nto the gap. This new framing
the star—but also a digression,

—*Cassie Packard*

ness; the terminal tongue in
nes, and cruelty: I can under-
bullet into Andy Warhol. In
Podber sent one through his
nroe. Later, Valerie Solanis
rcing his lungs, liver, esopha-
-compulsive documentarian,
amine freak, and all-around
ut she mortally wounded his
nted for Christmas, she'd say

's universe. Yet Berlin (1939–
nong the best (and worst) of
lous upbringing on Manhat-
hter of staunch right-winger
e onetime president and chief
and Muriel "Honey" Berlin,
rs trying to change her over-
d-thin, high-society good girl
ng her off to fat camps. And
own, she never quite shed her
a lifelong Republican and a
g to her obituary in the *New*
ld Trump's ascension to the

zed by Alison M. Gingeras,
e survey of the artist's work
dlepoint pillows, and Berlin's
e with her breasts), bolstered
tos, assorted tchotchkes, let-
gerie of dog collars for her
a, and Whoopi). The exhibi-
her artists, such as Francesco

Clemente, Scott Covert, and Jane Kaplowitz, lending the show a uniquely affectionate dimension.

Some of the more recherché offerings on view included a healing crystal that Warhol carried around during the 1980s in a shoe-polish bag from the Watergate Hotel in Washington, DC; a reliquary containing "Factory dust" taken from the studio's final location at 22 East Thirty-Third Street, before the building was torn down in 2009; a beautifully illustrated correspondence from Ray Johnson; and a May 19, 1958, letter to Berlin's mother and father from one A. Jobin, the director of a Swiss boarding school, describing an incident in which their daughter got a little drunk, couldn't get to the bathroom in time, and made a "mess on the carpet beside [her] bed." (Jobin concludes this embarrassing missive on an even more humiliating note, mentioning that, despite everything, Brigid still managed to "[lose] weight during the past week and now weighs 94 kilos.")

While the artist cultivated an antagonistic persona (she often played an unrepentant bitch in Warhol's movies, and John Waters once characterized her as being "ornery as hell"), there is an undeniable vulnerability to a lot of Berlin's art. It's easy to get caught up in the more starry, sensationalistic aspects of her oeuvre: Take the *Topical Bible (Cock Book)*, ca. 1960s–70s, an exhaustive compendium of dick pictures, among them those executed by Cecil Beaton, Jane Fonda, and Donald Judd; or the untitled album of Polaroids in which the artist documents herself having sex with an unidentified man. Considering the chilly, restrictive atmosphere of her youth, a need for self-exposure and intimacy seems palpable in all her work.

After Warhol was shot, he had to wear medical corsets for the rest of his life to keep his body properly aligned. Berlin dyed them in a range of sprightly hues—perhaps it was her way of trying to "touch" a man who seemed to dislike human contact and, like her mother, was often disparaging of her. In one of the show's vitrines was an assortment of men's briefs, colored in a similar palette by the artist—a gift to her friend and former lover Rob Vaczy. Next to the underwear was a handwritten note from Berlin, which begins I DYED FOR ANDY / I DYE FOR YOU—an unequivocally doting gesture from Her Satanic Majesty.

—*Alex Jovanovich*

Jane Dickson

KARMA

In New York's Times Square, value can be measured in watts and lumens. At night, the streets and the people on them are irradiated by colossal video screens, electric signs, and spotlit billboards—desperate pleas for our attention . . . and money. Even during the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic, when the sidewalks were mostly empty, the lights remained on, flooding the desolate terrain with advertising. In the late 1970s and early 1980s—when the area was crudely lit by the neon signs and fluorescent marquees of bars, pornographic theaters, and sex shops—Jane Dickson made this nightscape her primary subject. From her perch in the office behind the massive Spectacolor light board at One Times Square, where she worked the graveyard shift, or her loft window around the corner on West Forty-Third Street, Dickson observed the activity below, taking photographs and making sketches that formed the basis of her earliest canvases.

