

Karla Knight: Notes from the Lightship

February 28 – July 11, 2020

Andrew Edlin Gallery is pleased to present *Notes from the Lightship*, an exhibition of new work by **Karla Knight**, running from February 28 – April 11, 2020. Knight's first solo show with the gallery features visionary paintings and drawings made over the past three years. Her work will also be included in the gallery's booth presentation at the Independent Art Fair in New York from March 5 – 8, 2020.

Knight operates in an abstract, pseudo-scientific realm. Within her extraordinary diagrammatic paintings and drawings, she incorporates imagined signs and symbols that seem to communicate to unknown worlds. The artist grew up in a household where the existence of supernatural forces was readily accepted: Her father was an author of books on UFOs, the occult and ESP. Her interactions with her own child inspired her to construct a hieroglyphic vocabulary, which she has developed and refined over the last twenty years.

As her five-year old son learned to read and write, the artist noticed that he would make mistakes and then invent letters and words that seemed close to what he had memorized and was trying to recall. Connecting this process with her own artistic sensibility, she thought how interesting it might be to follow his lead and create a language that had no definitive meaning but might be understood by nameless others.

Shortly after getting her BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design in 1980, Knight established a career as an accomplished painter whose surreal landscapes and abstractions, with floating dimensional orbs, were being exhibited and collected. When her work grew more abstract and her compositions denser, she began to experiment with language. Leaping from landscapes into the unknown, the artist developed systems for organizing the symbols and characters of her made-up alphabet. Graphic and flat, possibly because Knight has always drawn and painted on recycled ledger paper, her renderings looked like game boards or computer motherboards viewed from above. The invented language appeared to be outside of an earthly realm and intended to communicate beyond the stars.

At this point, about six years ago, spaceships first began to appear in her drawings. Then, making another breakthrough, Knight began to envision areas of the paintings and drawings themselves as spaceships, into which she could load all of her past imagery and send them forth into the cosmos. Growing more layered and elaborate, the work echoed the complexities of modernist artists like Adolph Gottlieb, Alfred Jensen, Eduardo Paolozzi and Richard Pousette-Dart, and self-taught artists like the calendar savant George Widener or renowned painter of UFOs, Ionel Talpazan. Other influences include Chinese calligraphy, Buckminster Fuller and Lakota winter counts.

Starting with a ground of collaged sheets of ledger paper mounted on linen, Knight draws and paints a network of hieroglyphic characters and interlocking rectangular forms that resemble the floorplans for houses, stores, malls and airports. The backgrounds reference Jasper Johns' crosshatch mark-making, while her solid shapes are more machinelike and bring to mind toys,

logos and cartoon characters, and the Dadaist forms of Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst and Francis Picabia.

The artist's elements and techniques play off of one another — flat, hard-edged forms bring the viewer's eye to the surface of the work, while scumbled brushstrokes, crosshatching, hieroglyphic letters and intersecting lines that recall rural roads on a county map cause parts of the picture planes to recede, creating a dynamic and thought-provoking push/pull graphic effect. The surface holds the eye captive, but the positioning of an element or two (usually those 3D orbs that date back to her earliest works) send us into deep space.

“It's not about deciphering the work or the language,” Knight says about her art. “It's about living with the unknown.” Imagining her own solar systems, the spaceships to transport us and a language to communicate with whomever might be out there, she guides us through an open portal on a visual voyage to another place.

Karla Knight was born in New York City in 1958 and currently lives and works in Connecticut. Her work is represented in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art and Brooklyn Museum in New York and the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, among other public collections. She has been the recipient of multiple fellowships and residencies, including those from the Connecticut Office of the Arts, the MacDowell Colony and Yaddo.