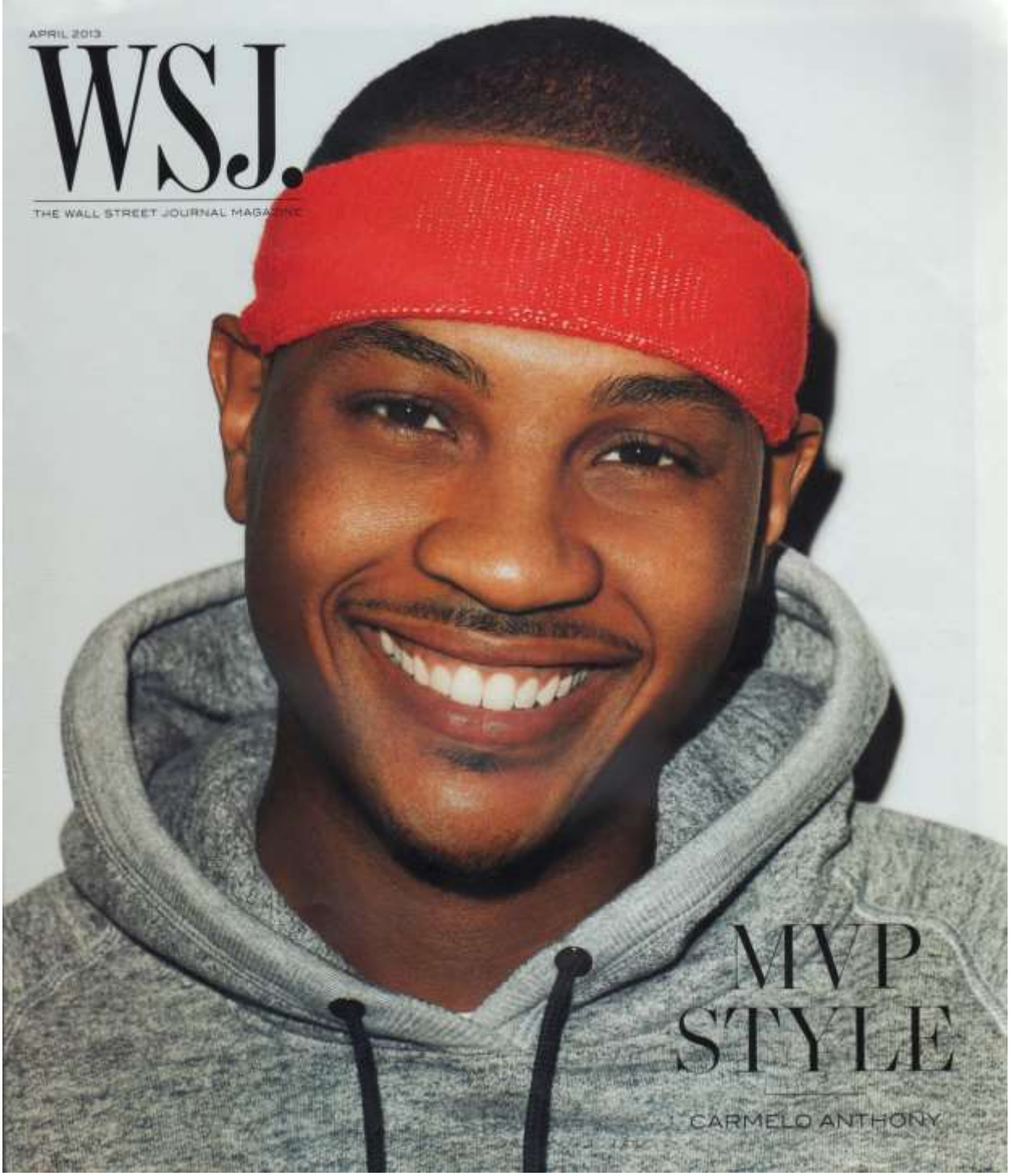
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THE ESCAPE ARTIST

Last year, the influential artist Mike Kelley committed suicide. The news shocked the art world. After all, his works were selling for millions, and a major retrospective is still set to travel to the U.S. this year. Here, an account of his extraordinary life—and his troubled last days.

BY KELLY CROW
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CATHERINE OPIE

PORTRAITS OF THE ARTIST
Kelley's second home, located in South Pasadena. Opposite page: Mike Kelley photographed by Grant Mudford in 1988, left, and on December 7, 2011, at his office in Highland Park, by Tyler Hubby.

