

SKARSTEDT LONDON – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Childish Things

Vija Celmins

Robert Gober

Mike Kelley

9 October – 21 November 2015

*When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.*

1 Corinthians 13.11



Skarstedt is pleased to announce its forthcoming exhibition *Childish Things*, to coincide with *Frieze Masters* at the London gallery in October. Featuring iconic works by Vija Celmins, Robert Gober and Mike Kelley, the exhibition engages with the deeply personal and often repressed memories of childhood. Looking back on this formative period from adulthood, the artists incorporate keepsakes and domestic objects charged with emotional and physical connotations, to emphasize the influence of childhood on their personal and artistic development.

At first glance, *Soup* by Vija Celmins is an image of a humble meal and yet the painting reveals itself to be much deeper in meaning. For Celmins, who grew up in Latvia during the war, soup is not only symbolic of a European tradition and a family ritual of mealtimes together, it connotes nourishment, the protective warmth of home, and stability in the chaos of war. In this painting Celmins captures the fears and anxieties, as well as the comforts of a child whose world is contained within the domestic sphere. Speaking with Robert Gober, Celmins affirms the lasting impression of her childhood memories on her artistic creativity:

*Your work may have been coloured by your religious experience, or whatever, and I think mine was coloured mostly by the chaos of my early childhood in the war...It was like, this is it, you're born, you're here, you have to deal with it. I was so afraid of being abandoned and lost in it. But later, in the studio, I think I relived all these things ...<sup>1</sup>*

In Mike Kelley's *Abb...Youth* the juxtaposed images of smiling teddy bears and a self-portrait taken from his high school yearbook is at once humorous and strange. Distancing his own childhood experiences from those explored in his work, Kelley invents fictions based on a pastiche of childhood objects, stories, fears and fantasies: *my biography is fairly dull. It's much better to fill in these empty spaces with fiction than the boring truth. I filled in the blanks with pastiches of things that had affected me when I was a child: cartoons, films...<sup>2</sup>*

The cinematic suite of images gives credence to Kelley's admission to creating fictions around his own childhood and also invites the viewer to project their own experience of youth onto the work. Although seemingly playful and innocent, the alienation of the images in single frames heightens the discord between the happiness of childhood play and the disaffections of the adult artist, conscious of the traumatic memories such images may harbor.

Playing with the tension between the everyday objects used in their work and the power of these objects to unseat our emotions, Mike Kelley and Robert Gober employ humour, irony and seriousness to enable us to enter their work and engage with more challenging and fraught material. Gober's *Tilted Playpen*, is a prime example of the artist's 'psychological furniture'. Positioning the familiar and strange in opposition, the

associations of this universally domestic object with protection and child well-being are called into question by the object's slanted pose. The playpen can no longer be seen as a safe haven, the element of 'play' is absent and instead the object becomes a 'pen' – a site of entrapment.

Uniting all of the works in the exhibition is the recourse to familiar objects which not only resonate with the artists, but which also speak to the viewer. Robert Gober said: "*Memory is like looking up at the stars, it's not a linear thing*".<sup>3</sup> The artists' recourse to childhood memories does not follow a clear narrative, instead it raises questions, affects our emotions and challenges the idea that to become an adult one must put aside the childish things of youth.

Image credit: Mike Kelley, *Abb...Youth* (detail), 1991. Art © Mike Kelley Foundation for the Arts. All Rights Reserved /Licensed by DACS, London.

Footnotes to text:

<sup>1</sup> *Vija Celmins*, Phaidon, New York and London, 2004, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Mike Kelley quoted in G. O' Brien, 'Mike Kelley', *Interview Magazine*, <http://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/mike-kelley>.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Gober quoted in conversation with J. Earnest, *The Brooklyn Rail*, <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2014/12/art/robert-gober-with-jarrett-earnest>

## About Skarstedt:



20 East 79th Street  
New York NY 10075



550 West 21st Street  
New York NY 10011



23 Old Bond Street  
London W1S 4PZ

Skarstedt was founded in 1994 by Per Skarstedt to mount historical exhibitions by contemporary European and American artists that had become the core of his specialty in Sweden and New York in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Skarstedt's New York gallery is located on 79 Street and Madison Avenue in an historic building, formerly the renowned Rosenberg Gallery. In October 2012, Skarstedt opened its London space on Old Bond Street with the inaugural exhibition *Andy Warhol: The American Indian*. Skarstedt opened its 3<sup>rd</sup> space in May 2014 in Chelsea, New York with the exhibition *Yves Klein and Andy Warhol: Fire Paintings and Oxidation Paintings*.

Skarstedt's programme reflects the gallery's established area of expertise whilst also expanding its focus to include museum-quality, historically researched exhibitions from modern and contemporary masters. Skarstedt's unique relationship with artists allows it to present exhibitions both on the primary and secondary markets, creating a dialogue between the generations. Skarstedt is committed to sharing both its aesthetic perspective and philosophical approach whilst working with prominent international museums and private collections around the world.

The gallery works with the following artists and artists' estates: Justin Adian, Francis Bacon, John Baldessari, Georg Baselitz, George Condo, Carroll Dunham, Eric Fischl, Peter Fischli & David Weiss, Lucio Fontana, Günther Förg, Keith Haring, Jenny Holzer, Mike Kelley, Martin Kippenberger, Yves Klein, Barbara Kruger, Louise Lawler, Sherrie Levine, Robert Mapplethorpe, Juan Muñoz, Cady Noland, Albert Oehlen, Richard Prince, David Salle, Thomas Schütte, Cindy Sherman, Lucien Smith, Rosemarie Trockel, Andy Warhol, Franz West, and Christopher Wool.

**Media Contact: [mariah@skarstedt.com](mailto:mariah@skarstedt.com) +44 (0) 207 499 5200.**