

ART SPIEL

Reflections on the work of contemporary artists

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Objects from the End of Western Civilisation at Norte Maar



Kevin Curran, Objects from the End of Western Civilisation

All Photos courtesy of the artist and Norte Maar Cypress Hills Gallery

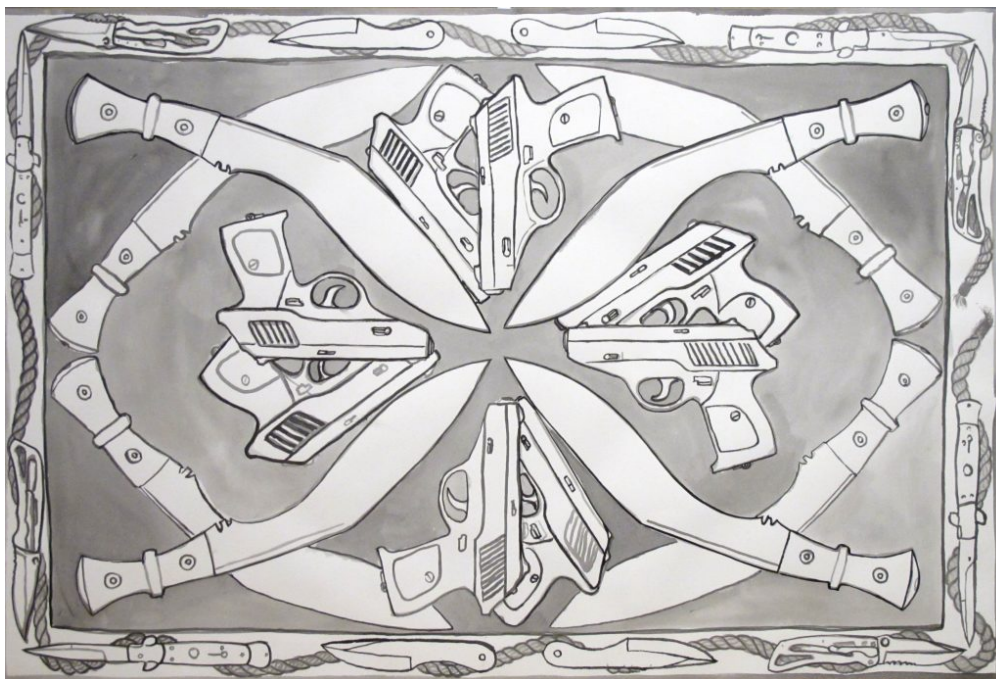
In his exhibition at [Norte Maar](#) Cypress Hills gallery, [Kevin Curran](#) uses interior design elements as a departure point for an installation – combining wallpaper, rugs, vases, framed works on paper, wall-mounted and free standing sculptures. His surfaces merge opulent materials like crystals and gold leaf, with rough-hewn casual aesthetic. This exhibition includes drawings that refer to Afghan war rugs as well as political tensions in the US. The symmetry of rug design paired with natural and man made forces of destruction highlights the fine line between an

orderly society and chaos. The imagery brings together a little boy's enthusiasm for rockets, trucks and guns with the perspective of an adult's anxiety driven by real world events.

