

Michael Gorman

Playwright / Writer / Director / Installation & Experimental Theater Artist

Bio



Mike Gorman is a playwright, installation and experimental theater artist, and founder of “The Forty Hour Club”, his current production company formed by a collective of independent artists dedicated to creating installations and productions that ask the question “To what consequence?” Mike’s work focuses on the economic, environmental and systemic destruction facing working communities and the paramount issue of sustainability.

For the past two decades, Mike has been writing and producing plays about the opiate epidemic. At the forefront of his work is a trilogy of plays—“The Honor and Glory of Whaling” that deals with the issue of opiate addiction in the commercial fishing community of New England. His newest play, “Chasing the New White Whale” further explores the current National opioid crisis through the unique lens of the fishing industry, and draws inspiration from Moby Dick and Ahab’s obsessive pursuit of the Great White Whale.

Gorman’s personal interest in the subject originally grew from his own family history with opiate addiction (his brother, Kevin, a commercial fisherman, died of a heroin overdose). Gorman’s past work has inspired him to embark on a creative journey that has led to the creation of a new model of theater aimed at addressing the opioid crisis head-on, and one that Gorman hopes to take on the road to working communities hardest hit by the epidemic. Through direct engagement with the community, “Chasing The New White Whale—Harpooning Addiction” combines theater, performance, multi-media installations, and an arts & advocacy model that together address the opioid crisis that is taking place in those communities. Says Gorman “this project is not simply about personal sadness and loss; it is about a regional and national health crisis and an artistic call to action. It is not intended to be my plaintive voice but the echo of the over 70,000 lives lost to opiate addiction each year.”

As an artist, Gorman is obsessed with the idea of invisibility—that there is a whole class and culture of people among us that feels, for all intents and purposes, invisible. His work on this project features a mythical chorus of ghostly whale hunters and modern day commercial fishermen inspired by Ahab's stowaway crew—"Fedallah and the Phantoms"—who represent those who are often "invisible" in our society—the addict; our abandoned and alienated working communities; the marginalized.

By presenting performances in non-traditional "venues", such as locations in and around working waterfronts, Gorman's work has the unique ability to creatively connect with the individuals and working communities being devastated by the opioid epidemic. Through this "direct approach" model, Gorman hopes to engender a greater awareness of the epidemic and the underlying disease of addiction; engage the audience in a creative dialogue that propels constructive change; and emphasize the need for more understanding and compassion.

"To make visible the invisible, and in the process, restore dignity to a people who have been stripped of it by fatal forces often beyond their control—that is my current goal as an artist"—Michael Gorman

Mike is also the newly appointed *Playwright in Residence* for the 2018-2019 season at La MaMa Experimental Theater Club in New York City, where he has a long-standing history and has produced many of his plays over the past 25 years.

Michael Gorman lives and works in Maine, where he makes his living as a finish worker, master painter and plasterer, and general contractor while continuing to write and develop new theatrical works.

Michael Gorman – CV

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Theatrical Productions: (*Major Produced Works*)

- **“Chasing The New White Whale”** – (2018)
Using Melville’s 19th-century monster as a metaphor for the modern plague of opioid addiction, Gorman’s newest production explores the current National opioid crisis through the unique lens of the commercial fishing industry, and draws inspiration from Moby Dick and Ahab’s obsessive pursuit of the Great White Whale. The play premiered Off-Broadway at The Ellen Stewart Theatre at La MaMa in New York City on November 24 - December 9, 2018.

- **“The Honor And Glory of Whaling”–A Trilogy**
This trilogy of plays constitutes a major body of work by Gorman, written and performed over nearly 2 decades. All three works premiered individually at La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club in NYC: ***If Colorado Had An Ocean (2014)***; ***The Honor & Glory of Whaling (2008)***; and ***UltraLight (2000)****. Inspired by the life and death of the playwright's oldest brother, a commercial fisherman, the plays deal with the issues of addiction and recovery in the commercial fishing industry of New England and chart the rise and fall of a commercial fisherman struggling with addiction. The trilogy tackles the complex emotional and social issues around relationships and livelihoods within the close-knit fishing community and shines a light on the unspoken hardships that fishing and addiction take on both family and community.

**UltraLight also went on to tour at venues throughout Maine & New England in 2003 (including: The Portland Stage Company in Portland, ME; Penobscot Theatre in Bangor, ME; The Grand Theatre in Ellsworth, ME. The tour was sponsored by MAAR– The Maine Alliance for Addiction & Recovery.*

Other Theatrical Productions:

Mike has a long-standing relationship with **La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club in NYC**, where he is currently the LaMaMa *Playwright In Residence* for the 2018-2019 Season. Over the years Mike has produced many of his other plays at La MaMa including:

- "How and Why I Robbed My First Cheese Store" (2013)
- "The Poet and the Lumberjack" (2011)
- "Death by Joinery" (2006)
- "Counting Coup" (2002)
- "Single Action Shotgun" (2001)
- "A Funny Old Bird" (1997)
- "Interview" (1996)
- "Chores" (1995)
- "Biffing Mussels" (1994).

A complete list of Mike's theatrical works can be found on his website: ([Link here](#)).

Installation Works & Staged Readings:

Gorman's staged readings often cross the line into installation work, and for that reason, both are included here.

