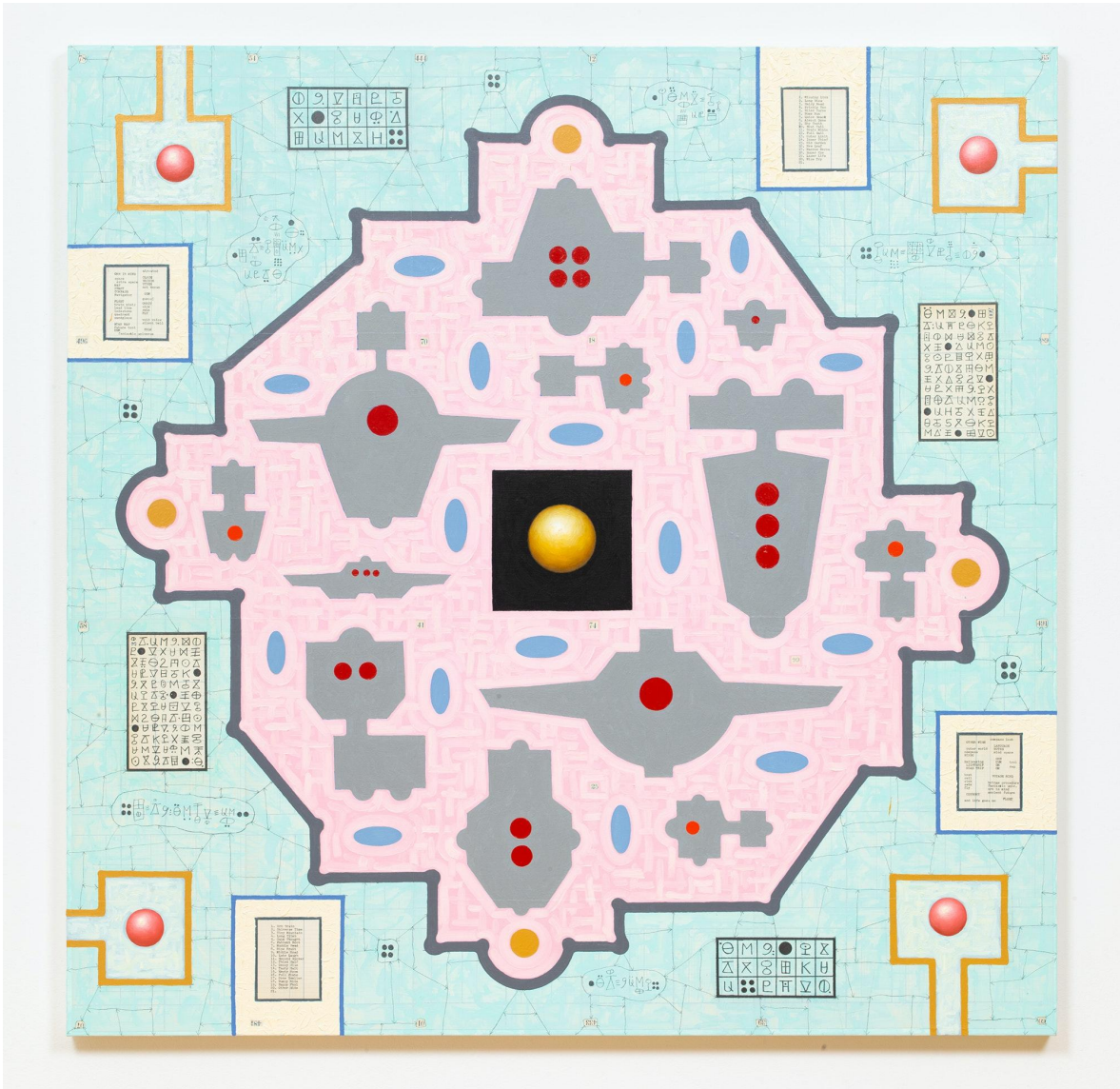


# BROOKLYN RAIL

ArtSeen

## Karla Knight: *Navigator*

By Kathy Battista

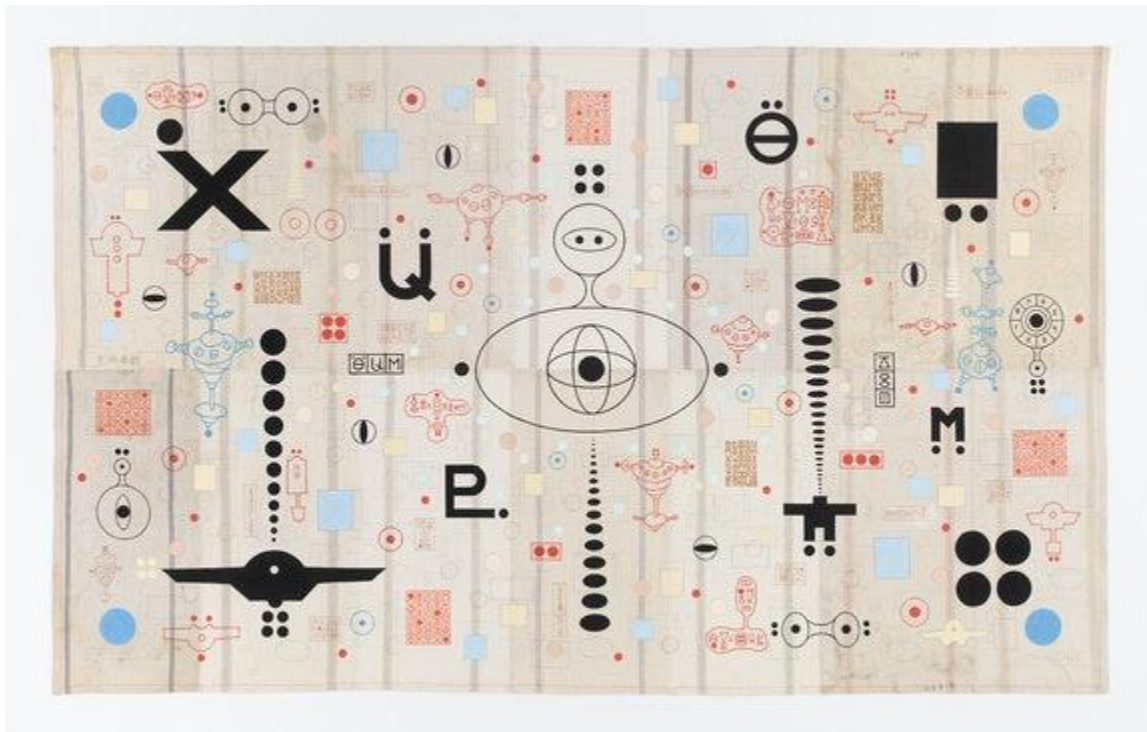


Karla Knight, *Fleet Mind 1*, 2020-2. Oil, Flashe, and pencil on paper mounted on linen, 51 x 51 inches.  
Courtesy of the artist and Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York.

*Karla Knight: Navigator* adds to an impressive litany of solo exhibitions devoted to female artists under the auspices of Senior Curator Amy Smith-Stewart at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum. Knight's exhibition is a superb example of how thoughtful curating can present an artist to new audiences, surprising even the most sophisticated art-viewing visitor.

Knight, who lives and works in Connecticut, is a local artist for the Aldrich. While she is represented by Andrew Edlin Gallery and her work is included in important collections (MoMA, the Brooklyn Museum, and the Walker Art Center, among others), she is not a household name. Her work, with its idiosyncratic and purposefully intractable visual language, has been discussed in relation to Hilma af Klint and Agnes Pelton, and bears comparison to other visionaries that remain under the radar, such as Franz Jozef Ponstingl, a Bucks County artist whose work utilized similar motifs.

