

**BMA PRESENTS TWO RECENT FILMS BY ACCLAIMED ARTISTS
 MARY REID KELLEY AND PATRICK KELLEY**

U.S. Debut of “In The Body of The Sturgeon” with Baltimore’s USS Torsk Inspiring the Film’s Setting

Artists Will Participate in a Talk at the BMA on Wednesday, April 4.

BALTIMORE, MD (March 13, 2018) — In collaboration with the Johns Hopkins University’s Center for Advanced Media Studies, The Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) presents *Mary Reid Kelley and Patrick Kelley: We Are Ghosts* on view April 4 through August 19, 2018 in the Contemporary Wing. The exhibition presents two dramatically stylized films that artfully resurrect history and poetry. For *This Is Offal* (2016), which won the Baloise Prize at Art Basel, and their most recent film, *In The Body of The Sturgeon* (2017), they reanimate the dead, empowering a drowned woman to tell the story of her suicide, and envision the final moments of an American submarine crew. These unorthodox ghost stories are told in careful meter and rhyme with wild wordplay and wickedly funny twists throughout the films’ scripts. More broadly, the artists’ choice to focus on subjects who represent life experiences not recorded in detail by official history (an unnamed, “average” woman and enlisted Navy men) is an act of reclaiming otherwise lost souls. Nearly life-size lightbox portraits of the film’s characters are also presented in the exhibition.



“The subjects of these two films parallel one another as embodiments of femininity and masculinity under the stresses generated by their own imperfect natures and confrontations with death, as well as the eras they inhabit,” said Kristen Hileman, Senior Curator of Contemporary Art. “Despite their anachronistic forms of speech and odd, blank-eyed appearances, these figures represent us—or any person, at any time, who has struggled with her or his sense of identity and place in posterity—and lead us to the awareness, expressed in the show’s title, that inevitably ‘we are ghosts.’”

The division of labor in producing these films is divided between MacArthur Award–winner Mary Reid Kelley (American, b. 1979) and her artistic collaborator and life partner Patrick Kelley (American, b. 1969). In addition to creating the brilliant verbal contortions of the scripts, Mary directs and performs most of the roles in makeup and costumes of her own design. Patrick, who also appears in the two works, produces the digital effects and editing that result in the seamless but strange cinematic universes that underscore the characters’ plights. Harkening back to the early years of movies, particularly the dreamlike sets of German Expressionist film, the black-and-white *mises-en-scene* announce to viewers that they have entered another reality in which contemporary critical thinking infuses nostalgic fantasy with the power to bring greater nuance and empathy to attempts to imagine the people who lived before us.

For *This Is Offal* (pun emphatically intended), British poet Thomas Hood's *The Bridge of Sighs* (1844) is the jumping-off point. Hood approached the poem's fictional suicide with a distinctive understanding of the socioeconomic conditions of London that might have prompted such a fatal leap into the Thames. Mary and Patrick take Hood's grittier impulses several steps further by empowering their deceased woman and her various dissected body parts with speech. The organs and extremities display their own independent-minded personalities, as they bicker over which initiated the suicide and whether any will achieve eternal recognition as a scientific specimen or medical transplant. A ghostly body joins the fray, providing clues that in life the woman may well have struggled with her sense of vanity. While the true cause of the woman's fall is ultimately withheld, the work concludes with a realization that in death, her physical body has become simply "offal."

The artists' nimble wordplay is also evident in *In The Body of The Sturgeon*, which is making its U.S. debut at the BMA and was co-sponsored by the BMA, the Center for Advanced Media Studies, and Tate Liverpool. Although Mary sets the script during the closing days of the Second World War, she turns to American Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's much-parodied 1855 poem *The Song of Hiawatha* for its language and structure. She composes a *cento* (a poem made up entirely of words and lines quoted from an existing poem) that transforms mushrooms from Longfellow's vision of pre-colonial America into atomic clouds over Japan.