LAST DECEMBER, on a cold night in Amsterdam, a crowd packed into the newly expanded Stedelijk Museum for the opening of a major retrospective of Los Angeles artist Mike Kelley. The 19th-century institution had just undergone a nine-year, $172 million overhaul—much of it poured into the construction of a creamy new wing dubbed The Bathtub. Inaugurating the space with a show of Kelley's work was designed to send a signal to the contemporary art world that the museum was back, and smartly so.

Organizers devoted nearly six years to chronicling the career of this provocative performer, painter, musician, sculptor and installation artist, and the 200 artworks on display represented some of Kelley's best. These included his 1987 masterpiece *More Love Hours Than Can Ever Be Repaid*, a cheery yet unnerving tapestry he created by sewing together dozens of crocheted dolls and handmade stuffed animals he found at flea markets—objects of homespun affection that had been tossed out.

Nearly everyone who played a role in Kelley's three-decade career came to the opening party that night, from multimedia artist Tony Oursler—Kelley's longtime friend—to major German collector Harald Falckenberg and New York collectors Eileen and Michael Cohen. Even Dutch Prince Constantijn stopped by.

"HE DIDN'T LOOK LIKE A CALIFORNIA DUDE, BUT INTELLECTUALLY HE WILLED HIMSELF INTO BECOMING THE PARADIGM FOR WHAT A YOUNG L.A. ARTIST COULD BE—AND HE HAD NO INTEREST IN EVER LEAVING."
—PAUL SCHIMMEL

One person was missing, though: the artist, who had committed suicide in his South Pasadena home nearly a year earlier at the age of 57.

In a field that reveres greatness and immortalizes its own, Kelley's death stunned the contemporary art world—and haunts it still. Almost immediately after the news of his death broke, cryptic signs started popping up on Manhattan lampposts that read "I Saw Mike Kelley Today." In Highland Park, California, where Kelley kept his studio, an empty carport half a block away transformed into an overnight shrine. The artist's staff and friends fielded weeping calls from Korea and grief-stricken emails from London, Cologne and Tokyo, where galleries and auction houses have sold his works for up to $3 million apiece. Within months, at least eight U.S. museums paid tribute with their own pop-up shows of his art.

Kelley matters to art history in part because he discovered a potent way to pick up where Pop art left off. When he was growing up in a Detroit suburb, the art establishment reveled in Andy Warhol's slick appropriation of soup cans and Hollywood starlets. But by the time Kelley reached adolescence in the 1970s, Detroit's car factories were shuttering, and whatever pop culture he encountered didn't gleam—it sneered: Iggy Pop and the Stooges; *Sex to Sexty*, a cheeky comic; school hazing rituals; and soiled stuffed animals. Could fine art really be made from middle-class vernacular? Did the basements of America have anything profound to say? Kelley was among the first to seek an answer.

Oursler said, "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.' "

At a time when rising-star artists earned their stripes in New York, Kelley also stood apart for championing Los Angeles, a once-sleepy art scene that now simmers with younger talents like painter Mark Grotjahn and sculptor Sterling Ruby—both in their early-to-mid forties—who say they moved there in part to study with Kelley or work nearby. In fact, his thrift-store aesthetic has arguably influenced the way younger artists everywhere think about making art. "Mike brought the lowest, base forms of pop culture into the arts," says Ruby. "That's big with my generation, but he was the pioneer."

The retrospective that began in Amsterdam will travel to Paris's Centre Pompidou in May and then on to New York's MoMA PS1 in October before finishing early next year at Los Angeles's Museum of Contemporary Art. And on May 11, Detroit's Museum of Contemporary Art unveils *Mobile Homestead*, a full-scale replica of Kelley's childhood home that the artist commissioned. Together, the retrospective and the public-art house in Detroit will offer audiences their best chance in decades to experience the whole layered sweep of his oeuvre.

Yet Mike Kelley remains something of an enigma, even to his closest friends and family. Short and foul-mouthed, with blue eyes and a boisterous cackle, Kelley settled near the Pacific Ocean but preferred the desert. He hated to drive or fly—his agoraphobia and anxiety growing worse over the course of his life. His artworks earned him a fortune, yet he shopped mainly at second-hand stores and wore a pair of his father's red loafers for years. He painted just about every bedroom he ever had a particular shade of cucumber green.

