

KNOX MARTIN

Knox Martin's work is in numerous collections, including the Whitney Museum of American Art, Museum of Modern Art, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Art Students League of New York, Brooklyn Museum of Art, National Academy of Design, National Arts Club, New York University, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, New York State Museum, Montclair Art Museum, Art Institute of Chicago, Baltimore Museum of Art, Berkeley Art Museum, Boca Raton Museum of Art, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Denver Art Museum, Heckscher Museum of Art, Ithaca Museum, Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art, Lowe Art Museum, Oklahoma City Museum of Art, Portland Art Museum, Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art, Springfield Art Museum, Toledo Museum of Art, Weatherspoon Art Museum, Wellesley College, William Benton Museum of Art, Israel Museum and the Bibliotheque Nationale. In 2002 Knox Martin was named to the National Academy of Design.

Born in South America in 1923, son of William K. Martin (aviator, painter, poet, first man to fly over the Andes), Knox, as a child, lived across the street from the Hispanic Museum at 155th Street where he copied etchings and drawings by Goya. He studied at The Art Students League, later taught at Yale Graduate School of the Arts, first as visiting critic in art and then as Professor of Art, taught at New York University, at the University of Minnesota, and the International School of Art in Umbria, Italy, and is in "Who's Who in America"; he now gives master classes at the Art Students League. Knox has received an NEA Grant, Pollock-Krasner Grant, Gottlieb Grant, CAPS Grant, and Longview Fellowship. He was in the Navy in WWII and served as a shield and rescue flotilla on the 83500 sub-chaser's first wave at Omaha Beach in Normandy.

It had been many decades since *Los Caprichos* initially fascinated Knox Martin. Reviewing the artist's first solo show at the Charles Egan Gallery for the New York Times in 1954, Stuart Preston wrote: "It is in his ecstatic pen and brush drawings of women that Martin shows himself to be a draftsman of exceptional power and assurance; some are hastily done, but even the most lively scribbles throb with a particular intensity, both visual and sensational, that causes one to remember that Spanish warmth counts a lot for him, and that the blood of Goya is in his veins." Arthur Danto organized a panel on contemporary painting at Columbia University: "I remember ... Knox Martin delivering a surprising speech, of nearly religious intensity, on the continuity of great painting in a tradition going back to Velasquez and Titian."

In 1955 Willem de Kooning sent Meyer Schapiro to Knox's studio to see his *Concert in the Park*. Schapiro understood that the artist's latest canvas complemented his more metaphorical work, and left with the friendly warning: "Don't neglect this side." Willem de Kooning said: "Knox, your work has a snooty look about it I haven't seen outside of Matisse!" [The American Heritage Dictionary has an alternate definition of snooty as: proud, feeling of self-respect, or pleasure in something by which you measure your self-worth]

Knox Martin is the noted geometric abstractionist and has been active in New York City where one of his pieces is a huge mural on the wall of the Bayview Correctional Facility on West 19th Street. The mural, conspicuous for its size [10 stories!] and beauty, has often been used on post cards. Not surprisingly, advertisers call from time to time with proposals to lease the wall for commercial messages, but Bayview Correctional doesn't want its beautiful *Venus* "covered with beer or jeans ad". Besides, it's state property.

When I visited Knox's studio-living space [cramped and crowded, filled with marvelous artworks, volumes and volumes of art and art history books, plus pets] and saw numerous pencil drawings of plant life, flowers, and floral designs for his proposed twenty-four 16'x12' series, I knew his "new paradigm, a poetry of new space" was exactly right for his mature inventiveness, his "alteration of reality to a watershed of creativity ... the subject matter of what I do is creation". Blossoms, leaves, stems, pistils, stigmas, stamens, etc., are arranged in spatial order. The natural shapes take on almost geometric intensity with gestural expressiveness, yet with a drive for clarity and concreteness and hard contours. At the same time there are shifting recurrences; "random" Knox says, but they have the look of almost mathematical precision within the compositions as though they are disparities, or even aberrants, in the Golden Section. I impatiently look forward to Knox's strategic use of "color - pistachio, raspberry, banana ... festive, and impudent" (Arthur Danto) in works characteristic of his distinct forms that emerge from intense hues placed close against one another.

Like the Renaissance rediscovery of nature that began with their garlands and festoons of fruit, flowers, and vases filled with blossoms, Knox Martin, master draftsman,* succeeds in inducing a strong visual response that aims at emotional and spiritual pleasure, a fundamental condition for experience and ingenuity. It is heartening that a poetic, thoughtful, erudite, and painterly mind is at work in our time. The crisis of attention in the accelerating changes of technology and the industrialization of our visual culture with its mass consumption, perceptual disintegration, and loss of presence, make Knox's huge nature-energy-blossoming "poetry of new space" and bright vision, a necessity.

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"Anyone interested in drawing should see this exhibition of drawings by Knox Martin; he is his own man!" - Hilton Kramer [New York Times]

"This is the greatest drawing I have ever seen!" - Stanley Boxer [Signaling out a drawing by Knox at the Ingber Galley]

"Knox, you are the spirit of art!" - Peter Golfinopoulos

Immanuel Kant maintained that the beautiful consists in "pure disinterested delight"; he argued that when we are gazing at an object we do not consider its beauty a mere assertion of taste and we do not give emphasis to the relative aspects of our experience or the cultural moment of our mood. Instead, beauty is felt to be universal, beyond the reach of time and fashion or individual whim; the judgment of beauty carries an assertion of authority. Something universal has been established.

Or, as Willem de Kooning said: "Knox, your work has a snooty look about it...!"

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Knox Martin with one of his many sketchbooks.



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