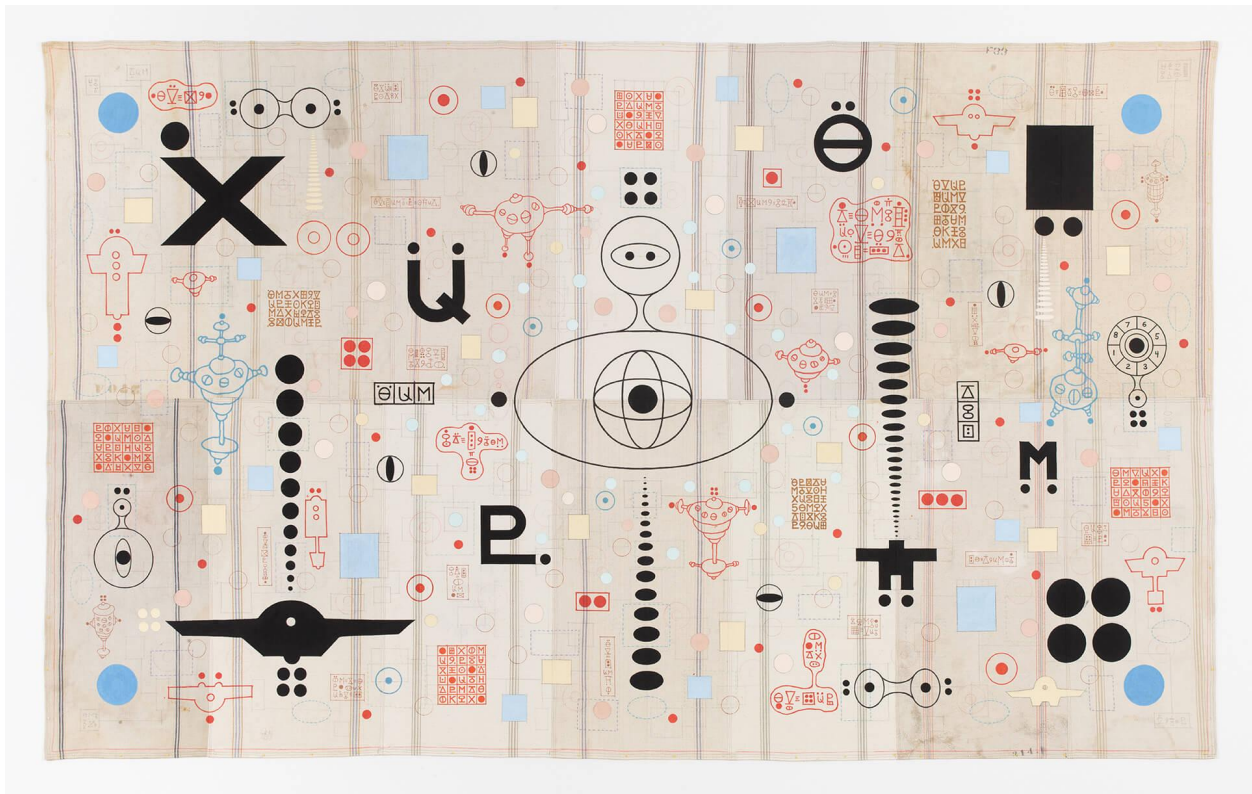


Karla Knight: Navigator: Traversing beyond the material at the Aldrich museum

STIR explores the four-decade long oeuvre of visionary American artist Karla Knight at The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Connecticut, United States.

by Manu Sharma | Mar 01, 2022

The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, located in Ridgefield, Connecticut, is a popular destination for contemporary art that dates back to 1964, when Larry Aldrich set it up with the desire to present his contemporary art collection. The Aldrich is one of the United States' truly contemporary art museums, and as Executive Director Cybele Maylone explains, "the Aldrich was able to present ambitious and risk-taking work, and bring art and artists into the daily lives of people in the community of Ridgefield, far away from the glare of New York City." She continues, saying, "The museum has grown and changed in the past five decades—we no longer have a collection, and instead act as more of a kunsthalle—but we remain committed to presenting an ambitious program of contemporary art."