Until now, few details have emerged about the manner and possible reasons for his death. Even friends who knew him say they are still sifting for clues. He was depressed and drinking heavily, they say, but was the source of his pain a recent heartbreak or something that stretched further back? He was working furiously on several ambitious projects right up to the end, and some say he felt enormous pressure to keep pace with his ideas and the art world's expectations of him. To a few, he confided he was even struggling to keep faith in art itself, an existential crisis all its own for a man who had always prized the pursuit of art above all else.

Kelley's studio manager, Mary Clare Stevens, wishes everyone would stop parsing his death altogether and focus on the art he created—and the charitable foundation he formed to help artists on the rise.

Grief rarely churns out neatly or quickly, though. In most art circles, Kelley's absence still causes consternation. At one point during the party in Amsterdam, Dutch art historian Petronella Zeeman summed up the sentiment in a whisper: "It's terrible, but why isn't he here? Why, when his career was going strong and he had this big show coming up, did he kill himself?"

MIKE KELLEY'S STUDIO compound in the historic Highland Park neighborhood of Los Angeles sits on a busy street behind a high wall. The juxtaposition is fitting because the division between people's public and private spheres—and particularly what they do at home where no one is watching—is a major theme in Kelley's art. When he initially bought the property on Figueroa Street a couple decades ago, it doubled as his home. He painted its eaves and kitchen cabinets green and filled the backyard pool with soil so he could plant a cactus garden atop it instead.

The cozy rooms of this stucco house still brim with hints of him. There is a cactus-shaped floor lamp in the living room made from horseshoes (he loved national park-lodge decor). A nearby wall displays his vast CD collection (he loved Sun Ra). There's also a white, unassuming building out back, behind the "pool," where he worked and often slept—even after he bought another home seven years ago in nearby South Pasadena.

Home is a motif that threads all the way to the beginning of his art. Michael Duffy Kelley was born in Wayne, Michigan, on October 27, 1954. His father, Henry, was a devout Catholic who managed janitors for a public school system. His mother, Rita, worked as a convenience-store clerk and later as a cook for the Ford Company's executive canteen. The Kelleys slipcovered their living-room sofa in clear plastic and hoped their four children would grow up to be teachers or, even better, priests. Their youngest, Michael, arrived nearly a decade after his siblings. He spent much of his childhood alone, reading in his room.

At one point, he stopped going to mass and started playing with a neighborhood boy whose parents were glass blowers—what amounted to his first encounter with art. Pretty soon, the family's glass studio became his creative "refuge," says George Kelley, his older brother. Kelley started telling everyone he intended to be an artist.

The news didn't go over well with his parents, but by adolescence, he had developed a stubborn streak, his brother says: In high school, Kelley taught himself to sew and once wore a thrift-store dress to class mainly to annoy his parents. He and his friends also spent long hours inventing their own comic-book series featuring an impish hero, Turd Man.

By the time artist Jim Shaw met Kelley outside a figure-drawing class at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Shaw recognized him immediately as a "fellow weirdo." In class, they studied Abstract Expressionism with teachers who sported crew cuts. But after hours, they hung out with anything-goes guys like Cary Loren, a hippie-haired musician who built fanciful papier-mâché theater sets in his loft. In 1973, Kelley, Shaw, Loren and Loren's girlfriend, Lynn Rovner, who

called herself Niagara, formed a band named after one of their favorite B-movies *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 vacuum cleaner. Ten minutes and one Bad Sabbath song later, Loren said they were asked to leave.

THREE YEARS LATER, Kelley and Shaw took their quirky sensibilities to the California Institute of the Arts, a Los Angeles art school whose faculty was enviably stacked with successful conceptual artists like John Baldessari and Douglas Huebler and maverick performers like Laurie Anderson. Shaw says that once Kelley set his mind to studying at CalArts, he quickly developed a fierce affection for Los Angeles, a laid-back city that didn't spook him like the art-world capital, New York. Curator Paul Schimmel, the former chief curator at Los Angeles County Museum of Contemporary Art, recalls meeting Kelley at a rooftop barbecue. "He didn't look like a California dude, but intellectually he willed himself into becoming the paradigm for what a young L.A. artist could be—and he had no interest in ever leaving," says Schimmel.

