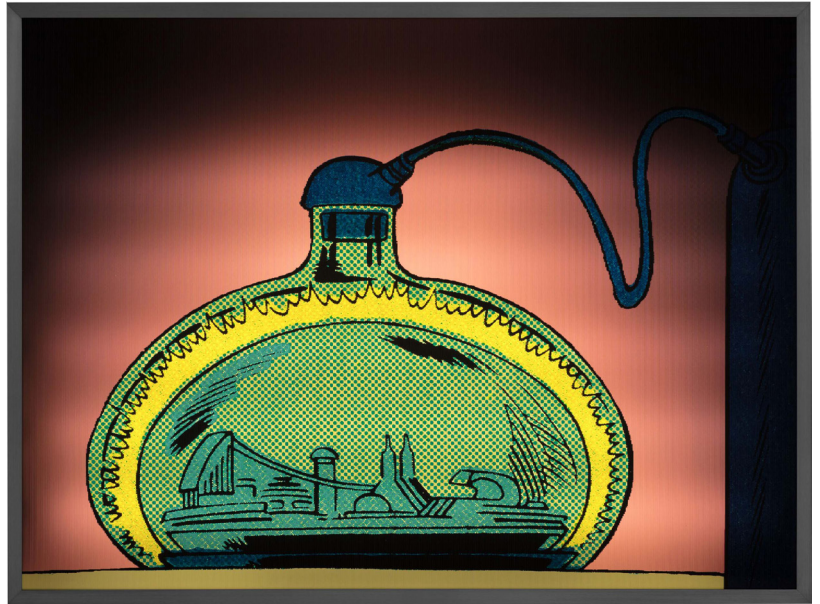
Kelley continued to be preoccupied with the artistic possibilities in this comic book world and a veritable "multiverse" of *Kandors* followed between 2007 and 2011. As Kelley would state of his Kandor sculptures:

The problem I set out for myself was to translate the two-dimensional comic-book renderings into three-dimensional sculptures. As I envisioned them, they would be akin to paintings by Henri Matisse in three dimensions, with science-fiction overtones.<sup>6</sup>

In these works, Kelley explores the formal properties of translucency and reflection by casting the Kandors in colored resins, setting them in tinted, handblown glass bottles made by the Kavalier Glass Factory in the Czech Republic, and illuminating the metropolises from beneath. The lenticular lightboxes manipulate the two-dimensional designs and colors of the comic book illustrations. Of these, Kelley wrote, "My goal was to highlight the differences between the graphic qualities of the comic-book illustrations and the dimensionalized versions of them represented in the sculptures."<sup>7</sup>

The formal exploration of color, texture, light, and scale is exemplified in the Kandors installed in the gallery. *Kandor 14* (2011) is a fascinating, highly polished version akin to Kelley's first Kandor from 2007 – *Kandor 1* – now in the collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. With its crystalline-like skyline cast in glowing oranges and greens, *Kandor 14*'s spare treatment of the city seems to underline the desolation and loneliness of its residents, whose survival is wholly dependent on the large gas tank and tubing to maintain their atmosphere. The red platform lends the work a cleanly stylized, clinical feeling.

In contrast to the sleek, precise lines of *Kandor 14*, in *Kandor 16B* (2010) the lava-like black pedestals are more textured. The work



was made with the leftover production scraps of Kelley's other cities. Kelley discussed the introduction of this bedrock-type material as a means of bringing a more organic texture to these pieces. As a purely formal strategy, *Kandor 16B*'s massive block of "natural" bedrock serves to make the fragile line and light inside the dome even more pronounced, producing a tension between the raw chunks of jagged stone and the cascading, globular masses of textured colors inside the glass dome. This conglomeration of candy-colored, sometimes dripping, sometimes pointed mass of resin completely abstracts the skyline of the miniaturized city. The disposition of the miniature figures outside of the glass dome – a gnome with a bemused look and a paintbrush in hand and a sweet bunny pulling a loaded cart – remind the viewer of the work's



domestic scale and calls back to Kelley's love of scouring flea markets for kitschy, pre-loved items put up for sale. Both figures are emblematic of Kelley's interest in the leftover remnants of contemporary culture.

The *Lenticular* works are installed with the *Kandors* and further emphasize Kelley's interest in the graphics of comic books while creating a sense of disorientation with their ability to change their appearance depending on the angle of viewing. A Superman collector provided Kelley with hundreds of different illustrations of Kandor; the graphically altered images of the city were blown up to the same scale as the *Kandor* sculptures and placed in lenticular light boxes so that the viewer's movement could affect these pieces' appearance. Two, sometimes three, diverse views and color schemes are achieved in these works. A critique and evolution of the great works by Pop artists who expanded on the iconography of mass printing technologies like Roy Lichtenstein and Robert Rauschenberg, the lenticular quality of these pieces adds an additional interesting layer of transmutation which artists have been exploring since Han Holbein the Younger's famous shifting painting *The Ambassadors* from 1533.



