

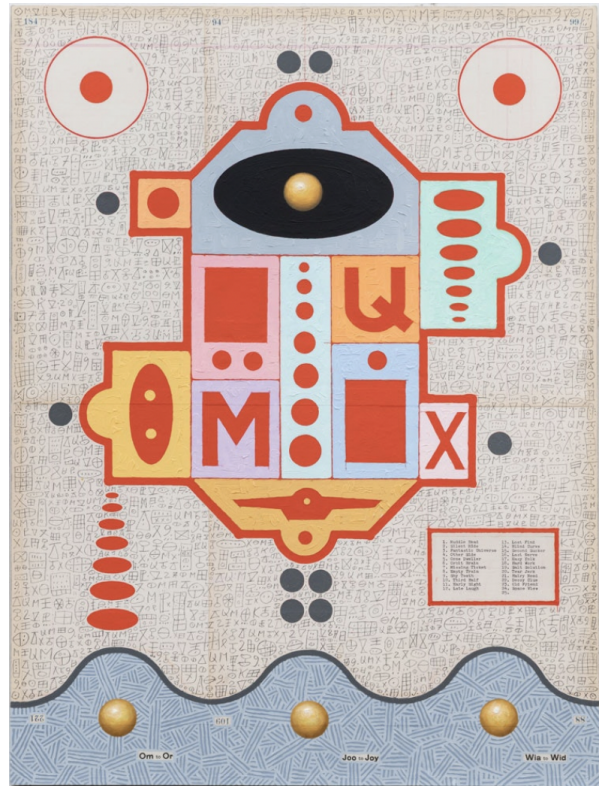
Karla Knight: Road Trip

By Ann McCoy

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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 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

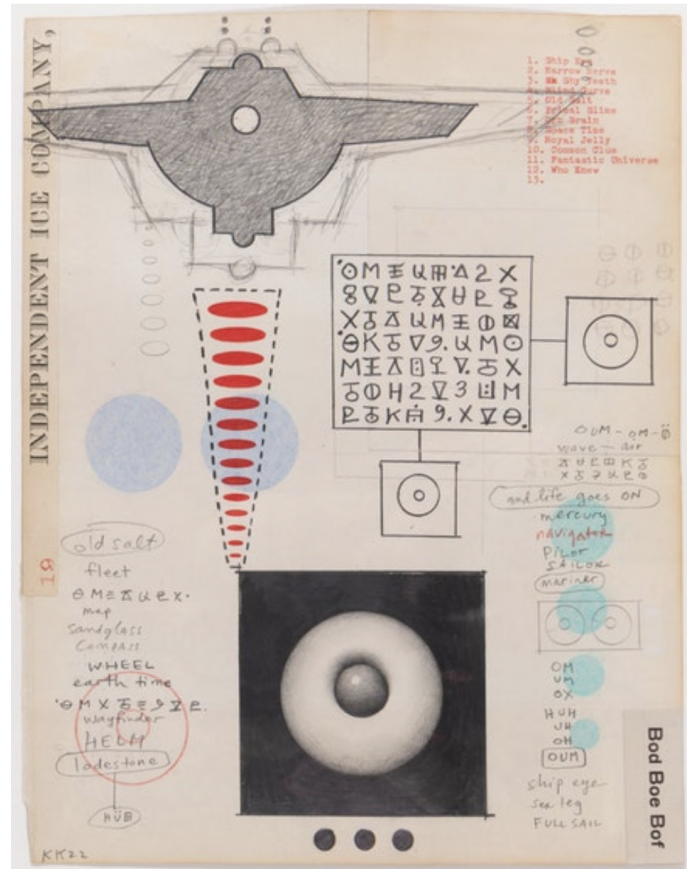


Karla Knight, *Wave 1*, 2022. Oil, flashe, and pencil on paper mounted on linen 31 x 23 inches. Courtesy the artist and Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York.

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 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*.



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.

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.