

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, the cultural erasure of the working class, and the paramount issue of sustainability.

Mike is also a *Playwright in Residence* 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.

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 obsession with these themes originally grew from his own family history with opiate addiction (his brother, Kevin, a commercial fisherman, died of a heroin overdose), and has propelled him to embark on a creative journey that has led to the creation of a direct-approach model of theater aimed at addressing the opioid crisis head-on. This “*Arts Intervention*” serves to directly connect with the communities and individuals being devastated by the on-going epidemic by bringing performances directly to those communities. By including recovering addicts and those in re-entry in the

performances, Gorman uses the stage and the voices of those on it as a form of restorative justice for all involved. This model and project—which Gorman has named *“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. *“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.”*

With this project, and through his work, Gorman hopes to engender a greater awareness of the epidemic and the underlying disease of addiction; create connection and engage the audience and community in a creative dialogue that propels constructive change; emphasize the need for more understanding and compassion; help reduce the stigma associated with addiction; and ultimately, help initiate healing.

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.

For more about Mike and his work, visit his website at:
www.fortyhourclub.com

Michael Gorman – CV

Playwright / Writer / Director / Installation & Experimental Theater Artist

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.

A complete list of Michael Gorman’s theatrical works can be found on his website:
www.fortyhourclub.com

Other Theatrical Productions:

Mike has a long-standing relationship with **La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club in NYC**, where he was the LaMaMa *Playwright In Residence* for the 2018-2019 Season. Over the years Mike has produced and premiered 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).

Theatrical Tours:

- **“UltraLight”– New England Tour (2003)**

Ultralight is a play about a younger brother's struggle to help his older brother fight his heroin addiction. The play takes the form of a dramatic parable, with the younger brother cast in the role of a fisherman and the older brother cast in the role of a trout. Interwoven with the present-time action of the play is a mythical story that explores the lessons to be learned from addiction about the bonds of brotherhood, wilderness, story telling and integrity—and what it means to be alive, "really and truly" alive.

After Ultralights’ debut at La MaMa in New York City, the play went on to tour at venues throughout New England while successfully reaching out to the addiction & recovery community. The tour included stops at: The Portland Stage Company in Portland, ME; Penobscot Theatre in Bangor, ME; and The Grand Theatre in Ellsworth, ME. The tour was sponsored by MAAR– The Maine Alliance for Addiction & Recovery.

Installation Works/Community Engagement & Outreach Events/Staged Readings:

Michael Gorman's staged readings & community engagement events & performances often cross the line into installation work, and for that reason, all are included here.

- ***"In Ahab's Head—Chasing Phantom's"***—(2019)
A collaborative community performance in association with "What's Art Got To Do With It?"— A 3-day conference about the power of art to address our opioid epidemic. This short and powerful piece featured R.A.W. Players (Restorative Art Works) & members of the Maine Coastal Regional Re-Entry Center/Restorative Justice Program (all non-actors), in the roles of The Phantom's, and incorporated monologues about their lives and experiences dealing with addiction, incarceration, re-entry, and healing. (Belfast, Maine—Nov 1, 2019).
- ***"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 Beaugard 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 Intervention" 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. With this project, Gorman hopes to engender a greater awareness of the epidemic and the underlying disease of addiction; create connection and engage the audience and community in a creative dialogue that propels constructive change; emphasize the need for more understanding and compassion; help reduce the stigma associated with addiction; and help initiate healing.

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.