Kelley also impressed Richard Armstrong, now the director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, who then ran the La Jolla (now San Diego) Museum of Contemporary Art, which was then the region's top contemporary art museum. Armstrong says he purchased an artwork from Kelley's senior show: *Catholic Birdhouse*, a strangely shaped white birdhouse in which the artist had carved two holes, one large and one small, with corresponding signs that read "the easy way" and "the hard way." Armstrong liked Kelley's sense of humor so much he invited the artist to do a performance at his museum a few months later. Oursler, a classmate of Kelley, drove him there and watched, grinning, as the 20-person audience tried to make sense of Kelley's style. At the time, performance art was all about action: Vito Acconci rolling, naked, beneath a ramp in a gallery; Chris Burden asking a friend to shoot his arm with a rifle. Kelley stood beside a houseplant and delivered a frenetic 45-minute monologue about a man who was convinced that the plant was controlling his thoughts. At the end, Kelley's character exacts revenge by ripping one of the plant's leaves. Several members audibly gasped. "You couldn't see him perform without feeling invigorated and confused," says Oursler. "You realized you were caught up in a tide-pool of Freudian and Jungian misnomers with a punk overtone to it all—he was chaos and utter brilliance."

By 1982, Kelley had signed with two of the country's top young galleries, Metro Pictures in New York and Rosamund Felsen in Los Angeles. Right away, Felsen said Pasadena real-estate developer Robert Rowan and *Love Boat* producer Douglas Cramer paid $600 or more for Kelley's black-and-white paintings of monkeys and symmetrical shapes. Three years after that, he exhibited his work in the Whitney Biennial, an artistic endorsement he would accept seven more times over the course of his career.

In 1987, he began teaching at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, a sign among his peers that he had "arrived." That same year he started toying with the material that would earn him an international reputation: stuffed animals. In all his years rooting through

CREATIVE TIME
Clockwise from left: Kelley in Los Angeles in 1989; Superman-inspired *Kandor 15*, 2007; *Catholic Birdhouse*, part of Kelley's senior thesis, 1978.

FLOATING WORLD
Left: *Deodorized Central Mass With Satellites*, 1991–1999, installed at Perry Rubenstein Gallery in L.A. last year.

TRAVELING SHOW
Right: *Mobile Homestead* in front of the abandoned Detroit Central Train Station, 2000.

flea-market bins, he had grown to feel a particular curiosity about the hand-knit dolls and secondhand sock monkeys he always found on offer. The question Kelley asked hinged on the economics of exchange: How many hours of love did the grannies who sewed such creatures hope to engender—and had they been paid in full? Few artists at the time were interested in looking closely at the causes and uneasy consequences of familial entanglements. The fact that he was a man interested in handicraft struck others as odder still. A few saw these stuffed animals as evidence of something nefarious and wondered if he had suffered some form of child abuse, an allegation he consistently denied to friends throughout his life even though it continues to crop up in public discussions of his art.

Felsen, his dealer, wasn't sure how collectors would react when he splayed blankets across her gallery floor and arrayed tattered animals around them in formal groupings, like they were attending a picnic without people. The biggest piece in the 1987 show, *More Love Hours Than Can Ever Be Repaid*, was composed of animals and afghans and stretched 10 feet wide. He hung this on the wall next to *The Wages of Sin*, a pedestal table dripping with candles in rainbow hues, as though audiences were standing before a holy shrine at mass, a nod to his Catholic upbringing. The show didn't sell especially well, but after *More Love* and *The Wages of Sin* debuted in that year's Whitney Biennial it never left. The museum bought both pieces for $9,000—his highest price at the time.

In 1991, the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington devoted a show to these same plush pieces, and for the first time Kelley invited his brother George and sister-in-law Debbie to take a look. The invitation was significant—according to his girlfriend at the time, the choreographer Anita Pace, Kelley told his relatives little about his burgeoning art career because he didn't believe they would appreciate his artwork. George says his brother was probably right—it only mattered to their parents that Kelley had secured a teaching job. For his part, George says he guffawed when he walked into the museum. Stuffed animals? Minutes later, a local reporter approached George and asked if his little brother had ever been sexually abused. George nearly threw a punch. Their parents were strict and so were the nuns at school, but he knew of no such trauma. George told his brother what had happened. He also apologized for chuckling at first glance. Kelley slapped him on the back: "Good, it's supposed to be funny."