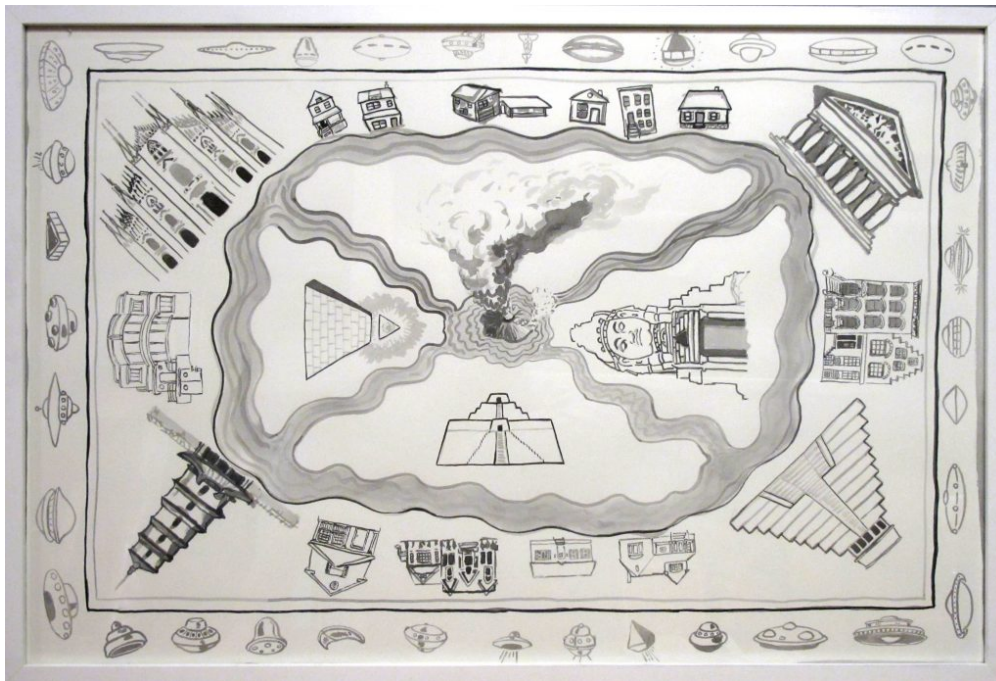
AS: You are using the language of interior design as a starting point to create installations – can you tell me about the genesis of your process?

Kevin Curran: The first two jobs I had in New York were involved with interior design. The first job was as a sales assistant at a furniture showroom in the New York Design Center making copies, updating prices and fielding angry phone calls. Occasionally I would cover for one of the salespeople and work with a designer and their client on customizing designs for their home. I started flipping through "Elle Decor" and "Architectural Digest". I lasted about four months, then started doing art placement and installation for a company that had a broad clientele – private collectors, hospitals, offices, hotels, really anywhere you could imagine a picture being hung. But mostly we worked with interior designers during the last phase of their project at someone's home. So I was seeing how objects, surfaces, and light fixtures are valued and become expressive within a domestic context, how a language of display is meant to convey intellectual curiosity and sophistication. What really struck me was how all of the things in a home are orchestrated to create a look, an identity.

All this time I was also teaching art history classes at university. As an artist I am very interested in the question of what things are canonized, how certain artworks are chosen to embody a new direction or a movement. There is perhaps a closer relationship between art history and interior design than many would like to admit – both are selecting things and placing them within a framework, context, or value system.



Kevin Curran, Objects from the End of Western Civilisation



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AS: I am curious to know more about how you edit your imagery and how you chose to juxtapose it – like Afghan war rugs paired with natural and man-made forces of destruction, for example?

Kevin Curran: I especially like learning about the history of architecture, painting, and sculpture, but also what has happened in my lifetime. There is the short and familiar scale of one's own life, and the need to place that in a larger context – I like how different images play off one another and how the baggage they carry resonates.

Those rug designs create a visual puzzle where all the pieces fit together formally, but also play off one another conceptually. A lot of the imagery depicts institutional structures – like government or religious buildings, military equipment. The other imagery depicts either specific personal elements- such as the house I grew up in, the way I drew monster trucks in elementary school, or generic elements – such as a sailboat, an airplane, a house. It is about the balance between the big impersonal forces that shape our world, and the idiosyncratic aspects of personal experience. So the church or the government, though bitterly contested within, feel out of our control, like a lightning bolt, a big wave, or a forest fire. I like how these drawings resemble little self contained worlds, shaped by the forces within- like a mandala in a way.