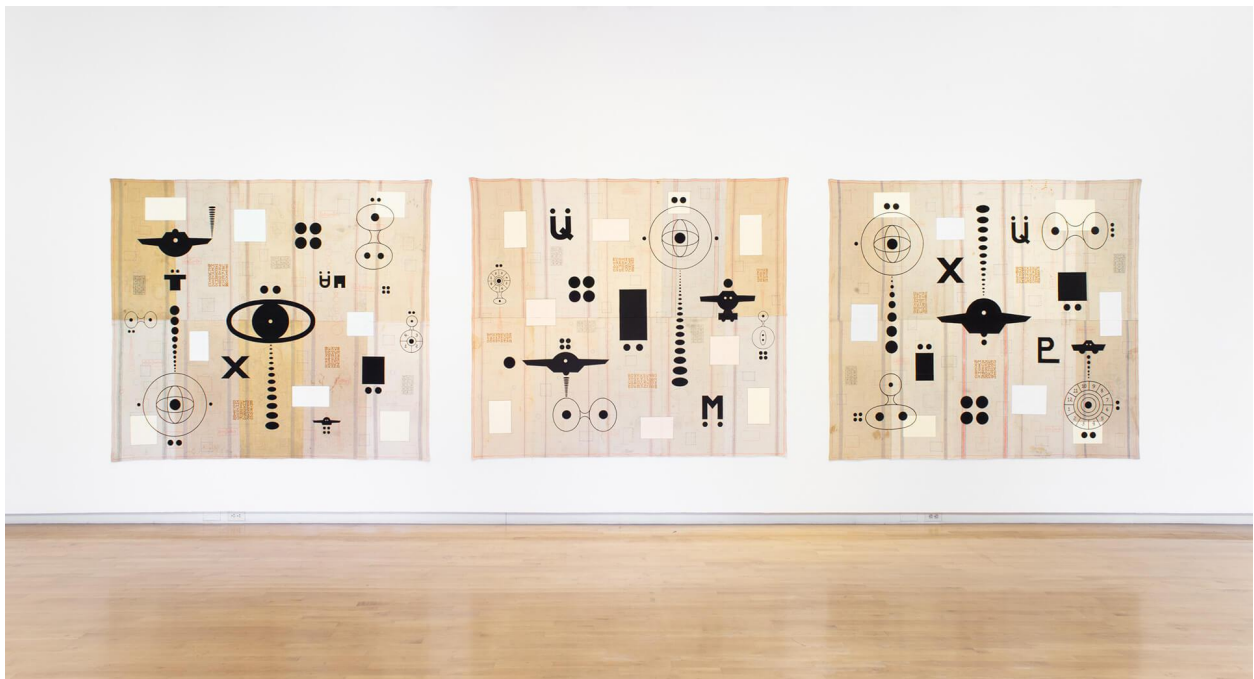


Fantastic Universe (More Than You Know), 2020-21, Flashe, acrylic marker, pencil, and embroidery on cotton

Image: Karla Knight, Courtesy of Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York

As of January 2022, one of the visual artists on display at the Aldrich is Karla Knight, who has a practice that spans nearly 40 years, and has created a large body of flat and extremely striking imagery. Knight's show is titled *Karla Knight: Navigator*, and the work on display has a strong visionary quality, referencing narratives that feel embedded within science fiction. The artist acknowledges this, and explains the grounding for her work, saying "I grew up in a family where the paranormal was normal – my father and grandfather wrote