From then on, the art world demanded autobiography from Kelley. Rather than quell the scrutiny, he stepped fully into the role of provocateur—toying with critics and waffling continually between memory and myth in his life. In an essay first published in *Architecture New York* in 1996, Kelley wrote, "I had to abandon working with stuffed animals for this reason. There was simply nothing I could do to counter the pervasive psycho-autobiographic interpretation of these materials. I decided, instead, to embrace the social role projected on me, to become what people wanted me to become: a victim." When the Whitney gave him his first mid-career survey in 1993, he 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. It was also around this time that his dealer, Felsen, realized the stress of his stepped-up workload might be exacerbating his agoraphobia. When the pair flew to New York for the "Catholic Tastes" opening, she said Kelley made their driver stop four times between the airport and the hotel, ostensibly so he could use the restroom. She suspected it had more to do with anxiety.

Ironically, friends say these were some of his happiest years. In 2000, he and Pace broke up, but the pair remained close friends. Soon Kelley began dating a cherry-haired Italian curator, Emi Fontana. He threw legendary parties at his Figueroa Street home and studio each Thanksgiving and Fourth of July. He was as outspoken as ever, and often ended these meals by regaling friends and neighbors with tall tales about his supposedly hardscrabble childhood, according to artists Diana Thater and T. Kelly Mason, who lived next door. Thater's favorite Kelley story: He told her that to get to school, he had to step across an open sewer. "I was so gullible, I always believed him," she says, laughing. (Eventually, she learned that Kelley had actually grown up in a sanitary middle-class neighborhood.)

Around 2004, he switched from Metro Pictures to the bigger Gagosian Gallery, in large part because he wanted room to display outsize artworks. Gagosian also pledged to pay his production costs for the first five years after joining up. Kelley plunged in by orchestrating one of his most immersive environments ever, *Day Is Done*. For years, Kelley had scoured yearbooks for images of those curious rituals and rites of passage that invariably crop up in American high schools, like 4-H Club and prom. Then over the course of a summer he hired dozens of extras and restaged at least 30 of the captured moments, scripting scenes as though the act of participation in the rituals had wrecked psychological havoc on its members.

Day Is Done was a commercial hit for Gagosian, with sections of his installation selling to buyers like Los Angeles billionaire Eli Broad for between $225,000 and $500,000 apiece. Friends say Kelley was pleasantly surprised by all the attention. That same year, he stopped teaching, telling Art Center he had grown too busy.

ON JANUARY 30, 2011—roughly a year before Kelley died—Gagosian Gallery in Beverly Hills threw a dinner for the artist following the opening of his latest show, "Exploded Fortress of Solitude." The show amounted to a new blend of two major bodies of work he had been developing for years. There were toga-party videos reminiscent of the repressed-memory series *Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction* of which *Day Is Done* is a part. And there were also neon-hued cityscape sculptures and tar-like grotto installations referencing one of his other ongoing series, *Kandor*, named after Superman's home city. In comic-book lore, the superhero's home planet is destroyed but not before he's able to shrink his city and ferry it to his earthly fortress.

Several people at the dinner after the opening say they were approached by Kelley's girlfriend at the time, Trulee Grace Hall, a design student he'd met several years after he stopped teaching. "Mike doesn't see enough of his friends," she said, to attendees such as Pace, Kelley's ex-girlfriend, and artist Marnie Weber, who is married to Kelley's longtime friend Jim Shaw.

CREATURE COMFORTS
Mary Lou Heath Thus Can Love Be Imparted and *The Wages of Sin, Kelley*, c.1992 were hastily stuffed animals, afghans and a pole-tent with candles.

STUDIO VISIT
A view of the back porch of Kelley's studio compound, now the offices of his foundation. The filled-in pool, on the left, is just visible.

MODEL LIVING
Clockwise from left: Kelley loved cacti, like this one; a cactus lamp and some of the artist's CDs at the studio compound; a model of the retrospective traveling to the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

SPEAKING VOLUMES
From left: An exhibition catalogue; a bookshelf in the office of Mary Clare Stevens, the executive director of the artist's foundation, at the studio compound.

Hard things had happened in the past few years: Kelley's older brother Gary, a retired policeman, had committed suicide; Kelley only told a few people, including his longtime friend Cary Loren. His older sister Nancy and mother died shortly thereafter. His remaining brother, George, and others around him noticed that Kelley was drinking gin and vodka pretty heavily, something he hadn't done to excess since his youth. He also suffered from heart disease and a mild case of gout, and increasingly he depended on Hall to drive him around town.

