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BY CHRIS BYRNE



A Voice Through Drawing

New Zealand artist Susan Te Kahurangi King's monograph
inspires discussion at the New York Art Book Fair.

This September the New York Art Book Fair will host a panel discussion to introduce the monograph *The Drawings of Susan Te Kahurangi King*. The participants will include Gary Panter, Petita Cole, and myself. The publication's editor, Tina Kukielski, will moderate the talk. The book is published by the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami, in conjunction with the artist's first one-person museum exhibition, curated by Kukielski. Produced by Lucia|Marquand in Seattle, the monograph will feature essays by Kukielski and Panter, an interview with the artist's sister, Petita Cole, as well as a contribution by artist Amy Sillman and foreword by the museum's Deputy Director and Chief Curator, Alex Gartenfeld.

Since 2012, King's drawings have been shown at the Outsider Art Fair in New York and Paris, the Andrew Edlin Gallery in New York as well as the Robert Heald Gallery in Wellington, New Zealand. Gary Panter introduced me to King's work, and I was enthused to meet the artist during my first trip to New Zealand. By then Ed Marquand and I had already exhibited a chronological sampling of her sketchbooks at the Outsider Art Fair in Paris. Even before having the opportunity to examine the artist's entire archive, I was convinced that King was among the greatest draftspersons and image-makers. Yet nothing could have prepared me for the breadth and depth of the drawings I encountered. It was often possible to find visual lists of certain objects, which get reconfigured and distorted beyond recognition in subsequent pictures.

During my visit, Susan drew almost constantly each day, only

breaking to silently socialize with her family during meals and excursions. It was at this time I also became familiar with her personal story: She was born in 1951 in Te Aroha, New Zealand, and was raised with eleven siblings on the North Island. "Te Kahurangi" literally translated means "the treasured one" and Susan's father—an editor by trade—taught the Maori language and had a great passion for the people, devoting long hours to independent research.

Susan's earliest works share the same qualities as other children's drawings, save for their exceptional precocity. Sometime between the ages of four and nine years, she gradually stopped speaking—not suddenly or abruptly, but over a period when she would still occasionally hum or sing while she drew. Eventually the King family moved to the North Shore of Auckland for her education. (She currently lives with her sister Wendy.)

Susan ceased drawing for a 20-year period, when with the encouragement of her mother and siblings she resumed again in 2008, picking up nearly where she left off. I admire the artist's extended family—beginning with her maternal grandmother Myrtle Murphy—who has dedicated themselves to caring for her and preserving not only her work, but also the anecdotes and artifacts which will become so important for future scholarship. Susan's isolation from verbal and written communication has allowed her to methodically create an entire analogous world through her work. Each of my viewings has been a revelation, opening up different vistas with their own vocabularies and internal logic. **P**

Susan Te Kahurangi King, *Untitled*, c. 1975–1980, Graphite, colored pencil, and crayon on paper, 17 x 21.25 in., A127. Courtesy of the artist and Chris Byrne.