

William King is a pivotal figure in contemporary American sculpture. Emerging in 1950s New York under the aegis of Abstract Expressionism, King's poignant, often satirical, figurative work was a subversively egalitarian alternative to the Ab Ex – Pop – Minimalist juggernaut. Alongside his Cooper Union/10th Street contemporaries Lois Dodd, Alex Katz, Lester Johnson, Charles Cajori and Red Grooms, King proffered a socially astute and stylized realism that was both archetypically of its time and deliciously out of favor. Although King and his circle received due attention, particularly among critics and peers, this never erased the impression that their work was not the vanguard; that it was, at best, a respectable if ancillary endeavor. As with most received truths, this is open to reevaluation.

In retrospect, inattention presented opportunities that allowed for the development of coherent and expansive individual styles. Not that the canonical artists with their higher profiles did not develop distinctive styles—they did—but rather the scrutiny their art received put significant constraints on their output, constraints Bill King blissfully avoided.

Today it is the very unfamiliarity of King's work that is one of its greatest assets. Lack of familiarity is transformative, turning King's work into a novel and revealing lens through which to view the work of Figurative sculptors like Thomas Houseago or Aaron Curry, Rebecca Warren, Ugo Rondinone, or Huma Bhabha. This is an interesting exercise. These younger artists in their invocation of modernist, classical and archaic styles, caricature and comic gesture, high art and folk art, pathos and cheerful indifference, all find fissile precedent in the sculpture of William King.

William King was born in Florida in 1925 and grew up in Coconut Grove near Miami. Moving to New York in 1945 he attended Cooper Union. Upon graduating in 1948, King spent the summer at the Skowhegan School (where he continued to teach) and in 1950 took a Fulbright Grant to Rome. While at Cooper, King found inspiration in the 1948 posthumous retrospective of Elie Nadelman organized by Lincoln Kirsten at the Museum of Modern Art. Nadelman's radical stylization, interest in folk art and attraction to the vocabulary of social interaction proved transformational. (When a sculpture King made of Nadelman appeared in Art News attracting Nadelman's widow's attention, she asked Kirsten to contact King. Rather than the intended reprimand, Kirsten and Ms. Nadelman asked King to complete several unfinished Nadelman sculptures.)

Beginning in the early 1950s William King showed with the Alan Gallery, run by the legendary dealer Edith Halpert's director Charles Alan. After the Alan gallery folded in the late 1960s, King continued to exhibit with Terry Dintenfass well into the 1980s. The artist is the recipient of awards from the National Endowment for the Arts and received the International Sculpture Center Lifetime

Achievement Award (2007). King is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and was President of the National Academy of Design between 1994 and 1998. He has received honorary doctorates from The California College of Arts and Crafts, The San Francisco Arts Institute, The Corcoran School of Art and the University of Florida. King's work is in the collection of the Guggenheim Museum, Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Los Angeles County Museum, Metropolitan Museum and Whitney Museum, among many others.

William King lives with his wife, the painter Connie Fox, in East Hampton, NY.

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