On September 7, 2011, the *Guardian* came out with a scathing review of Kelley's show at Gagosian's London outpost, a continuation of the hybrid pieces he had begun in Beverly Hills. With the headline "Planet Bunkem," the review ended with a searing dismissal of both the man and his latest Superman-themed pieces: "Kelley has been thinking about this stuff for more than 20 years. What does it all add up to? You almost expect to see a dead horse up there on screen, getting a good flogging. Kelley overdoes it, time and again. Ah, you might say, but that's the point. It's what he does, to the sound of all that cinematic thrashing."

Rafael Jablonka, Kelley's dealer based in Cologne, saw the artist the following night at the London opening and realized he was in "destructive shape," drinking heavily and acting tensely toward his girlfriend. Jablonka says he and the artist had made tentative plans to meet again in the Austrian Alps a few days later to check out a company that specializes in crystals—something Kelley was curious to mull over for future work—but the artist backed out. Another group of friends, including Shaw and Oursler, had invited Kelley and Hall to join them for a reunion weekend in Paris. Oursler says he even tried to assuage Kelley's agoraphobia by reminding him he wouldn't have to fly; he could ride the train from London.

But when Oursler arrived in Paris, he got word that Kelley had changed his mind and had flown straight back to L.A. Oursler was disappointed and confused. "That was our first collective sign that something was really wrong," he says. Just after their return, Hall broke up with Kelley and moved out. For days after, Kelley called Shaw and his wife seeking solace over hours-long conversations. Few blamed her for leaving—Loren said the "caretaking role was a lot for her to shoulder." After the breakup, his friends decided to circle round more often.

On November 29, a Los Angeles art space called PRISM opened a survey about Kelley's college-era band, Destroy All Monsters, which had regrouped several times in the years since. Loren, one of the original band members, who now runs a bookstore in Detroit, got nervous after the artist gave him a big hug at the opening and said "he loved me, really happy, like he was saying goodbye." Loren looked down and noticed Kelley had scrawled a note on the backside of one of his hands that read, "Keep your mouth shut."

With the holidays approaching, Kelley's friends and staff instituted an informal "Mike watch" to check on him daily. Sometimes these visits led to lengthy conversations when he admitted his drinking was making his depression worse; other times, he was defensive. Loren tried to convince him to spend Christmas in Detroit, and Oursler invited him to do the same in New York. He spent it in Los Angeles, at the home of longtime collector and occasional collaborator Khourosh Larizadeh.

Sometime after New Year's, Kelley agreed to try rehab at a San Diego facility that specialized in treating alcoholics. But being stripped of his prescription sleeping pills—and the withdrawals—left him wide awake and second-guessing his decision. Eight days in, the artist checked himself out and came home.

It is a testament to Kelley's devotion to the Los Angeles art scene that in his final days he continued to pop into the occasional art opening. On January 14, he turned up at a show and bumped into Sterling Ruby, his former teaching assistant. Ruby says he was shaken when he casually asked Kelley how he was. "I'm horrible, I'm depressed," Kelley told him. Ruby suggested he take a vacation—with the Stedelijk retrospective already in the works, Kelley was often spending weekends at his studio trying to catch up. The pair made plans to meet at Columbo's, Kelley's favorite Italian piano bar, for dinner a couple weeks later.

From there, things continued to spiral: On January 24, Kelley went to lunch with John Welchman, an art historian who married Kelley's ex-girlfriend Anita Pace and now serves as president of the artist's foundation. Kelley told him he was overwhelmed by the prospect of helping curators finish the retrospective. He spoke about possibly starting fresh in New York or Berlin, where he wouldn't have to drive. Welchman was surprised by the confessional bent of their conversation, particularly when Kelley mentioned how he had been mulling the consequences of his long-ago decision never to marry or have children of his own. "I've given my whole life to being an artist, every ounce, so that there's nothing left," he told Welchman. "Now I need something else, but I'm emptied out."

