

Petzel

Nate Freeman, "Casting Call: Keith Edmier Makes a Final Mask of Himself for 'Mother Mold' at Petzel," *Art News*, September 7, 2017.

ARTNEWS

Casting Call: Keith Edmier Makes a Final Mask of Himself for 'Mother Mold' at Petzel

BY *Nate Freeman* POSTED 09/07/17 5:52 PM

[Share](#) 13 [Tweet](#) 8 [Pin](#) 0 [Share](#) 24



The artist getting a life cast of himself made.
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND PETZEL, NEW YORK

Petzel

Nate Freeman, "Casting Call: Keith Edmier Makes a Final Mask of Himself for 'Mother Mold' at Petzel," *Art News*, September 7, 2017.

On Wednesday afternoon, a few minutes before he turned 50 years old, Keith Edmier was at the uptown outpost of Petzel gallery in New York mixing alcone powder with water to create the goop that would cover his face, harden for half an hour, and become a life cast of himself. His show, "Mother Mold," was set to open that night, but it was not done—the work on view is a series of molds that Edmier, who has a past life as a Hollywood makeup artist, made over the last few decades, and his plan was for its final piece to be this cast of his head at 50.

"I'm not going to be able to talk pretty soon," said Edmier, who was sitting on a director's chair in the gallery in a T-shirt and black jeans, a giant blob of gray matter engulfing his head, rolling slowly down his forehead and being mashed in by two assistants.

"Are you really serious about your mother calling?" said Karen Holmberg, a collaborator of Edmier's who was around for the creation of the work.

"Oh, yeah, but you don't need to pick up," Edmier said, the blob now running over his nose.

"But it's your mother, and she's calling for your birthday!" Holmberg said, gesturing to the center of the room where, as it happened, there was a sculpture of Edmier's mother pregnant with Keith, the belly translucent to show the unborn baby inside.



An installation shot of the show.
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND PETZEL, NEW YORK

If she did call at the precise time of his birthday, which was 3:44 p.m. Eastern Standard Time, or 2:44 p.m. in his birthplace of Chicago (the artist wanted the cast to be of him at the exact *moment* he turned 50) there's a good chance he wouldn't have been able to say anything—the gray sludge was all over his lips, sealing shut his mouth as the cast of his face, the original and most technically accurate of self-portraits, began the process of hardening into a work.

While Edmier sat motionless and unable to see or speak, I ran through the show, up at the gallery through November 4, sifting through the series of life casts of figures, famous and non-famous, that the artist had made throughout his first career as a makeup artist, and then later, in his artistic practice. Luckily, before entering the solitary confinement of the molding process, Edmier had taken me through the work—he likened them to the wax castings wealthy Romans had made of their families, to display in the home during their lifetimes, and to be worn as masks by actors after their deaths during important ceremonies.

The figures were arranged, Edmier said, in the order in which they had entered his life: first came his mother, Beverly, and then there was a cast of Edmier made by his junior high school teacher when he was 13. The mold kickstarted his desire to work in special effects, and the passion led him to seek out Dick Smith, the legendary makeup man who became his mentor, and who has a life cast here in the show.

Petzel

Nate Freeman, “Casting Call: Keith Edmier Makes a Final Mask of Himself for ‘Mother Mold’ at Petzel,” *Art News*, September 7, 2017.

“I went there, Dick offered me a job, and I started working in the movie business,” he said while taking me through the show earlier that day.

One of the first projects he worked on was *Captain EO* (1986), the Michael Jackson spaceman flick that Francis Ford Coppola made exclusively for Disney theme parks, and next up in the line of heads is a cast of Michael Jackson that he helped make for the film.

“This is the only living life cast of Clint Eastwood,” he said.

It was missing an ear.

“I was working with Rick Baker on a movie called *Ratboy*,” he explained, referring to a forgotten film directed by Eastwood’s girlfriend at the time, Sondra Locke.

More movie stars followed: Jeff Goldblum and Geena Davis in *The Fly*, Kiefer Sutherland in *The Lost Boys*, Alex Winters in *Bill and Ted’s Excellent Adventure*.