*Navigator* occupies the entire second floor of the Aldrich, comprising three galleries and an interstitial space. A medium-sized gallery is dedicated to clusters of Knight's smaller works on paper. Each group is hung uniquely: from a grid-like installation of twelve colorful paintings on graph paper to more organic arrangements of differently sized thematic works rendered in minimal palettes created in charcoal or pen. Within some of these groups, individual pieces appear as microcosms of larger systems of hieroglyphs or codes. In other instances, crepuscular forms are complemented by lists of phrases or diagrams. These constellations of shapes and symbols read like prehistoric organisms that cannot be identified.



Karla Knight, *Fantastic Universe (More Than You Know)*, 2020-21. Flashe, acrylic marker, pencil, and embroidery on cotton, 73 ½ x 120 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York.



Adjacent to this gallery is a pass-through area that features a wall-mounted vitrine. This small segment of the exhibition is like a window into Knight's world: in the vitrine are open sketchbooks with lexicons of letters and characters and sketched forms. In one of these, the artist scribbled:

*New Parts From Old*

*regeneration (invertebrates)*

*ability to repair damage*

*planaria*

*mutate into something new*

A found image of a spaceship-like structure in a rural landscape is located below these phrases. Beside this is a closed notebook titled "SPACESHIP NOTEBOOK," while yet another scribble reads "TRUST WHAT YOU CANNOT EXPLAIN" in red ink. Above the vitrine are four works. In



one of these we see the artist experimenting with blue fabric dyes, which are notated as "midnight blue," "cerulean," etc. Knight's color study is a prelude to a painting located on the wall of the large gallery around the corner: in *Blue Navigator 1* (2021) the artist paints a complicated system of symbols in white on dyed blue fabric.

The most expansive wall in the large gallery features several of Knight's large-scale endeavors from recent years. A triptych installation aligns three of Knight's "tapestries." This is a new body of work for which the artist sourced 1940s and 1950s seed and grain bags as support material for mystical paintings.

Karla Knight, *Blue Navigator 2*, 2021. Flashe, acrylic marker, pencil, and embroidery on cotton, 68 x 50 inches.  
Courtesy of the artist and Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York.

The bags have a grainy texture and color range similar to linen and are adhered directly to the wall, giving an impression of artefacts or plans of ancient archaeological sites. *Wayfinder 1*, *Wayfinder 2*, and *Wayfinder 3* (all 2020) feature Knight's typical motifs rendered in black pigment: orb-like shapes that resemble atomic diagrams, sets of cartoonish eyes complemented by floating spaceship forms, and rows of ellipses rendered in descending or ascending sizes. Interspersed throughout is a plethora of other mysterious shapes and charts in various colors. For example, in the lower left quadrant of *Wayfinder 3*, Knight includes a clock-like shape where the numbers run counterclockwise and are anchored at 9 rather than 12. Concentric circles inside this form give the impression of an archaic sundial. This is bifurcated by the muted lines inherent to the found bags as well as other shapes added by the artist: an embroidered light blue rectangle intersects the clock while a circular, stitched form also overlaps. To fully appreciate this floating cosmology of forms one must come closer, allowing these works to open up in terms of intricacy and delicateness, balancing the heavier black forms that dominate each work.

In a final small gallery, the dyed-blue *Blue Navigator 2* (2021), is juxtaposed with framed pieces on antique found papers. In both palette and visual language, these connect to the colorful, repetitive symbolism in two works on the ground floor by emerging artist Amaryllis De Jesus Moleski. *The Guardians* (2015) and *Graduation Day* (2021) feature exuberant iterations of shapes, from floating eyes and hamburgers to wishbones, clouds, flames, and star forms. The works on paper by De Jesus Moleski may be seen as intentional foreshadowing of what one finds upstairs in Knight's works, lending cohesiveness to the museum's displays. It also illustrates the Aldrich's ongoing curatorial commitment to exhibiting a diversity of intergenerational women artists.

**ON VIEW**

The Aldrich

October 17, 2021 – May 8, 2022

Ridgefield, CT