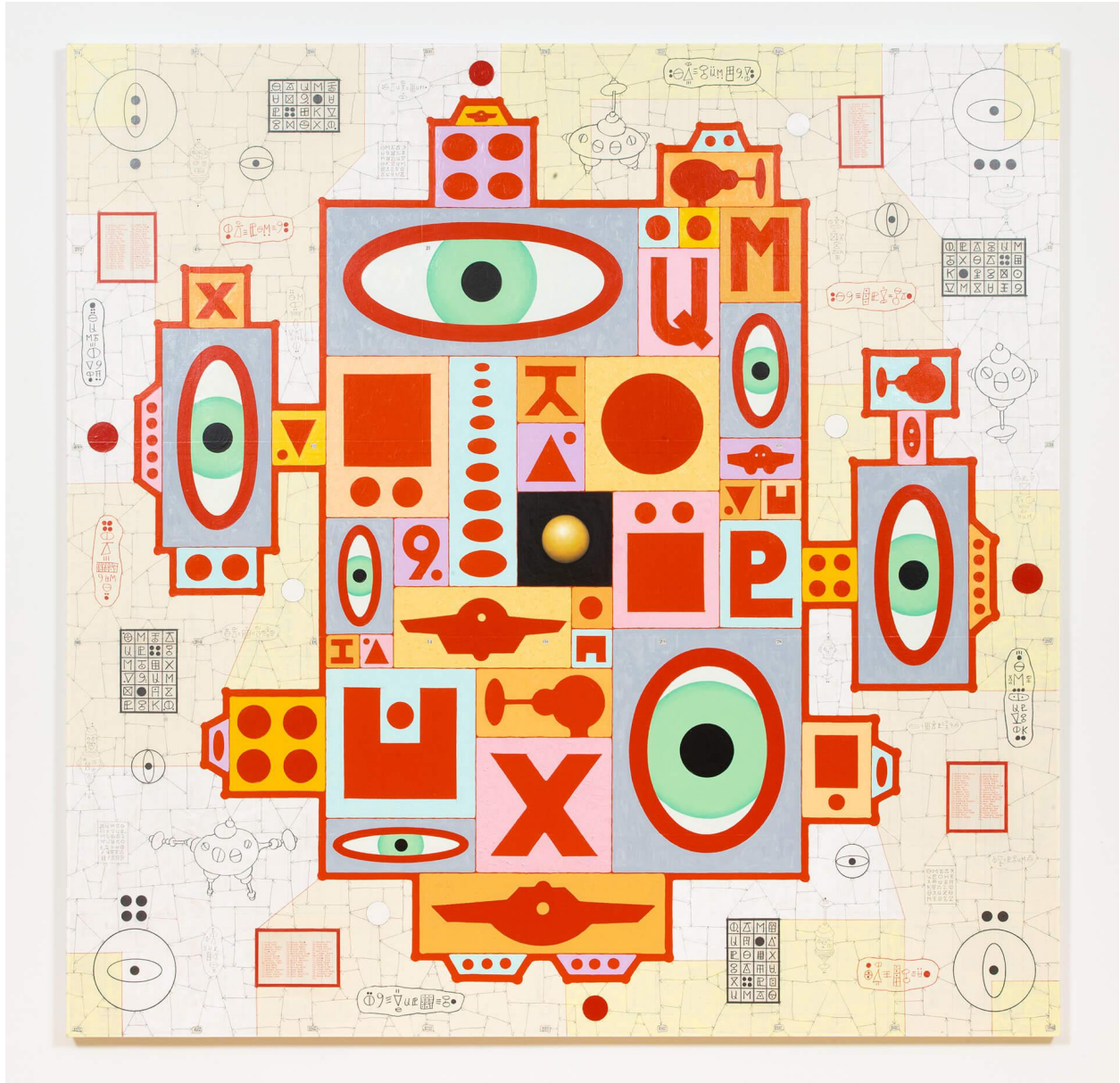
books about life after death, UFOs, the occult, and my family did a lot of Ouija boarding. Other realms and realities besides the physical ones were accepted. There was a lot of emphasis on the soul and what happens to it after death. My father also wrote some science fiction stories." Knight received an invitation to show at the Aldrich over a year and a half ago, just as she had begun a new series of work; that being her tapestries. Senior Curator Amy Smith-Stewart was intrigued by these, but also wished to treat the exhibition as a focused survey that would track the development of the artist's unique visual language over the many decades she has practiced. She tells STIR, "This show tells a story about the creation of her expansive imagistic system, while also unveiling an entirely new direction of her practice through her latest experimentations." What Smith-Stewart is referring to here are the artist's "tapestries", referenced above. Some of these are quite large; a decision on the part of the artist, taking into account the dimensions of the exhibition space at the Aldrich. Looking at them placed alongside each other, one attempts to identify a sort of meta-narrative that permeates Knight's work. Upon close inspection, pieces such as *Fantastic Universe (More than You Know)* seem to detail an exodus of sorts, and are littered with what appear to be illustrations of cosmic vehicles. There are glyphs as well, yet these are altogether inscrutable, largely by design. As the artist asserts, her practice is inspired, more than anything else, by "the mysteries and absurdities of life" and that "it's not about deciphering the work or the language, but rather about living with the unknown."



