

Alexander Gray Associates

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John Kelly

The Mirror Stages: Self-Portraits, 1979–2009

May 20–June 27, 2009



John Kelly, *Egon, Waldemar, Artaud, Mona* 2005, ink on panel, each 20" x 16"

Alexander Gray Associates is pleased to present a project with renowned performance artist, John Kelly. Since emerging on the East Village club scene in the early 1980s, Kelly's enigmatic performance work has been presented at international venues and festivals. His performance work, blending elements of dance, story-telling, song and experimental theater, draw from fictional and historical figures and subject matter ranging from the fall of the Berlin Wall and the AIDS crisis to German Expressionist film. The cast of characters he has developed since the 1980s has morphed personal narrative with stylized and celebrated notables from Art History and culture, including the Mona Lisa, Caravaggio, Martha Graham, Egon Schiele, Jean Cocteau, and musical sources as varied as Gustav Mahler, Joni Mitchell, Robert Schumann, and Maria Callas.

A relatively unknown part of Kelly's practice is his work as a visual artist. Since the 1970s, he has consistently created self-portraits, in the form of drawings, paintings, photographs and, more recently, with video. The studio time devoted to making these artworks is often a core part of the development of subsequent performance works. In the gallery exhibition, over 40 self-portraits are hung, salon-style, creating a portrait hall of Kelly's many personae and faces, expressions and phases. Together, they show Kelly's sensitivity as a draftsman and painter, while providing psychological and stylistic threads through thirty years of dance, theater and music.

Kelly has performed at hundreds of venues, including nightclubs, concert halls and museums. Kelly's club performances, which expanded ideas of Drag and performance art, began in New York in the early 1980s at the Mudd Club, the Pyramid Club, Club 57 and Danceteria. He enjoyed further notoriety with his rendition of Joni Mitchell as the closing act of the legendary *Wigstock* festival (1986–2005). Theatrical venues include the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Brooklyn, NY; the American Academy in Rome, Italy; Carnegie Hall, Alice Tully Hall at Lincoln Center, The Kitchen, Dance Theater Workshop, Central Park Summerstage, PS 122, Creative Time, St. Mark's Church, The Joyce Theatre, New York, NY; Yale Repertory Theatre, New Haven, CT; Alley Theatre, Houston, TX; and the Spoleto Festival, Spoleto, Italy. Performances at museums include the Walker Arts Center, Minneapolis, MN; the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA; the Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, PA; Baltimore Art Museum, Baltimore, MD; and the Tate Modern, London, United Kingdom.

John Kelly has been honored with numerous awards, including fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York Foundation for the Arts, the Guggenheim Foundation, Art Matters, and CalArts/Alpert Foundation. He is the recipient of an American Choreographer Award, a New York Dance and Performance Award (Bessie), and multiple Village Voice OBIE Awards for Performance. Residencies include the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University; Yaddo; MacDowell; and the American Academy in Rome.

Concurrent with his exhibition at Alexander Gray Associates, Kelly will be performing in New York in the month of June. On June 12, 2009, he will appear in collaboration with David Del Tredici at Symphony Space. His popular tribute to Joni Mitchell, *Paved Paradise Redux*, will be performed at the Abrons Arts Center, June 18–21 and June 24–27, 2009, and will include a recreation of Mitchell's PBS interview with Tavis Smiley, performed by Flotilla DeBarge. In 2010, he will be an artist-in-residence at the Park Avenue Armory and the Civatella Ranieri Center in Italy.

Alexander Gray Associates is a contemporary art gallery and advising firm based in New York. Our exhibition program focuses on mid-career visual artists who emerged in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Through consulting and collection advising, we provide expertise for our individual and corporate clients. Our ultimate goal is to provide a direct experience with Modern and contemporary art that encourages discourse around art's role in the advancement of culture. Gallery hours: Tuesday–Saturday, 11:00 AM – 6:00 PM.