割 BROOKLYN RAIL

Karla Knight: Road Trip By Ann McCoy June 7, 2022

Karla Knight's mysterious spaceships transport the viewer into other-worldly dimensions at a time when much of the art world can feel grounded by an ideological flat earth society. Like Hilma af Klint, whose works were channeled from higher masters in the astral plane, Knight's remind us that art can originate from realms both mysterious and incomprehensible. Positivism, Adorno's anti-occultism, and the "liberation" of art from its spiritual mission have dominated much recent discourse. When reading Knight's statement—"I would say a visionary is someone who is a good listener, and a bridge between two



Karla Knight, *Wave 1*, 2022. Oil, flashe, and pencil on paper mounted on linen 31 x 23 inches. Courtesy the artist and Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York.

worlds"—this critic wanted to applaud. Her works resonate and affect us deeply and draw the viewer into deeper meditations with their presence. Karla Knight's art is pulled from the artist's own psyche and lifts us into the fourth dimension where the spirit resides. It bucks many recent collective theoretical trends.

Although her father wrote books about UFOs, the artist's spaceships transport the viewer into the unconscious, not outer space. With the recent Pentagon Congressional hearings on UFOs, it is an easy mistake to take Knight's craft literally as objects from Roswell and other phenomena from Ufology. Knight references Carl Jung as one of her influences. Jung's flying-saucer writings went from a thesis that they were psychic products to fantasies and a wish fulfillment to connect with the divine. Surprisingly, it

was Jung's *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1962), not his flying saucers, that inspired the artist. Knight identified with his sacrifices and break with his professional circle as he charted his own path: Jung broke from Freud to devote himself to his inner visions

and daemon at great personal expense. In the contemporary art world, we don't hear much about exploring the inner realm and depths of one's psyche. This task still rests largely with the "outsider artist." It is interesting that Knight, who attended art school and is not "self-taught," has found representation with the Andrew Edlin Gallery, which focuses its program on the work of visionary and outsider artists.

Knight's creation of a personal and incomprehensible language is intriguing; she developed it by watching her child make up letters. It is hard not to think of the long-undeciphered Voynich Manuscript (fifteenth century), or the Jesuit polymath Athanasius Kircher's *Egyptian Oedipus* (fifteenth century), in which he falsely



Karla Knight, *Little Road Trip 3 (Bod Boe Bof)*, 2022. Graphite and colored pencil on paper 14 x 11 inches. Courtesy the artist and Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York.

believed he had solved the enigma of the hieroglyphs. Knight's hieroglyphic groupings have no comprehensible meanings, yet she writes them late into the night. They celebrate that which lies beyond comprehension, linking the image which conveys unknown meanings to a language which does the same. We are reminded that that which defies literary discourse can move us in other ways.

The artist learned book indexing as a vocation from her mother. Using four old typewriters, Knight makes "list poems" that she collages onto her works, with a blank space left to suggest unknown possibilities. Each number has two-word phrases, some taken from terms the artist saw in an old science book, *Animals Without Backbones*.

Who could not love titles like *Primal Slime, Royal Jelly, Muddle Head,* or *Ooze Dweller*? William Kentridge also uses an old typewriter as a way of reintroducing the hand; here, the same poetic device, along with the use of old ledger paper, gives Knight's works a historical charm. These lists are typed on paper and cut in small squares which are collaged on many of her larger linen works, like *Wave 1* (2022) and *Wave 2* (2022), as well as on pencil and colored pencil works on paper such as *Little Road Trip 1* (*Muo Mup*) (2022), and *Little Road Trip 2* (*Hah Hai Hak*) (2022), *Little Road Trip 3* (*Bod*)

Boe Bof) (2022), and *Little Road Trip 4* (*Can Cao Cap*) (2022). The "list poems" add another dimension, the artist as poet, to an already complex visual narrative.

The artist's touch, drafting skills, and use of materials makes the work visually compelling, especially her recent use of grain bags. Knight was struck by the Sioux Winter Counts in *The Plains Indians: Artists of Earth and Sky*, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2015. Winter Counts are pictorial histories of tribal events executed on buffalo hides, muslin, and in notebooks. The artist was particularly impressed by the muslin Winter Counts and was inspired to use



Karla Knight, *Book Cover 1 (Index)*, 2022. Oil, flashe and colored pencil on book cover 19 x 15.5 inches. Courtesy the artist and Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York.

the sewn-together grain bags in her own work. Works like *Pilot* (2021), on cotton with embroidery, capture the narrative sweep of the Sioux Winter Counts, with their hand stitching. The vertically stacked rows of linear images also remind one of the Sioux works where figures are often arranged in rows, although usually in a horizontal format.

Two particularly stunning works using repurposed ledger binders, *Book Cover 1 (Index)* (2022), and *Book Cover 2 (Alphabet)* (2022) have blue circles with beautifully rendered orbs in delicate oil paint, and resemble the orbs painted by the artist in the mid-eighties.

The soul was supposed to have the form of a sphere in the analogy of Plato's "world soul." For Jung, these shining orbs in dreams and visions were automatic projections, psychic manifestations of the God symbol: God existed as a circle whose center was everywhere and circumference nowhere. In these two works, the artist reaches for the divine. They are perhaps the jewels in the crown of this remarkable exhibition. This is a *Road Trip* I would recommend as a pilgrimage in this dark time.