

Marianna Lee  
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Can I be a kid again?  
The Temple of Apollo- Voyage to the Bombay Sapphire Sea

Karen Kilimnik's technique of brushstrokes, colors, and scale play a significant role in *The Temple of Apollo- Voyage to the Bombay Sapphire Sea*. She provides a nostalgic feeling through contradicting disturbance and comfort with romance in her piece. The art piece is water-soluble oil on canvas measured at 9 x 13 inches.<sup>1</sup> *The Temple of Apollo* whisks the viewer into another world, drumming up personal narratives and emotions tied to certain objects. Elephants symbolize luck and prosperity. The elephant in the canvas is significant because it is leading the people on its back to a new pathway. There is disturbance with starting fresh and going to something new, but the elephant can be a way that it is something to look forward to. Kilimnik's work may have a comfort feeling given that some believe her work has an image that maybe a young child might have created the art piece. Kilimnik uses her skills to help grasp the viewer into a storyline taking them away from reality through the contradictions of disturbance and romance.

Kilimnik's selective choice of color helps to deepen the message behind her skills contradicting negativity and maturing into something worthwhile. The glowing baby blue helps to create a fantasy-like image where it blends in with white, brown, peach, as well as different other colors along the canvas. The peach from the flag creates a bold statement being one of the many bright colors that pop out and make it stand out from the others. The reflectiveness of the white on the top of the canvas makes it have a bright scenery making that pleasing and light to the eye. Rather, if Kilimnik were to use a darker color for the sky, it would come off more harsh. These colors are important when looking into a piece such as this one. If the colors were to be more dark and have negative emotions connected to them, you wouldn't get the intimate feeling of nostalgia and reassurance.

Karen Kilimnik is an American artist born in Philadelphia in 1955. She studied at Temple University in Philadelphia, where she currently works and lives today.<sup>2</sup> Her production of artwork is widely impacted by the ideas of both mass and high culture including George Stubbs, English painter, all the way to The Avengers and pop music forcing distinctions between her own

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<sup>1</sup> Karen Kilimnik, *The Temple of Apollo---Voyage to the Bombay Sapphire Sea*, 2022. Water-soluble oil on canvas, 9 x 13 inches (22.9 x 33 cm). © Karen Kilimnik. Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Eva Presenhuber and Sprüth Magers. Photo: Christopher Burke, Shoot Art.

<sup>2</sup> "Karen Kilimnik at Sprüth Magers, Grafton St., London." GalleriesNow.net. Accessed July 24, 2023. <https://www.galleriesnow.net/shows/karen-kilimnik-5/>.

confliction of cultural influence and production.<sup>3</sup> Cultural influence is important because it helps to define people's perspective on life and values. Forcing a distinction between the two connects to Kilimnik's work by not glorifying something that may be negative in the viewer's perspective, but turning it into something positive and/or not as disturbing as it truly is. Kilimnik does a good job glorifying something that may be viewed negatively into something that has potential to be good. As mentioned before, the change of going down a different route may be scary and uncomfortable. It seems as so in this painting, the elephant, signifying new beginnings and good luck, is carrying many travelers on its back and guiding them to an unknown destination.

The first initial thought when looking at this painting was about the size. Compared to the other paintings in the gallery, this was the smallest one; it almost looks like a toddler could have created the piece. Not only was the size an initial thought, but the painting gave a sense of a comfort feeling. The symbol of elephants and the gondola also connect back to Kilimnik's work of comparing disturbance and comfort with romance. A gondola in the water, where in many cities is a romantic gesture and a place to get away for a while without distractions. There is also a temple-like building structure painted faintly to make it look more distant than everything happening "up close."

The idea of brushstrokes and scale play a significant role in Kilimnik's work, and for this particular art piece, sentimentality exists where the storyline seems to be coming out of a fairytale or that it is fictional. Sentimentality and nostalgia is connected by connotation and emotions tied back to a reason and personal association. By incorporating sizing into an art piece such as this one, the viewer can get captured into another world and start to build ideas and narratives based on personal experiences or emotions and feelings tied to certain objects. In this particular piece, a fantasy of sensation is gained from this light contrast of colors from subjects throughout the canvas. Multiple people riding an elephant, a gondola sailing in the water nearby, and a temple distant and looming out of the water. These all have importance within the canvas by signifying leaving something in your past and following a new journey. By the loose brushstrokes, the painting picks up a cinematic scenery of an image that was shot and reimagined in a way that is more optimistic and understanding.

Most of Kilimnik's work is known to have a fantasy-like feeling and image portrayed on her canvas. A quote from *Sprueth Magers* will explain more in context the meaning behind why most of Kilimnik's work is the way it is. "The worlds she creates simultaneously draw from major events, a recurring series for example of maps that color in the boundaries of shifting territories across war in the twentieth century, to more general themes such as English country houses, Delftware or fairies. Often her paintings and drawings come to inhabit carefully produced stage sets, theatrical environments that viewers can experience as though part of the

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<sup>3</sup> "Karen Kilimnik." Sprüth Magers, July 21, 2023. <https://spruethmagers.com/artists/karen-kilimnik/>.

artist's self-contained worlds, that bear a similarity to early installations."<sup>4</sup> It seems as Kilimnik creates her own setting onto her canvas which explains why her work is envisioned as “unreal” or a fantasy.

With such a small canvas, it becomes more intimate where the viewer imagines themselves in the painting. This quote from the *New York Times* does a great job digging deeper into Kilimnik's choices for the scaling of her artworks. “Her scatter pieces might be described as set-up photography in the manner of Sherman and Laurie Simmons — only without the photography. They can seem laughably slight on first glance, resembling failed attempts at store-window dressing, make-believe, homemade stage sets by a theater-crazed child or a teenage girl's messy room. But once you start examining them bit by bit, you can find yourself engrossed by their elaborate collisions of narratives and the poignant sense of longing for contact, beauty and happiness that animate them.”<sup>5</sup> This connects to Kilimnik providing a nostalgic feeling through contradicting disturbance and comfort with romance in her piece. This is because the piece suggests an explanation for why her canvas may be small for some artworks and may seem like a child created it. It is a gateway for the viewer to examine the emotions connected within the artwork through subjects and deeper messages connected to heartening memories from the past.



Karen Kilimnik, *The Temple of Apollo---Voyage to the Bombay Sapphire Sea*, 2022. Water-soluble oil on canvas, 9 x 13 inches (22.9 x 33 cm). © Karen Kilimnik. Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Eva Presenhuber and Sprüth Magers. Photo: Christopher Burke, Shoot Art.

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<sup>4</sup> “Karen Kilimnik.” Sprüth Magers, July 21, 2023. <https://spruethmagers.com/artists/karen-kilimnik/>.

<sup>5</sup> Smith, Roberta. “Karen Kilimnik: Finding Meaning in Scatteredness.” *The New York Times*, June 1, 2007. <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/01/arts/01iht-klim.1.5955476.html>.

Kilimnik brings the viewer back to a carefree time: remembering the feeling of what it was like to be a kid. The elephant signifies opening life to different and new possibilities, taking the travelers to a pathway, while leaving room for memories. Kilimnik's cultural influence helps create *The Temple of Apollo- Voyage to the Bombay Sapphire Sea*, helping the viewer remember their past and reminding them to let go of it.

## Bibliography

1. Karen Kilimnik, *The Temple of Apollo---Voyage to the Bombay Sapphire Sea*, 2022. Water-soluble oil on canvas, 9 x 13 inches (22.9 x 33 cm). © Karen Kilimnik. Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Eva Presenhuber and Sprüth Magers. Photo: Christopher Burke, Shoot Art.
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