Wayfinder 3 (triptych), 2020, Flashe, acrylic marker, pencil, and embroidery on cotton

Image: Jason Mandella, Courtesy of Karla Knight and Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York

Born in New York City, the American artist views questions concerning her creative journey as being rather broad, and mentions, "I have always made art since I was a child, and always knew I wanted to be an artist. I have worked for 40 years, maintaining my studio practice, and exhibiting my work." She graduated from Rhode Island School of Design in 1980 and saw a lot of exposure in the New York art scene back then. However, Knight would leave for New Mexico in the 90s in order to start a family, only returning to the outside world with her work in the last 10 years. The artist prefers not to be categorised into creative movements, explaining that she is unconcerned with current trends, politics, gender issues etc. Her focus lies in issues otherworldly, just as it has always been. She says, "I see myself as a bridge between worlds, and do not presume to tell people what that might mean."



Big Navigator, 2020-21, Oil, Flashe, and pencil on paper mounted on linen

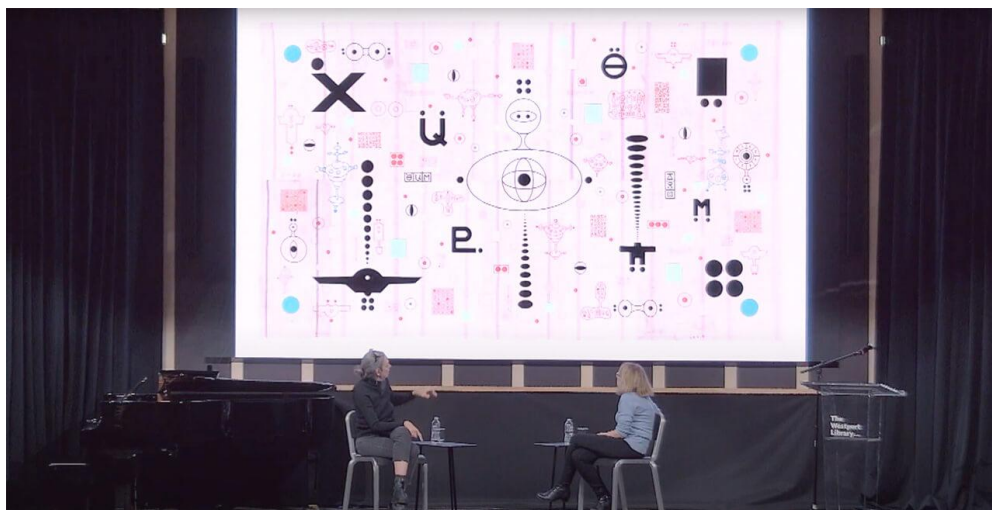
Image: Karla Knight, Courtesy of Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York

Just as Knight is something of a veteran in the art world, so too is the Aldrich's Senior Curator, who organised the show with her. As Smith-Stewart explains, she has organised 39 exhibitions and projects at the museum since 2013, and over 70 exhibitions in museums, collections, galleries and various temporary spaces across the span of her career. She continues, saying "I am also the founder of the eponymous nomadic curatorial project, *Smith-Stewart*, previously located on the Lower East Side in NYC. I began my career as a curator at PS.1 Contemporary Art Center, which has since been renamed MoMA PS1. I have served on faculty at the School of the Visual Arts, MFA Fine Arts department and the Sotheby's Institute of Art's MA Contemporary Art program." One of the future curatorial projects Smith-Stewart is looking forward to undertaking at the Aldrich is *52 Artists: A Feminist Milestone*, which is set to be a show celebrating the anniversary of the historic exhibition *Twenty-Six Contemporary Women Artists*, curated by Lucy R Lippard at the Aldrich in 1971.

