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Mudam Luxembourg
Musée d'Art Moderne
Grand-Duc Jean

MARY REID KELLEY

17.06.2017 – 10.09.2017

PRESS KIT

Press release

MARY REID KELLEY

Exhibition from June 17 to Septembre 10, 2017

Curator Marie-Noëlle Farcy

"I didn't set out to make videos, but ultimately I found the form irresistible – the potential of a narrative form, an expansive form. I could finally see the figures I wanted to paint, but I didn't see them until I had heard them and started writing in their voices." (Mary Reid Kelley)

The US artist Mary Reid Kelley is presenting a video from 2011, *The Syphilis of Sisyphus*, as well as her film *This is Offal* (2016), which enters the Mudam's collection. Reid Kelley, a trained painter, who since 2008 has made eight films – from the script, props and costumes to filming and editing – in collaboration with Patrick Kelley, realised very early on that she could not express all she wanted to with painting alone. Her black-and-white films are artistic syntheses that combine moving pictures with highly allusive, humorous poetry within an aesthetic that seems almost expressionistic. The focus is always on serious and tragic figures in pointedly artificial narratives; so far, the artist has engaged with themes related to World War I, the 19th century and ancient Greek mythology. But Reid Kelley's films are far from being realistic descriptions. On the contrary, the artificial, grotesque style of the language and images creates an alienation effect in which elements of Greek tragedy, with its accompanying chorus, and of Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre combine to create an extremely intense artistic fusion capable of giving adequate expression to the topic in question. The point of view throughout is a feminist one, with the question of women's role in society a recurrent theme in all her works up to now.

In *The Syphilis of Sisyphus*, Reid Kelley uses the example of a prostitute in mid-19th-century Paris to spotlight the age-old conflict of women between reality and appearance. In its allusion to the famous text by Albert Camus, the name of the main character, Sisyphus, suggests the absurdity of her existence and implies that for this young woman, defiance and conformation is the only possible attitude. As a former revolutionary, she was once a believer in devotion to nature à la Rousseau. But in the face of necessity, she pragmatically decided against the irrationality of revolutionary upheaval, turning away from naturalness towards artificiality, as advocated in Charles Baudelaire's "In Praise of Cosmetics", the apologist of modern life, to whom there are countless allusions here. As a "fallen" beauty in the Paris of 1852, the year in which, for Karl Marx, history repeated itself as a farce with the proclamation as emperor of Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, Sisyphus saw herself quickly locked up, for having all too loose morals, in the madhouse of the Salpêtrière, where Jean-Martin Charcot was later to produce a famous example of a very male point of view with his research into hysteria. The theatrical character of the work is underlined by the Saltimbanques who mark out the absurdities of the temporal framework in a mixture of Greek chorus and French vaudeville. In addition, Reid Kelley uses anapaestic tetrameter for her text, a metrical pattern that was typically used in the Greek classical period for introductions to odes and in modern times for comic limericks. This artful interweaving of pictorial and textual references, this huge wealth of historical and cultural allusions, combined with the exploitation of the possibilities of video technology, fully exemplifies the special charm and depth of Reid Kelley's works.

In *This is Offal*, Reid Kelley also follows these principles. The artist touches here on a serious theme – a young woman's suicide – in a playful manner. She presents an intriguing quarrel between the organs and body parts of the dead woman, which all have different opinions about the reasons for her act and the consequences of it, and give one another the blame. While the heart naively hopes to live on through transplantation, the brain is confronted by vehement reproaches from the liver, which considers it to be behind the unhappy incident. The body itself is pleased to be able to aid science, while the forensic medical expert examining the corpse begins to have misgivings about his job in the face of such senselessness. In this film, Reid Kelly caricatures certain literary clichés, such as that in the famous poem *The Bridge of Sighs* of 1844 by Thomas Hood about the suicide of a “fallen” young woman who jumps from a London bridge out of despair and poverty. At the same time, she is making an ironic commentary on the saying by Edgar Allan Poe from 1846, for whom “the death [...] of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world.” For Reid Kelley, her protagonist is “the opposite of Poe's ideal”. As opposed also to Albert Camus's idea of revolt as a response to the absurdity of life, the dead young woman perhaps yielded to the temptation of suicide without being completely aware of the finality of her act. This finality is stressed by the artist with an allusion-rich wordplay at the end of the film, when it becomes clear that the river isn't just any river, but that of the Underworld: “This is the river that the boatman picks, you can't be pulled from it, because it Styx.”

Mary Reid Kelley was born in 1979 in Greenville, South Carolina (US).
She lives and works in Olivebridge, New York.

LIST OF THE EXHIBITED WORKS

Mary Reid Kelley with Patrick Kelley

I Feel Ya, Ophelia (The Autopsy), 2016
Light box
170 x 80 x 8 cm
Courtesy the artist and Arratia Beer, Berlin

I Regret, Juliet (The Recovered Body), 2016
Light box
170 x 80 x 8 cm
Courtesy the artist and Arratia Beer, Berlin

This is Offal, 2016
HD video, black and white, sound
12 min 51 sec
Collection Mudam Luxembourg
Donation Baloise Group

A Female Is a Living Monument, 2017
Light box
51 x 51 cm
Courtesy the artist and
Fredericks & Freiser Gallery, New York

The Syphilis of Sisyphus, 2011
HD video, black and white, sound
11 min 2 sec
Courtesy the artist and Arratia Beer, Berlin

Mary Reid Kelley

Morals Police, 2012
Collage, watercolour, acrylic on paper
50 x 78 cm
Collection Andrea Krantz and Harvey Sawikin

My Heart Was Cut Out, 2016
Watercolour, acrylic, charcoal, pencil on paper collage
82,5 x 66 cm
Courtesy the artist and Arratia Beer, Berlin

Sisyphus' Straitjacket, 2011
Cloth, ribbon, foam, metal hanger
59 x 49 x 8 cm
Courtesy the artist

Diderot's Globe, 2011
Cardboard, metal, acrylic
37 x 23 x 21 cm
Courtesy the artist and
Fredericks & Freiser Gallery, New York

Sisyphus' Gown, 2011
Cloth, ribbon, tassel, lace, foam, hoop skirt, acrylic paint, polymer clay, wood, metal frame
135 x 115 x 115 cm
Courtesy the artist



Mary Reid Kelley with Patrick Kelley, *The Syphilis of Sisyphus*, 2011
Courtesy the artist and Arratia Beer, Berlin
© Mary Reid Kelley



Mary Reid Kelley with Patrick Kelley, *This Is Offal*, 2016
Collection Mudam Luxembourg, donation 2016 - Baloise Group
© Mary Reid Kelley

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Mary Reid Kelley is the winner of the Baloise Art Prize.



PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Address and information

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Opening hours

Thursday-Monday and public holidays	10am-6pm
Wednesday	10am-11pm (exhibition spaces: 10pm)
24.12 and 31.12	10am-3pm
Tuesday and 25.12	Closed

Entrance fee

Adults	7€
Under 26 years old, groups	5€
Mudami card (valid 1 year for 2 persons)	50€
Under 21 years old	free
Students under 26 years old	free
Wednesday, 6-11pm	free

By car

Kirchberg -> Avenue John F. Kennedy -> Philharmonie -> Tunnel -> Mudam
GPS: X 49.62 - Y 6.14

Images

Available on request

Press contact

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