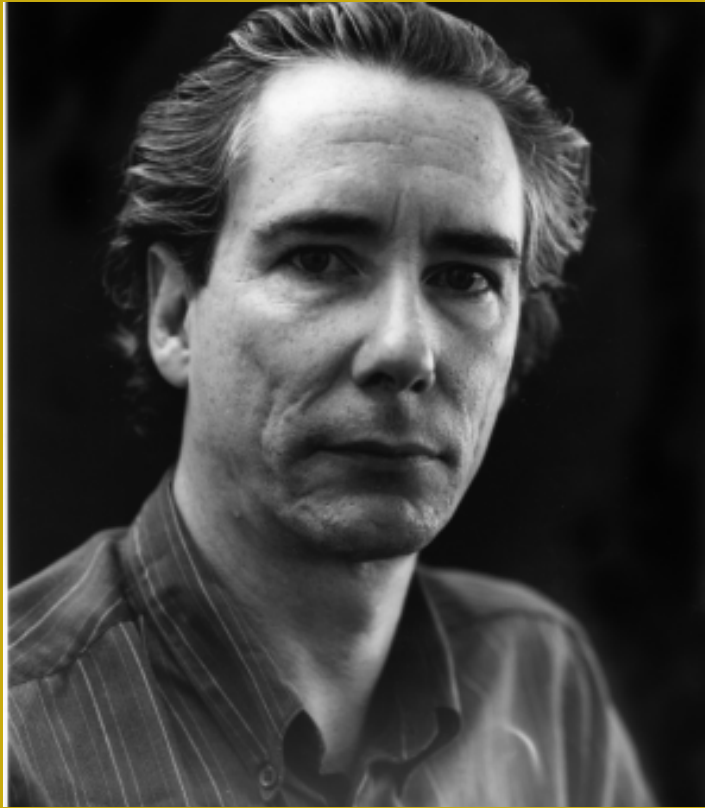


MIKE KELLY FROST ART MUSEUM



THE TEACHER RESOURCE PACKET

THE ARTIST



Mike Kelley was an American artist. His work involved found objects, textile banners, drawings, assemblages, collages, performances, and video. He often worked collaboratively and produced projects with artists Paul McCarthy, Tony Oursler, and John Miller. Writing in *The New York Times*, in 2012, Holland Cotter described the artist as "one of the most influential American artists of the past quarter century and a pungent commentator on American class, popular culture and youthful rebellion."^[2]

Education Activity



Connect: 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. He also worked on curatorial projects; collaborated with many other artists and musicians; and left a formidable body of critical and creative writing. Starting out in the late 1970s with solo performances, image/text paintings, and gallery and site-specific installations, Kelley came to prominence in the 1980s with a series of sculptures composed of common craft materials.

Featuring repurposed thrift store toys, blankets, and worn stuffed animals, the Half a Man series focused on Kelley's career-long investigation of memory, trauma, and repression, predicated on what the artist described as a "shared culture of abuse."

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.



Memory ware Flat #48
Mike Kelley (Art Bridges)



Mike Kelley, 'Memory Ware Flat #58' (detail), 2009.

© Mike Kelley. Courtesy Mike Kelley Foundation for the Arts and Hauser & Wirth.

Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography Zürich

Memory Ware Series

Mike Kelley's Memory Ware Flat series was inspired by a largely unresearched folk tradition of jug decorating from the American South. Known as "**memory jugs**," these vessels are possibly funerary, and adorned with beads, buttons, or china fragments belonging to a deceased loved one. The memorial nature of these objects aligns with Kelley's artistic practice, which addresses themes of bereavement, mortality, and nostalgia. Additionally, Memory Ware Flat No. 48 attempts to deconstruct the biased hierarchy that privileges abstract painting above folk art, by presenting a non-representational form, intended for the fine art market, crafted from inexpensive thrift store jewelry.



Unidentified, Memory Jug with Finial

20th century, mixed media on ceramic, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Herbert Waide Hemphill, Jr. and museum purchase made possible by Ralph Cross Johnson, 1986.65.310

American Art – Memory Jug

Memory Jug History

A memory jug is an African American folk art form that memorializes the dead. It is a general term for a vessel whose surface is adorned with an assortment of broken china, glass shards, and small objects, especially items associated with a dead person. They are called forget-me-not jugs, mourning jugs, memory vessels, spirit jars, whatnot jars, ugly jugs, and whimsy jars.[1]

