

The Many Worlds of Susan Te Kahurangi King

BY SCOTT INDRISEK | NOVEMBER 05, 2014



Susan Te Kahurangi King's "Untitled," c. 1965, currently on view at Andrew Edlin Gallery.
(Courtesy Andrew Edlin Gallery)

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New Zealand artist Susan Te Kahurangi King uses simple means — colored pencil, sheets and shards of paper — to explore her own unique, layered universe. It's a place in which deconstructed Donald Ducks and Bugs Bunnies contort into colorful landscapes of bits and parts, cavorting with other manic characters of the artist's own devising. A drawing of King's that's merely 11.5 by 16 inches can possess the forceful energy of a miniature, cartoon "Guernica." An exhibition on view at Andrew Edlin Gallery in New York

showcases examples from this idiosyncratic oeuvre, most of them from the 1960s and '70s. (For various reasons, King took a hiatus from artmaking for around two decades before returning to her craft in 2008). The exhibition, "[Drawings From Many Worlds](#)," is curated by Chris Byrne — a jack-of-all-trades who is both [an inventive artist](#) and co-founder of the Dallas Art Fair, among other things.

Byrne's introduction to King came via artist [Gary Panter](#), who in turn had been clued into the work by his [bandmate](#) Devin Flynn, who first saw it on Facebook. "It was a series of friends getting excited about it," Panter explained. "She's my age and I feel a close affinity to her drawings, [depicting] an interior landscape — which apparently she experiences, moment to moment. Her work is continually inventive, not a locked down set of repetitions."



Courtesy Andrew Edlin Gallery



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"King's facility and the range of imagery seemed unprecedented — she wasn't just making 'Art about Art,'" Byne said. "Her drawings reminded me of [Peter Saul's](#) early period. It's as if both artists are internalizing these mass media/pop icons for their own pictorial purposes, and not simply mimicking the glossy surfaces of mainstream culture."

King's sampling from Disney and Looney Tunes also seems prescient, given similar tendencies in the work of everyone from Joyce Pensato to Jim Shaw, Paul McCarthy, and Llyn Foulkes. These drawings would have been very much at home in the current SculptureCenter exhibition, "[Puddle, Pothole, Portal](#)" — stylistically they call to mind

certain pieces by Saul Steinberg, the thematic centerpiece of that show. Yet Steinberg seems almost politely subdued when viewed in relation to King's wild compositional logic. Byrne, for his part, is intent on proselytizing for this undersung talent. "I've spoken with Jason Brinkerhoff, KAWS, Natalie Frank, Michael Williams, the FedEx guy," he joked. "I was truly on the war path. I couldn't believe how great the drawings were, and I wanted to let everyone know."