For the recent paintings exhibited across two of Karma's three East Village galleries, Dickson has been revisiting her decades-old photographs, producing a new body of work that homes in on the inadvertent poetry of commercial signage. A trio of tall, slim paintings of the Empire Theater's marquee—*Kung Fu Hits Horse Cops 2*, *Empire Always Great*, and *Rage* (all works 2023)—bridge her early and recent

Jane Dickson, *Kung Fu Hits Horse Cops 2*, 2023, acrylic and eggshell on linen, 72⅛ × 35⅝".

representations of Times Square. There are still remnants of passersby: Two threatening cops on horseback trot by a pair of men in furtive conversation, four workers update the sign with new titles, and a solitary man pickets us with a placard that reads REPENT THE END IS NEAR. But the artist's drastic vantage points and severe cropping foregrounds the words on the marquee, which function as warnings, or even as a form of captioning: HITS hangs above the officers, a neon EMPIRE glimmers like a beacon over the sign-changers on their ladder, and RAGE hovers over the doomsayer. Each scene is suffused with an artificially blue light, which Dickson creates using a washy acrylic flecked with shattered eggshells, heightening the undercurrent of violence.

In other works, Dickson plays with the ambiguity and duplicity of marketing language. What is "promised" by the roadside billboard in *Promised Land 2*—fittingly displayed in the gallery's storefront window—is not paradise, but fast cash in exchange for the house you can no longer afford. *Bargain*, a luminous, seemingly backlit painting on royal-blue felt of a sign festooned with plastic carlot flags, seems to ask what is gained in any deal, and what, of course, is lost. In *Save Time 2*, a Laundromat's orange neon encourages customers to drop and go, but it also reminds us how artists preserve time in pictures.

Dickson regularly applies traditional painting techniques, like chiaroscuro and scumbling, to atypical substrates, including Astroturf, carpet, sandpaper, and vinyl. For some of the works here, she deftly used acrylic on canvas-mounted felt to reproduce softer, diffuse light; for others she deployed oil-stick on linen, often prepared with a black ground, to achieve the flickering radiance of neon. The latter approach is especially evident in *Universal Unisex*, an after-hours view of a nearly empty hair salon and the most Hopperesque picture in the show. With their texture-derived soft focus and disorienting perspectives, Dickson's paintings are intoxicating—especially the larger ones. *Sizzlin' Chicken*, a hazy rendering on paint-saturated olive-green felt depicting a scene outside a fast-food joint, actually *looks* drunk.

At times, Dickson's seductive surfaces belie her subject matter. *School Girls* shows us that skin-flicks like *That's My Daughter* once played on West Forty-Second Street, an area that is now a family destination with its big-box stores, Disney adaptations, and immersive candy shop experiences. The "architecture of distraction," as the artist called it recently, still predominates. *Up Against the Wall*, a loose rendering in oil stick of two cops frisking three men—who certainly do not appear to be white—in a subway station is, regrettably, more timeless. Although Dickson first painted this image in 1981, the scene is still painfully familiar: It could be playing out anywhere in the city at any moment. Together, these works suggested how Dickson resists the trappings of nostalgia, even as she revisits old images: by acknowledging that the past is as knotty and difficult as the present, and that neither is more "authentic" than the other.

—*Chris Murtha*

Ken Kiff

ALBERTZ BENDA

Despite the fact that Ken Kiff
his paintings are unequivocally
and absurd, far from any notio
a modernist in the mode of Pa
their aesthetic eloquence and
crude and coarse, and his pal
nance and insistence of the wo
one may classify them stylistic
as he himself frequently ackn
works, such as *Yellow Woman*
(Serenade), late 1970s; *Untitl*
and *Woman Watching a Mu*
women. All of these pieces wer
world: Ken Kiff in Dialogue,"
output that featured contrib
Dingle and Ken Gun Min—pa
similarly unfettered field.

Perversion, from the Latin
wrong way, or deviating fron
course to satisfy some deep-sea
ings convey an aberrant state
male artist, of course—but wh
age-old, is his idealization of
or reluctant Kiff's women may
cal modernist view, which is pa
disfigurations of his female sul

Sometimes Kiff's women ar
on-canvas *Goddess in Street (*
divinity, pink breasts erupting
her tongue out at the viewer. N
mocking our inhibitions while
dity of her own body and M
women are radiantly at ease,
Goddess, Attendant and Cloa
the center of her own verdant

Kiff, whose wife was a psy