> "YOU COULDN'T SEE HIM PERFORM WITHOUT FEELING INVIGORATED AND CONFUSED. YOU REALIZED YOU WERE CAUGHT UP IN A TIDE-POOL OF FREUDIAN AND JUNGIAN MISNOMERS WITH A PUNK OVERTONE TO IT ALL—HE WAS CHAOS AND UTTER BRILLIANCE."
>
> —TONY OUSLER

On Saturday, January 29, Pace was performing a piece of choreography along a staircase at the Welcome Inn in nearby Eagle Rock, California, as part of a citywide exhibition called "Pacific Standard Time." During the 5:30 p.m. performance, she noticed Kelley standing nearby, staring intently at her "like a proud father." By the time the performance ended and she had changed her clothes, she looked around for him, but he had already left. The following day, Diana Thater and T. Kelly Mason noticed him padding around and they said a brief hello.

Sometime after that, either late Sunday night or the following Monday, he went back to his green house on the hill and stepped into the second-floor bathroom. With him, he carried a heartbreaking arsenal that included a Smith & Wesson .38-caliber revolver, Xanax, vodka, soda pop, peppermint-flavored liquid soap—and a barbecue grill. He covered a pair of ceiling vents with duct tape to make the bathroom airtight and then lit the grill's charcoal briquettes. As the grill's toxic carbon-monoxide fumes began to build, he tossed some pillows into the tub and climbed atop them to breathe and wait, a photograph of ex-girlfriend Hall taped low on the wall beside him.

On Tuesday morning, Kelley's college friend Shaw called the house and got no answer. Later that afternoon, Kelley's therapist called the studio to let them know he had missed an appointment. The studio called Weber, and together with Welchman and another mutual friend, Fred Nilsson, they agreed to go over to Kelley's house. It was about 5:30 p.m., already dusk, and no lights were on. Welchman hoped briefly that Kelley was out because he had met a woman. Nilsson scrambled up the drainpipe of the two-story home and peered into several windows. When he made it to the bathroom, he saw Kelley's legs in the tub. Weber, distraught, called 911. The coroner later ruled the death a suicide by carbon-monoxide poisoning; the revolver was never used.

A LITTLE MORE THAN A YEAR later, the studio where Kelley felt most at home is still trying to recalibrate. Since he left no note, Stevens and her staff of eight have had to improvise.

First there was the upending of the Stedelijk show, which had to be reworked so it would feel more like an ultimate survey of Kelley's greatest hits. The art loans, the catalogue, the layout of the pieces in the galleries—everything suddenly had to be reconfigured. On the night the exhibit opened, the studio staff intended to amble over to a nearby bar so they could toast their leader on their own. But by the time the reception ended, they were too exhausted and went to bed.

Now, they've turned their attention to finishing an even more ambitious project in Detroit, *Mobile Homestead*. Years ago, Kelley tried and failed to buy his childhood home on Palmer Road in Westlake. More recently, he asked the city's new Museum of Contemporary Art if he could build a replica of it on their grounds, and the museum agreed. This house, once completed in May, will be used to showcase local artists, the museum said. A pair of stacked basements underneath will also be used for occasional artistic events.

In a design twist, the front section of Kelley's replica can also be detached and driven around like a mobile home. Kelley insisted that this doppelganger—with its matching white siding and green door—be constructed first, so that he could film it winding its way from downtown Detroit to the house in the suburbs. On the day of its maiden voyage, the mobile home made it less than a mile along its route before turning a corner too tightly and falling over. The facade has since been repaired, but friends say Kelley always worried over it like an omen. ■

LEGACY: THE MIKE KELLEY FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS

THE CHARITABLE ENTITY that Kelley started in 2008 to support artists has taken on added significance—and a high-profile board of trustees—since his death. Chairman Paul Schimmel, former chief curator of Los Angeles's Museum of Contemporary Art, says the artist used to give away his own money, but now the board plans to leverage occasional sales of his art to deliver direct grants to artists, curators, critics, musicians and cultural groups that Kelley might have admired, particularly outside the artistic mainstream.

Kelley was only 54 when he created his foundation, making him one of the youngest artists ever to do so, behind others formed by Keith Haring and Robert Mapplethorpe, says Christine Vincent, an Aspen Institute expert on artist-endowed foundations. It also appears to be well stocked: Schimmel says its holdings include at least 500 of Kelley's artworks.

Above: Members of the artist's estate trust and his foundation include, from left: John C. Welchman, Marnie Weber, Paul Schimmel, Jim Shaw, Mary Clare Stevens, Joan Weinstein and Gary Cypres.