

Art in America

KIKI KOGELNIK

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SIMONE SUBAL

by anne doran



NEW YORK Austrian-born artist Kiki Kogelnik (1935-1997) was one of a number of women working in the Pop vernacular during the 1960s—others include Dorothy Lannone and Rosalyn Drexler—in whom interest has lately been renewed. None appear more contemporary in their approach than Kogelnik, whose paintings and drawings from 1964 to '70 were the subject of this exhibition. (A larger show, at the Kunstverein Hamburg, similarly focused on Kogelnik's work from the 1960s, closes Dec. 30).

Kogelnik began her career as a gestural painter, showing in Vienna with the likes of Arnulf Rainer. After moving to New York in 1960, she abandoned abstraction, a decision reinforced by encounters and subsequent friendships with heavyweight figures on the burgeoning Pop art scene such as Roy Lichtenstein, Öyvind Fahlström and Claes Oldenburg. By the early 1960s she was making figurative paintings, drawings and assemblages that combine Pop art's immediacy, industrial techniques and materials, as well as concern for Suzi Gablik's "surrogate world of the mass media," with the allusiveness of Dada and Surrealist montage—notably Picabia's mechanomorphic figures—Machine Age idealism and the formalism of European modernist abstraction and design.

Simone Subal Gallery

Among Kogelnik's primary interests were science and technology, including ideas about artificial life and space exploration. She was also intrigued by eros and thanatos, as well as interior and exterior constructions of self, agency and powerlessness. Her layered compositions consist of silhouetted figures and body parts (produced either by tracing the prone bodies of friends or by using the anatomical rubber stamps utilized by physicians and dentists), stencils of tools and machine cogs, and proliferating dots and abstract designs, all deployed to allusive and pictorially complex effect.

One of three paintings in the show (*Atmospheric Drag on Satellite*, 1965), for example, is dominated by a pair of life-size stenciled figures floating against a dappled gray and black background. In the bottom half of the work, a dot pattern is transected by a supergraphic-like band of blue stripes shading from light to dark. On top of this band are two silhouetted disembodied, pale peach-colored arms and a speckling of bright blobs of colored paint. Here, the illusion of depth seems continually on the verge of collapsing into a flat arrangement of forms, attesting to Kogelnik's training as an abstract painter. The canvases were accompanied by a group of 11 wonderful works on paper, such as *Untitled (Robots)*, ca. 1967, in which a hand outlined in bright orange dots seems to be saluting an exodus of identical humanoids, their arms tight against their bodies, streaming into planetary space.

Kogelnik's paintings and drawings, with their fusion of Pop and abstract forms, ambiguous spaces and narratives, now look very up-to-date, with affinities to the figurative work of younger artists such as Anya Kielar or even photographers like Michele Abeles and Talia Chetrit. This Lower East Side gallery, usually devoted to the work of emerging artists, seemed a fitting venue for Kogelnik's art.

Photo: Kiki Kogelnik: Atmospheric Drag on Satellite, 1965, acrylic on canvas, 72 1/8 by 54 inches; at Simone Subal.