Memory Jug

Folk art covers all forms of visual art made in the context of folk culture. Definitions vary, but generally, the objects have a practical utility of some kind, rather than being exclusively decorative. The makers of folk art are typically trained within a popular tradition, rather than in the fine art tradition of the culture. There is often overlap, or contested ground[1] with 'naive art'. "Folk art" is not used in regard to traditional societies where ethnographic art continues to be made. The types of objects covered by the term "folk art" vary. The art form is categorized as "divergent... of cultural production ... comprehended by its usage in Europe, where the term originated, and in the United States, where it developed along different lines." [2]

For a European perspective, Edward Lucie-Smith described it as "Unsophisticated art, both fine and applied, which is supposedly rooted in the collective awareness of simple people. The concept of folk art is a distinctly 19th-century one. Today it carries with it a tinge of nostalgia for pre-industrial society." [3]



*We Are Made of Stories:
Self-Taught Artists in the Robson Family Collection, 2022)*

Memory Jug History (continued)

Memory jugs give physical form to remembrance. Because these assemblages were rarely valued by anyone other than family members at the time of their creation, the identities of their makers were almost always lost to time. The profusion of mementos encrusted onto crockery traces the beliefs and customs of the people who made them and those they cherished. This jug features over 275 objects, from an extracted tooth to shells, tiny glass bottles, an Aunt Jemima button, and more, fragments of the material world chosen to remember a life and to honor a loved one's spirit on earth, long after they are gone.



Appalachian History – Memory Jug

Memory Jug History (continued)

This is a memory jug from the collection of Melver Jackson Hendricks (1867-1933) who served in the North Carolina House of Representatives in the early 1920's.

Memory jugs made from bottles, urns, bowls and other vessels have been found on graves, particularly in the South, and almost always on African American graves. Often they are decorated with trinkets including seashells, glass shards, jewelry, coins, mirrors or other visual reminders of a loved one.

The memory jug shown here is currently in the North Carolina Museum of History. The museum's information on the provenance of the jug is a bit sketchy. Its creation date is estimated at about 1900, probably because of the gray salt glaze used on it and the specific items attached to it, and the museum assumes it was local to Davie County, where Hendricks lived.



Memory Ware Flat #58, 2009, Mike Kelley

Memory Ware Flats

Kelley borrowed the phrase “memory ware” from a type of North American folk art in which the surfaces of common household objects – bottles, vases, lamps, and so on – are completely covered with small, decorative keepsakes and personal items. The artist first encountered examples of the genre at a Toronto antique fair in 2000, where he purchased a memory ware bottle. Given his longstanding interest in repurposing materials with prior histories as well as his ongoing engagement with the aesthetics of craft and folk art, one can easily imagine how he came to envision possibilities – apparently, almost immediately – for developing works that would deploy the memory ware aesthetic, but toward very different ends.

Memory Ware Flats (continued)

With their vivid, pullulating surfaces cordoned off within wood frames, the Memory Ware Flats clearly align themselves with the medium of painting rather than with assemblage or sculptural relief. Heroically scaled, horizontal compositions such as Memory Ware Flat #17 and Memory Ware Flat #18 (2001; see pp.118-19) evoke the “allover” approach of postwar American abstraction. (The use of the word “flat” in the series title, meanwhile, recalls the modernist credo that painting ought to remain faithful to the flatness of its canvas support.)

In place of sweeping gestures and dramatic skeins of paint, however, Kelley’s Memory Ware Flats substitute tightly packed fields of trinkets and charms. Seemingly randomly ordered yet exactingly neat, as though fashioned through a kind of highly organized pictorial vomiting, their “noncompositional” arrangement mitigates any impression of sentimentality; indeed, in sharp contrast to the homey look and nostalgic orientation of memory ware folk art, Kelley’s works appear – oddly enough, given their material makeup-coolly formal.

STUDIO EXPERIENCE

Making the Memory Jug

Essential Questions

Elementary

What is a memory jug?

What can you re-purpose from your home to create artwork in the style of Kelley?

Where in your neighborhood can you find items to re-purpose?

Why did you select these items? Why are they of value to you?

Middle School

What math skills can you use to create an organic asymmetrical artwork in the style of Kelley?

How does pop culture influence our everyday life?

What is already happening in our community to preserve culture and natural resources?

Why did you select these items? Why are they of value to you?

High School

What in your life do you consider to be everyday arcana?

Kelly was fascinated with oppositional fixation; describe how you can see it in his artwork ?

Why was Mike Kelley described as a “master provocateur?”

Why did you select these items? Why are they of value to you?

Do these items bring you joy?