Kelley's *Kandors* and *Lenticulars* belong to many prestigious public and private collections in the world and have been included in numerous highly acclaimed exhibitions. A group of 21 different *Kandors* cities (*Kandors Full Set*, 2005-09) was shown in the inaugural exhibition of the Pinault Collection, *Mapping the Studio: Artists from the François Pinault Collection*, Venice, in 2009. In 2011, Museen Haus Lange und Haus Esters, Krefeld, held the exhibition *Kandors*. The major, touring retrospective *Mike Kelley*, which began at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and subsequently traveled to the Centre George Pompidou, Paris; MoMA PS1, New York, NY; and concluded at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, featured three *Kandors* and two *lenticulars* along with several other related works. The Museum of Modern Art, New York owns *Kandor 13* (2007), while the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh owns *Kandor 20* (2007). In 2019, the Hammer Museum held the exhibition *Dirty Protest: Selections from the Hammer Contemporary Collection*, which featured Kelley's *City 000* (2010), a work that is part of his *Kandors* project.



Additional work by the artist is included in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, Baltimore Museum of Art, Centre Georges Pompidou, Detroit Institute of Art, Fundacion "la Caixa," Madrid, Goetz Collection, Munich, Jumex Collection, Mexico City, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam, Museum für Moderne Kunst, Vienna, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Museum Ludwig, Cologne, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, and the Whitney Museum of American Art. Mike Kelley was the recipient of numerous awards in his lifetime.

Kelley's death by suicide on January 31, 2012, was a devastating loss. Dozens of obituaries and articles from The New York Times to the Wall Street Journal commemorated Kelley and his practice.



He was remembered by international curators, directors, artists, art historians and collectors as a thought-provoking, innovative, and fearless artist. He produced a body of artworks in every form and medium, including paintings, sculptures, works on paper, installations, performances, videos, photographs, critical texts, and music. He is credited with guiding a young generation of LA artists and helping to shape the transformation of the city into a leading capital for contemporary art. Kelley looked at history, art, craft, literature, popular culture, sexuality, philosophy, education, class, and religion, exposing their connections and contradictions, and in so doing, our own.

List of notes:

- 1 Tony Oursler quoted in Kelly Crow, "The Escape Artist," The Wall Street Journal, March 14, 2013.
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 Jeffrey Sconce, "When Worlds Collide" in *Mike Kelley: Exploded Fortress of Solitude*, Beverly Hills/London: Gagosian Gallery, 2011: p. 157.
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 *Mike Kelley: Kandors, 1999 – 2011*, Hauser & Wirth, 2018.
- 6 Mike Kelley quoted in George Pendle, "The dark side of Superman," The Economist, September 25, 2015.
- 7 Mike Kelley, *Kandors*, in Rafael Jablonka (ed.), *Mike Kelley: Kandors*, Hirmer, Munich, Germany, 2010: p. 57.

List of illustrations:

- 1 Portrait of Mike Kelley. Photo: Timothy Greenfield-Sanders.
- 2 Installation view, *Mike Kelley*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, December 15, 2012 – April 1, 2013. Photo: © Gert Jan Van Rooij.
- 3 Mike Kelley, *Lenticular 16*, 2007. Photo: Genevieve Hanson.
- 4 Mike Kelley working in his studio, 2011. Photo: Jennie Warren.
- 5 Mike Kelley, *Lenticular 8*, 2007. Photo: Fredrik Nilsen.
- 6 *Mike Kelley: Catholic Tastes*, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993 (catalogue cover)
- 7 Mike Kelley working in his studio, 2011. Photo: Jennie Warren.
- 8 Superman no. 496, 1979.
- 9 Mike Kelley, *Kandor 14*, 2011. Photo: Fredrik Nilsen.
- 10 Mike Kelley, *Kandor 14*, 2011 (detail). Photo: Fredrik Nilsen.
- 11 Mike Kelley, *Kandor 14*, 2011 (detail). Photo: Fredrik Nilsen.
- 12 Installation view, *Kandor-Con 2000*, Jablonka Galerie at Technische Universität, Cologne, Germany, 2007. Photo: Nic Tenwiggenhorn.
- 13 Installation view, *Kandors: Mike Kelley*, Jablonka Galerie, Berlin, Germany, 2007. Photo: Fredrik Nilsen.
- 14 Mike Kelley, *Lenticular 18*, 2007. Photo: Fredrik Nilsen.
- 15 Mike Kelley, *Kandor 1*, 2007. Installation view, *Kandors : Mike Kelley*, Jablonka Galerie, Berlin, Germany, 2007. Photo: Fredrik Nilsen.
- 16 Mike Kelley, *Kandor 16B*, 2010 (detail). Photo: Fredrik Nilsen.
- 17 Mike Kelley, *Kandor 16B*, 2010 (detail). Photo: Fredrik Nilsen.
- 18 Installation view, *Dirty Protest: Selections from the Hammer Contemporary Collection*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, January 24-May 19, 2019. Photo: Jeff McLane.

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