“I was the same age as a lot of these actors, and when you spend a lot of time with them, you become pretty good friends,” he said. “I looked up when these casts were taken, when these characters entered my life, so there is this kind of narrative.”

In the early 1990s, Edmier left L.A. and came to New York, eager to work in artists’ studios as a sculptor and assistant, and was introduced to a young unknown named Matthew Barney.

“One of the first artists I found was Matthew Barney, he said,” standing in front of the life cast of Barney, young with chiseled features. “It was the first month I had been here, and I sent out my film résumé to various artists and people I wanted to work with. I was a fan of Jeff Koons, Cindy Sherman, the only person who responded was Richard Flood who at the time was the director of Barbara Gladstone Gallery. He was a big horror movie buff and he had seen every movie—even the bad movies—I’d worked on. He said, ‘Hey there’s some artist I want you to meet. I think with your skills, it could work.’ “

He stopped for a second and looked at the face of Matthew Barney.

“It was just when Matthew was going to have a gallery called Petersberg that Clarissa Dalrymple was gonna—then it closed, it was kinda when the whole crash happened. I went to meet with Richard and Clarissa and they were looking through my portfolio and there’s all these prosthetics in there. They said, ‘There’s this artists we’re working with who’s using prosthetic parts.’ So we just met up, we were about the same age, and that was my introduction to Matthew Barney, to the art world.

We moved on to two casts of Farrah Fawcett, who had a deeply intimate collaboration with Edmier, both of them using each other as their muse.

Petzel

Nate Freeman, “Casting Call: Keith Edmier Makes a Final Mask of Himself for ‘Mother Mold’ at Petzel,” *Art News*, September 7, 2017.

There were more: Rodney Dangerfield, who lived in the same building as Farrah, and Charlie Sheen who was also friends with Farrah. There was an ex-girlfriend who was a model, David Bowie, Jeff Bridges in *Starman*, John Keats, John Buffalo Mailer, Grace Kelly, George Washington and Kevin Bacon. Edmier had never met Bacon when he decided to include that cast in the show, but surreptitiously ran into him on the subway ([Kevin Bacon really likes taking the subway](#)) while holding a binder of images, and attempted to explain the project to him.

“I was thumbing through these things, and I was thinking, what’s my connection to him?” he said. “And I had an autographed picture of the Kiefer Sutherland life cast, and they were in *Flatliners* together. So that’s Kevin Bacon separation number three or something. And he just signed it.”

Then there was a cast of Edmier from two years ago, then Barack Obama—who, Edmier noted, has never actually had a life cast done, as there hasn’t been a cast of a sitting president since Abraham Lincoln, who makes two appearances in the show. (The Smithsonian has a 3-D scan of his face, and Edmier made his life cast from that.)

And on the wall next to Obama was blank space where the final cast was set to go. The time in the chair was passing slowly—at one point, Edmier made a motion to his wrist, which was interpreted as a request for the time.



The final work in the show, made hours before it opened.

COURTESY THE ARTIST AND PETZEL, NEW YORK

“It’s 3:27,” an assistant said.

It had been five minutes since the mold started to set.

Finally, an assistant came in and said, “Thirty more seconds!” and right after that moment a cell phone began to ring, and Holmberg picked it up.

“Are you calling for Keith?” she said. It was, of course, his mother, calling at exactly his birthday, 3:44 Eastern, or 2:44 in Chicago.

“He’s actually taking the cast off right now,” Holmberg said to Beverly Edmier. Then, the assistants came over and carefully removed the mold from Keith Edmier’s face, which had an eerie sci-fi effect to it, the face coming out of a shell. Blinking to regain focus, he slowly reached for the phone, staring first at the impression made by his face, then at the

sculpture he made of his pregnant mother.

“I just got out of the shell, mom,” Keith said to Beverly Edmier. “It came out great, just like 50 years ago.”

<http://www.artnews.com/2017/09/07/casting-call-keith-edmier-makes-a-final-mask-of-himself-for-mother-mold-at-petzel/>