- **"The Hungry Ghost"**– (2019). "The Hungry Ghost" (a parable and scene taken from Gorman's play "The Honor and Glory of Whaling" that deals with the themes of opiate addiction, loss, and family) was an installation, reading, and performance that took place in the rural community of North Haven—an island 15 miles off the coast of Maine. Students (elementary to high school) read and acted out the scene on stage as part of the evening performance, which was followed by a presentation by Gorman about his Art & Advocacy model "Chasing The New White Whale—Harpooning Addiction".
- **"Ambergris"—Mining The Net Yard for the Roots of Addiction and New Models of Sustainable Fishing**– (2018). "Ambergris" was an environmental installation and performance that explored the roots of the disease of addiction and the economic devastation being caused by the ongoing opiate epidemic within the

commercial fishing community. This multi-media community event was held outdoors on the working waterfront in The City of Portland, Maine at the Portland Fish Exchange & Net Yard, and featured performers, dramatic readings, dance, live music, artwork, and video and photographic projections. The event (funded by a grant from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts) was part of Gorman's on-going project/arts & advocacy model "*Chasing The New White Whale–Harpooning Addiction*".

- **"Goin' West"**– (2018). A staged reading of Michael Gorman's original 1987 play "Goin West" was staged at the La MaMa Galleria in New York City. The reading was Mike's first event as the newly appointed "Playwright In Residence" at La MaMa. Directed by Arthur Adair. Featuring Alan Barnes Netherton, Jennie Vath, and Nick Denning, along with live musicians.
- **"A Playwright's Journey"**– (2018) A staged reading, installation, and multi-media performance time-line of the history and development of Gorman's epic trilogy of plays "The Honor and Glory of Whaling" was presented at The Steel House in Rockland, Maine. The community event included readings from Gorman's work; live performance pieces from Gorman's plays; dance; video; artwork; live music, and a real boat. This event was the final project and public engagement component for Mike's Ellis Beauregard Residency.
- **"The Chase"**–(2017). An installation and staged reading series inspired by Gorman's trilogy of plays, "The Honor and Glory of Whaling", that deals with the issue of opiate addiction in the commercial fishing industry of New England. The installation and readings were created and performed at the La MaMa Galleria in NYC in April 2017 and CMCA (Center for Maine Contemporary Art) in Rockland, ME in June 2017.
- **"The Honor & Glory of Whaling– A Trilogy"**– (2016). A marathon staged reading of Gorman's Trilogy of plays ("*UltraLight*", "*The Honor & Glory of Whaling*", and "*If Colorado had An Ocean..*") took place at New York Theatre Workshop in NYC.
- **"UltraLight"**– (2016). A staged reading of Gorman's play "*UltraLight*" was held at The Stonington Opera House in Stonington, Maine, and was a featured play of the theater's community engagement series.

- **“Fishing for Paradise”**– (2014). A multi-media installation “Fishing for Paradise” was a deconstruction of the playwright’s creative process for his trilogy of plays, “The Honor and Glory of Whaling”. The installation took participants on a dramatic journey of discovery through the playwright’s world as he unearthed the layers of production history of his epic cycle of plays that plumb the depths of addiction and recovery in the commercial fishing industry. The installation also incorporated the work of several other visual artists, and was created in the La MaMa Galleria in NYC, to coincide with the production of Gorman’s play “If Colorado had an Ocean ...”
- **“UltraLight”**– (2002). A staged reading of Gorman’s play “UltraLight” was held at The Gloucester Stage Company in Gloucester, MA, following the play’s premiere at La MaMa in NYC.

Current Projects:

- **“Chasing The New White Whale–Harpooning Addiction”**
Chasing The New White Whale–Harpooning Addiction is an on-going project and art & advocacy theatrical model created by Michael Gorman dedicated to bringing awareness to the issue of opiate addiction in the commercial fishing community of New England and beyond. Through an evolving series of environmental installations, readings, presentations, performances, education/outreach, and through direct engagement with the community, Gorman and his production company *The Forty Hour Club* have created a new model of theater aimed at addressing the opioid crisis head-on. Gorman has started to take the project on the road to working communities hardest hit by the epidemic, including presenting performances in non-traditional “venues”, such as locations in and around working waterfronts.

Awards, Grants, & Residencies: (Most Recent)

- April 2019- Michael was invited to the island of North Haven, Maine to be an **Artist in Residence** as part of their Arts & Enrichment program. He and members of The Forty Hour Club presented a series of school workshops, which culminated

with an evening performance by students and a presentation by Mike about his work on the project "Chasing The New White Whale—Harpooning Addiction".

- July 2018- Mike received ***The Project Grant For Artists through The Maine Arts Commission***, which he used to create a video companion piece to his project "Chasing The New White Whale".
- November 2017- Mike received a 2018 ***Kindling Fund Grant (Andy Warhol Foundation)*** to pursue his environmental installation—"Ambergris"—at The Portland Fish Exchange in the heart of the working waterfront in Portland, Maine.
- August 2017- Mike received a six-month ***Artist Residency and Grant from the Ellis Beauregard Foundation*** in Rockland, ME, to continue his playwrighting and installation work.
- April 2017- Mike was appointed "***Playwright in Residence***" at ***La MaMa Theater*** in NYC for the 2018-2019 season, where his newest play "Chasing The New White Whale" was produced and premiered in Nov-Dec 2018. Mike will be continuing his residency with La MaMa into 2019, where his duties include creating and teaching a playwrighting program for students.

Education:

- 1986-1988— B.A. in Literature —Clark University, Worcester, MA.
Mike pursued independent studies and began his playwrighting career at Clark, earning a B.A. in literature. He was also nominated for The Rhodes Scholarship and received the Russ Granger Award as the University's outstanding Scholar-Athlete. He was also nominated for induction into the Clark University Athletic Hall of Fame (soccer).
- 1984-1986—School of Landscape Architecture at The College of Environmental Science and Forestry, Syracuse, NY.
- 1982-1984—Associate's Degree in Landscape Development, SUNY Cobleskill, NY.