Patrick's disjointed editing reinforces the fragmentation inherent in Mary's script, presenting staccato sequences of shots that evoke the radio static that would interrupt the communications of a sinking submarine. (The set for this film is inspired by the *USS Torsk* docked at the Inner Harbor.) Just as Longfellow attempted to conjure a subject—the oral traditions of Native Americans before European contact—that was unknowable from his position in history, Mary and Patrick imagine the impossible-to-observe situation of men locked in a metal container, dying at the bottom of the ocean. However, unlike their predecessor, they are fully aware of what they do not and cannot know, reconstructing their grim scenario to understand history as a tool to probe human character, rather than a fixed truth or a status quo-affirming ideal.

Mark Reid Kelley and Patrick Kelley: We Are Ghosts is the latest in a series of projects in partnership with the Center for Advanced Media Studies at the Johns Hopkins University. This exhibition is co-curated by Senior Curator of Contemporary Art Kristen Hileman in collaboration with the JHU Center for Advanced Media Studies and by Lauren Barnes, formerly an Assistant Curator at the Tate Liverpool and now Curator at The Hepworth Wakefield. *We Are Ghosts* was presented at the Tate Liverpool from November 17, 2017 to March 18, 2018. The BMA and Tate Liverpool have co-published a catalogue including the films' scripts and essays by both curators to accompany the exhibition.

ARTIST TALK

On Wednesday, April 4 at 6 p.m. Mary Reid Kelley and Patrick Kelley will join Senior Curator of Contemporary Art Kristen Hileman for an in-depth conversation about how the artists incorporate poetry, painting, and digital editing into their fiercely compelling videos. The event will take place in the BMA's Meyerhoff Auditorium.

MARY REID KELLEY

Mary Reid Kelley (American, b. 1979) earned a BA from St. Olaf College and an MFA from Yale University. The artist is the recipient of a MacArthur Foundation Grant, has received awards from the American Academy in Rome, the Rema Hort Mann Foundation, and the College Art Association. Major exhibitions include Salt Lake Art Center, SITE Santa Fe, Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, and ZKM Museum of Contemporary Art in Karlsruhe, Germany.

PATRICK KELLEY

Patrick Kelley (American, b. 1969) earned a BFA from St. Olaf College and an MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art. The artist has taught Photography, Video, and New Media courses at the University of Minnesota, St. Olaf College, St. Mary's College of Maryland, and Skidmore College in New York. His works have shown at the Bibliothèque Publique d'Information-Centre Pompidou, Paris, France, the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Germany, and the Minnesota Museum of American Art.

THE BALTIMORE MUSEUM OF ART

Founded in 1914, The Baltimore Museum of Art is a major cultural destination recognized for engaging diverse audiences through dynamic exhibitions and innovative educational and community outreach programs. The BMA's internationally renowned collection of 95,000 objects encompasses more than 1,000 works by Henri Matisse anchored by the famed Cone Collection of modern art, as well as one of the nation's finest holdings of prints, drawings, and photographs. The galleries showcase an exceptional collection of art from Africa; important works by established and emerging contemporary artists; outstanding European and American paintings, sculpture, and decorative arts; significant artworks from China; ancient Antioch mosaics; and exquisite textiles from around the world. The 210,000- square-foot museum is also distinguished by a grand historic building designed in the 1920s by renowned American architect John Russell Pope and two beautifully landscaped gardens featuring an array of 20th-century sculpture. The BMA is located in Charles Village, three miles north of the Inner Harbor, and is adjacent to the main campus of Johns Hopkins University. General admission to the BMA is free so that everyone can enjoy the power of art.

VISITOR INFORMATION

General admission to the BMA is free. Special exhibitions may be ticketed. The BMA is open Wednesday through Sunday from 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. The museum is closed Monday, Tuesday, New Year's Day, July 4, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. The BMA is located at 10 Art Museum Drive, three miles north of Baltimore's Inner Harbor. For general museum information, call 443-573-1700 or visit artbma.org.

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Image: Mary Reid Kelley and Patrick Kelley. Video still from *This is Offal*. 2016. Courtesy the artists and Fredericks & Freiser Gallery.