

# GAVLAK

Michael John Kelly

*Darklands*

November 11 – December 22, 2016

Gavlak Los Angeles is pleased to present the latest body of work by Los Angeles-based artist Michael John Kelly. This is the artist's first solo show with the gallery.

The exhibition's title comes from an album of the same name by the Scottish alternative rock band, The Jesus and Mary Chain. Kelly listened to *Darklands* almost exclusively while producing this series, and the album's recording is analogous with his practice. When the band's drummer left in 1986, his replacement was an electronic drum machine. With the release of *Darklands* in 1987, the band transformed from the analog instrumental, three-piece rock band into a two-piece with computer-synthesized parts. Kelly's own practice is attributed to a similar method.

Combining painting and digital imaging with photography and collage, Michael John Kelly intentionally crosses mediums, blurring the distinction between digital and analogue. The artist first creates his composition and its components on his iPad and then seamlessly weaves his printed sketches and found images into the layered paint.

While the encompassing gallery walls house his many diptychs, his sculpture, *Michael Jor-el Kelly* stands alone in the main space. Shaped pieces of painted electrical conduit, pulled from the walls of his own studio, form the semblance of a mask, revealing the painting, *Son on the Steeple*, behind. The mask, an archetype of comic-fiction, has become a motif throughout Michael John Kelly's works. From Picasso's *African Period* to Nick Cave's *Soundsuits*, artists throughout the history of Modernism have long appropriated the mask. In this instance, Kelly recreates an experience from one of his earliest childhood memories, a scene from *Superman* (1978) that his father took him to see in theatres as a toddler. Superman's father speaks to him as a vision of a floating mask, which then rotates so that, from the camera's point of view, the audience can see through its eyes. A pivotal scene in the film, this memory became a moment of metamorphosis for the artist who, at a young age, lost both of his parents and would assume the improvised mantle of family patriarch to a young orphaned family.

Selfhood plays a key role in Kelly's work, as he not only shares the same name with the late, celebrated Los Angeles artist, Mike Kelley, but similarly, references *Superman* and childhood nostalgia. As homage to the deceased art hero and an attempt to take ownership of his name, Michael John Kelly placed three luminous votive sculptures in front of his triptych *Broken Lovers*, boldly alluding to Mike Kelley's *Bottled Cities*. Separated from the main gallery, both painting and sculptures work in unison as an altarpiece. The artist references the intimacy of worship, be it of a religious icon, celebrity and pop-culture, or the adoration of one's self through today's social media. In a separate gallery, a single-channel video portrays an animation of Jim Shaw, Los Angeles artist and longtime friend of Mike Kelley, singing to Michael John Kelly's studio as if by video conference.

Born in Provo, Utah in 1975, Michael John Kelly grew up in Huntington Beach, California. He later returned to Utah where he received his BFA in Painting and Drawing from Brigham Young University. He received his MFA in painting and drawing from UCLA in 2013, and recently completed a residency at 68 Projects in Berlin, Germany where he exhibited the solo show *Language*. His work has been included in exhibitions across the United States and is in worldwide private collections.

A reception will be held for the artist on Friday, November 11 from 6-8pm.

For more information about the exhibition or for press inquiries, please contact Lauren Wood at 323-467-5700 or [lauren@gavlagallery.com](mailto:lauren@gavlagallery.com).