STUDIO EXPERIENCE

Making the Memory Jug

Choosing the Vessel

The vessel used for the memory jug doesn't have to be a jug - it can be a large glass bottle, a food jar or even a clean terra-cotta plant pot. Remove labels from glass items by soaking them in warm water for a while, then rubbing the label away. Wash the glass surface with warm water and dish soap; rinse, and then allow it to air dry. To decide which size vessel to use, look at your collection of trinkets -- the goal is to cover as much of the surface of the jug as possible with your memorabilia, so a small vessel is best paired with a small collection of trinkets.

Antique memory jugs were often covered completely with a clay- or putty-like substance; the materials varied based on what was readily available to the creator. Choose an air-drying clay that does not crack, or use a two-part putty, such as epoxy putty, if you wish to cover the entire vessel. Any putty that dries hard and can be manipulated will work, ask at the hardware store about the properties of the product sold so you can decide what will work best. A thinset mortar can be used in place of putties or clays.

STUDIO EXPERIENCE

Making the Memory Jug (Continued)

Step 1

Choose the Adhesive or Putty

(Elmers Glue was used in the Frost Art Museum Project)

Apply the putty approximately 1/4-inch thick over the outside of the vessel. If you have a soft putty or thin set, spread it with a putty knife. For a two-part putty or clay, press the material in place with your fingers.

Step 2

Press a few of your favorite trinkets onto key locations, such as several favorite tokens or foreign coins spread out near the shoulders of the bottle or jug.

Step 3

Arrange other items such as strands or beads from broken jewelry around the memory jug. Tiny beads, for example, can be used around key items to further highlight them, or you can arrange beads or tiny colorful pebbles and shells in patterns such as swirls. Continue covering the memory jug with trinkets, spacing them as desired, until they're all in place.

Disclaimer: The Frost Art Museum Educators poured the resin to all of the students works to contain the small objects in place. Students did not use resin.

STUDIO EXPERIENCE

Making the Memory Ware Box

Gathering Trinkets

If you're making your memory jug as a personal keepsake, gather items of sentimental value that you no longer use, such as a broken bit of a grandmother's locket or small toys you enjoyed as a young child. Children participating can use pieces from long-lost games, broken action figures or a few shells or foreign coins from a collection. Items placed on the jug are meant to stay there permanently, so don't use your favorite rings or earrings, for instance.

Choosing the BOX or FRAME

The box or frame used for the memory ware box can be an empty frame, picture frame, a shallow drawer, or any square, round or rectangular box that has some depth. To decide which size box to use, look at your collection of trinkets -- the goal is to cover as much of the surface of the box as possible with your memorabilia, so a small box is best paired with a small collection of trinkets.

Choose An Adhesive

The memory boxes can be filled depending on the depth. A thin layer of Elmer's glue or white clear drying glue can be used to secure the memorabilia in the box.

STUDIO EXPERIENCE

Making the Memory Ware Box

Step 1

Apply air dry clay (not recommended) or use Elmer's glue to secure the pieces as they are arranged.

Step 2

Press a few of your favorite trinkets onto key locations, such as several favorite tokens or foreign coins spread out near the shoulders of the box. You can arrange your pieces to represent areas of your life – family, friends, career, interests, etc.

Step 3

Arrange other items such as strands or beads from broken jewelry around the memorabilia pieces in the box. Tiny beads can be used around key items to further highlight them, or you can arrange beads or tiny colorful pebbles and shells in patterns such as swirls. Continue covering the memory box with trinkets, spacing them as desired, until they're all in place and you've reached your desired composition.

Step 4

Use ASTM Approved Non-Toxic Epoxy with trinkets, spacing them as desired, until they're all in place and you've reached your desired composition.

STUDIO EXPERIENCE

RUBRIC

Design/Composition

Student applies design principles (such as unity, contrast, balance, movement, direction, emphasis, and center of interest) with great skill.

Student applies design principles (such as unity, contrast, balance, movement, direction, emphasis, and center of interest) with fair skill.

Student tries to apply design principles (such as unity, contrast, balance, movement, direction, emphasis, and center of interest) but the overall result is not pleasing.

The student does not appear to be able to apply most design principles to his/her own work.

Material Choices

Choice and application of the items selected show advanced knowledge of color relationships. The color choice of the items selected enhances the artwork.

Choice and application of items show knowledge of color relationships. Items are appropriate for the artwork.

Choice and application of the items selected show knowledge of color relationships. Items selected are, however, NOT appropriate for the artwork.

Student needs to work on learning color relationships and using that knowledge of selecting items for their artwork.