AS: Can you tell me a bit about *Objects from the End of Western Civilisation* (with an “s”:) how the idea evolved, your process, and your decision making along the way?

Kevin Curran: I am thinking of how many of the spaces I saw that were conceived by people with their interior designers were laden with history. The moment we are living through now seems like an ending, though I suppose there is a long streak of apocalyptic freak out in American culture dating back to the beginning. Now it is expressed in dystopian sci-fis like “Black Mirror”, or “The Walking Dead”.

The thin veneer of civilized society seems so precarious, so easily stripped away. The government is supposed to be this amazing democratic achievement but it is responsible for so much destruction, whether through indifference and neglect or through coordinated and reckless violence. The monsters in the wallpaper for me are about a loss of control, the animal overtaking the human.

There is a British streak in the origins of our constitution and government. In a way we originated from and surpassed the British empire. I like how Civilisation with an "s" points at that history, our close cousins whose delusions of empire were disabused not too long ago. I also think that spelling has a bit more panache.



Kevin Curran, Kevin Curran, Objects from the End of Western Civilisation



Kevin Curran, *Objects from the End of Western Civilisation*



Kevin Curran, *Objects from the End of Western Civilisation*

forms part of our identity. So the drawings and sculptures should play off one another and I enjoy the creative process of setting up those relationships.

AS: Are they found or made / manipulated objects – can you give me a brief story behind them?

Kevin Curran: I generally work with existing imagery and objects. I am interested in how objects are imbued with value, and in the line between the mundane and the rarefied. The distinctions between art, craft, and design are on my mind too. There is a piece in the show called “Painting” which is actually a felt throw pillow, like you might find on a sofa. It is based on an Ellsworth Kelly painting. His work is up on a pedestal, a sophisticated piece of fine art which is out of reach, but I want to hug that painting and rest my head on it. I want to close the distance. The vases are kind of like that too. I paint on the inside or outside of glass vases from the 99 cent store. I want to transform that mass produced vase into something more specific, associated with hand made things. I carved the astronauts out of foam, but they are based on an existing image that I modified, usually slightly chubbier versions of Hellenistic or catholic art. It is about the climactic moment, bursting the bubble of the heroic narrative. I think it is good to have a sense of humor about aesthetic and historical value, to play near the lines of demarcation between high/ low or expensive/ cheap.



Kevin Curran, Objects from the End of Western Civilisation

AS: How do you see this installation in context of your previous work?

Kevin Curran: Mixing up craft, design and art historical value judgments is an ongoing concern. I want to set my work in a domestic context within the gallery because I want the work to feel lived with.

AS: Would you like to share on what you are currently working ?

Kevin Curran: I am making a latch hook rug with 60,000 threads based on one of designs in my show, the big one with the castle at the bottom, a government building, the church I grew up attending and my house and those snakes slithering around.

Kevin Curran is an artist and curator who has shown his work in New York, Philadelphia, and Tokyo. He founded The Laundromat Gallery in Bushwick in 2008, and later was a co-founder of Airplane Gallery in Bushwick. He grew up in upstate New York and Northern California with his seven siblings. Curran attended college at the State University of New York in Oneonta, and earned his MFA at the Tyler School of Art. He taught sculpture, art history, and drawing for many years in Tokyo at Temple University's Japan campus, and at School of Visual Arts in New York. Today he lives in Glendale, Queens with his wife and daughter

Kevin Curran: Objects From the End of Western Civilisation

Cypress Hills, Brooklyn – Norte Maar On view thru Feb 25

Hours: Weekends, 12-6pm

Hours: Weekends 12-6pm | and by appointment

Directions:

Norte Maar, 88 Pine Street, Cypress Hills, Brooklyn

JZ Train to Brooklyn. Crescent Street Stop

 **EXHIBITION REVIEW**

ART EXHIBITION, BROOKLYN ART, BUSHWICK ART, INSTALLATION ART, KEVIN CURRAN, NORTE MAAR