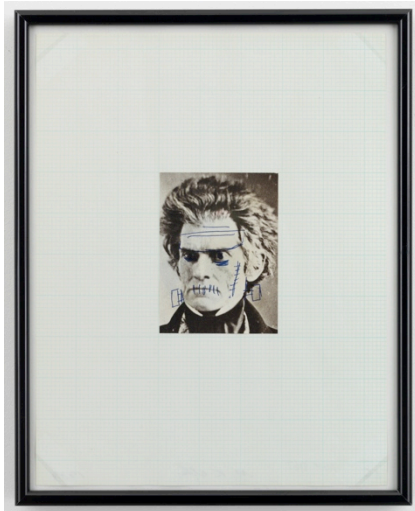




"Mike Kelley: Reconstructed History"

<http://www.timeout.com/newyork/art/mike-kelley-reconstructed-history>

Posted: Mon Oct 13 2014



Originally presented as a limited-edition artist book, Mike Kelley's 1989 series, "Reconstructed History," consists of 50 works on paper depicting defaced images of historical figures taken from old U.S.-history textbooks. As seen here, the suite of scrawled-over illustrations mock America's past with lewd comments and doodles that seem more like the handiwork of a juvenile delinquent than a 35-year-old artist—Kelley's age when he made them. With their many references to sex, drugs and bodily functions, Kelley's notations hold nothing sacred.

In one altered picture, the Statue of Liberty is seen sporting testicles and ejaculating through her torch; in another, a prospector from the gold rush defecates in a stream while panning for gold. And so it goes from one hilarious scene to the next: A signer of the Declaration of Independence barfs on the historic document; John C. Calhoun, the Vice President under John Quincy Adams and a militant defender of states' rights and slavery, is remade as Frankenstein's monster, complete with stitches and bolts in his neck. Kelley kept the original captions from the textbooks so that a papal visit shows the pontiff with shit on his hands, asking, "Where's the toilet paper?"

In his essay for the original book, Kelley passed off his exercise in graffiti as simply the expressions of normal grade-school students who would eventually grow up to become civic and religious leaders. But with the nation's pretense to exceptionalism running rampant today, these bad-taste collages offer a piquant commentary on our imperial decline, standing as classic works by America's brightest bad-boy artist. — *Paul Laster*