STUDIO EXPERIENCE

STEAM Connections for EXPLORATION

Spatial Arrangement of Organic Items, Recycling, Sustainability, Mixtures & Solutions - Chemical Reaction of (Epoxy Mixture)

Resources:

Make A Memory Jar

Mike Kelly Foundation

Exploring Mike Kelly with Kids

<https://www.redtedart.com/kids-get-arty-exploring-mike-kelley-kids/>

BENCHMARKS

K-5 – MA.K11.MTR.5.1, ELA.K12.EE.4.1, SC.3.P.8.2 & 3, SC.4.E.6, SC.5.L.15.1, SC.5.P.8.3, VA.3-5.C.2.2

6-8 - ELA.7.C.4.1, SC.7.E.6.6, SC.8.P.8.9, SC.8.P.8.Pa.5, VA.68.C., VA.68.F.1.1, VA.68.S.3.3

9-12 - ELD.K12.ELL.SI.1, MA.912.AR.2, SC. 912. L.17.17, SC. 912. L.17.20, VA.912.O.1.5, VA.912.S.3.1

Mike Kelly

Close-Looking Activity

What can we know by looking?

1. Describe what you see. Think about line, color, texture, pattern, and shape. Can you figure out what it is made of, or how it was made?
2. What do you know about this object? Is it familiar? What is not familiar?
3. List words or ideas that come to mind when you look at this object. Why does this object make you think about those words?
4. What questions would you like to ask about this object? Can you guess the answers to any of them?
5. Does the object connect to a story or memory that has meaning to you?



Prompt Questions for Assignment Building

(Middle & High School Students)

1. What are my strengths?
2. What are my short-term goals and long-term goals?
3. Who matters most to me?
4. What do I like to do for fun?
5. What new activities am I interested in or willing to try?
6. What are my values? What do I believe in? If I could have one wish, it would be _____ Where do I feel safest? What or who gives me comfort?
7. If I were not afraid, I would _____
8. What is my proudest accomplishment?
9. Am I a night owl or an early bird?
10. What do I like about my job?
11. What do I do to show myself self-compassion and self-care?
12. What am I passionate about?
13. What is my happiest memory?
14. What do my dreams tell me? What is my favorite book?
Movie? Band? Color? Animal?
15. What am I grateful for?
16. When I am feeling down, I like to _____

RUBRIC

Criteria	4	3	2	1	Score
Mixed Media Skill	Application of a variety of mediums is preplanned and done in a logical, sequential manner. Each material is used well.	Art mediums are applied in a careful, logical manner. Multiple materials are used.	A variety of mediums are not equally utilized. The student could have applied materials more carefully.	Student did not plan out the use of materials. Art mediums were not applied logically or carefully.	
Design/Composition	Student applies design principles (such as unity, contrast, balance, movement, direction, emphasis, and center of interest) with great skill.	Student applies design principles (such as unity, contrast, balance, movement, direction, emphasis, and center of interest) with fair skill.	Student tries to apply design principles (such as unity, contrast, balance, movement, direction, emphasis, and center of interest) but the overall result is not pleasing.	The student does not appear to be able to apply most design principles to his/her own work.	
Material Choices	Choice and application of the items selected show advanced knowledge of color relationships. Color choice of the items selected enhances the artwork.	Choice and application of items shows knowledge of color relationships. Items are appropriate for the artwork.	Choice and application of the items selected show knowledge of color relationships. Items selected are, however, NOT appropriate for the artwork.	Student needs to work on learning color relationships and using that knowledge of selecting items for their artwork.	
Use of materials	Student typically keeps materials and area clean and protected without reminders. The student shows great respect for the materials and his fellow students.	Student typically adequately cleans materials and work area at the end of the session without reminder, but the area may be messy during the work session. Student shows respect for materials and fellow students.	Student adequately cleans and takes care of materials if reminded. Occasional spills and messy work area may be seen. Shows some respect for materials and fellow students.	Student deliberately misuses materials AND/OR does not adequately clean materials or area when reminded. Shows little respect for materials or fellow students.	
Time/Effort	Every minute of class time was used wisely. Much time and effort went into the planning and design of the artwork.	Class time was used wisely. Student could have put in a little more effort.	Class time was not always used wisely. Student could have put in more effort.	Class time was not used wisely and the student put in no additional effort.	

TOTAL SCORE:

Note: This rubric is designed for Middle School students, the rigor of the criteria categories can be increased or decreased for the appropriate grade level.

This is a teacher resource packet intended for elementary school students.

For more educational resources,
please visit: <https://frost.fiu.edu/learn/schools-teachers/index.html>