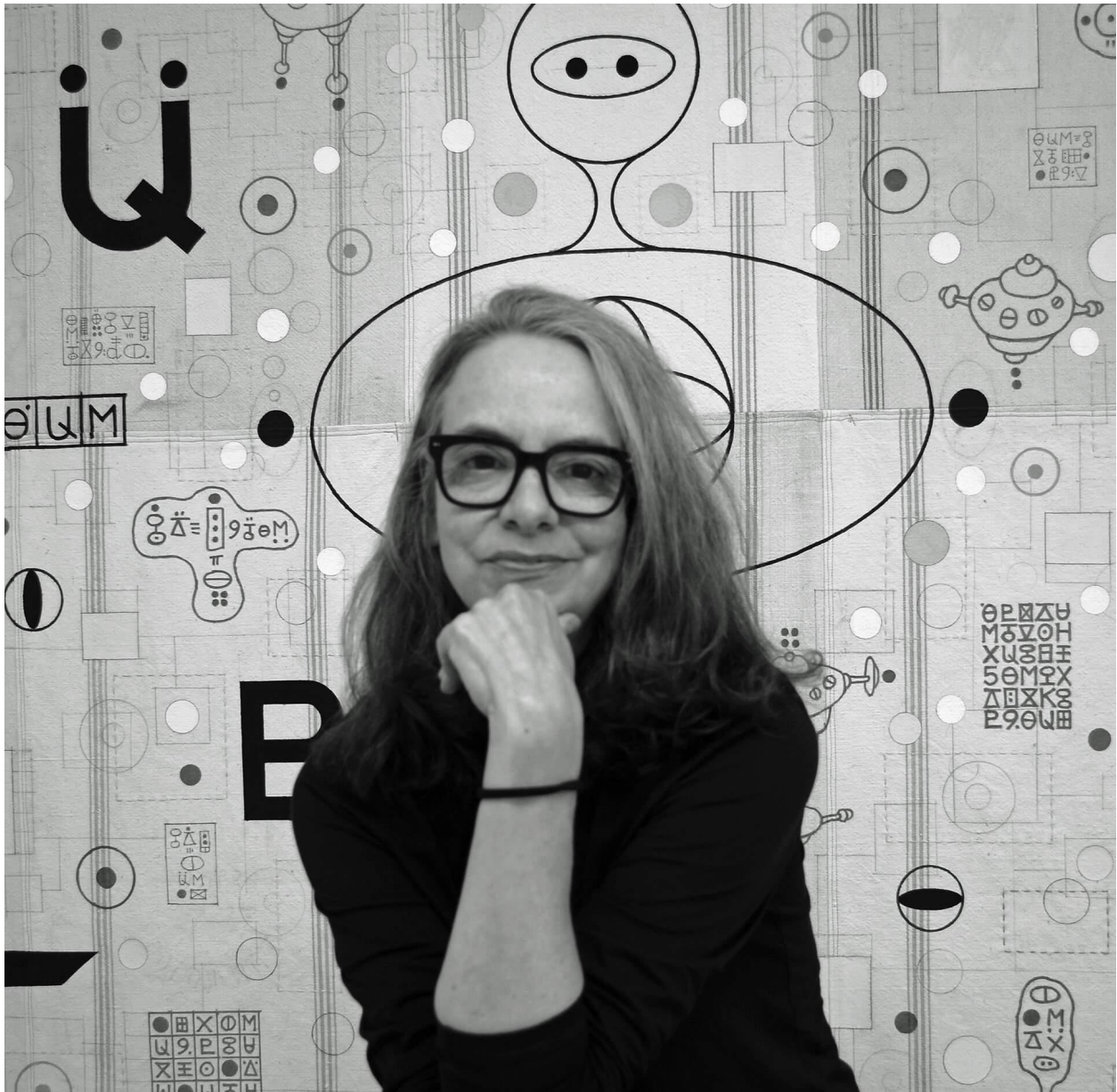


Another image of the exhibition *Image: Jason Mandella*, Courtesy of Karla Knight and Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York

Reflecting on *Karla Knight: Navigator*, Smith-Stewart believes that spending significant periods of time with the work leads one to realise that her vision is unlimited, and that her art, which is hinged on discovery, beams us to loftier realms that alter our perception of time and space forever. Knight herself seems quite happy at being able to exhibit at the Aldrich, and regards the venue highly for its reputation of giving budding artists their first institutional solo exhibitions. During the process of putting together the exhibition, both Knight and Smith-Stewart dug through over 40 years of the artist's work, which must have surely been a wonderfully reflective experience. It is not often that exhibition attendees are able to engage with such a large cross-section of an artist's life's work, and *Karla Knight: Navigator* is sure to delight and inspire visitors; sparking their imaginations and sensitizing them to the possibilities that lie beyond the tangible realms many feel bound to.



Karla Knight and cartoonist Roz Chast's live conversation and Q&A
Video: Courtesy of The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum's YouTube Channel



Artist Karla Knight

Image: Courtesy of Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum

(The exhibition is on view at The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum until May 8, 2022.)