

TEMPLON



ROBIN KID

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ROBIN KID's Nostalgic Vision of the American Dream

"Searching For America" at TEMPLON NYC is a wide-eyed, provocative and sometimes offensive journey through many different Americas, from the one that creates to the one that destroys.

By [Elisa Carollo](#) · 10/03/24 6:26pm



"Searching For America" marks ROBIN KID's first solo show at TEMPLON NYC. ©ROBIN KID, Courtesy the artist

Working at the intersection of cultural and personal memories, multidisciplinary autodidact artist [Robin Kid](#) (THE KID) explores the impact of American culture, mass media and the disillusioned promise of "happiness" carried by the American dream in "Searching For America" at TEMPLON NYC. It's a personal endeavor in which he interrogates what America represents today compared to the idealized image created by the media during childhood—and more specifically, his childhood. At the same time, the exhibition is reflective of a long-standing national identity crisis, questioning the country's brief history in an effort to uncover the fundamental cultural pillars and events that still shape our notion of what an American actually is. In that sense, KID's work mirrors what Bruce Springsteen once observed during the *Wrecking Ball* press conference in February 2012: "I have spent my life judging the distance between American reality and the American dream."

On the occasion of this debut solo presentation in the U.S., Observer spoke with the artist to delve deeper into the meanings and messages of these new works and how his view of America has evolved—shifting from promise to disillusion over time.

As is typical in the artist's practice, KID presents a series of ambitious large-scale works in this show, demonstrating his skill at staging entire semiological and societal dynamics. He creates theatrical settings that seamlessly blend installation, painting, craftsmanship and multimedia. Neither strictly painting nor sculpture, KID's hybrid pieces combine steel panels and aluminum sculptures with oil painting to produce powerful, provocative, toylike billboards that invade the viewer's space, projecting a set of imposed desires through perfectly balanced advertisements that are at once eye-popping and menacing. Scale is a natural part of KID's process, with his work drawing heavily from the aesthetics of billboards and other aggressive advertising techniques designed to be noticed, offering no possibility of escape.

"As a child, I was impressed by billboards, those next to the highway and movie ones," KID explained. "It imprinted on me as a child; these massive billboards had something magical for me." He also has an incredible ability to world-build—a talent he developed at the same time. "I always wanted to create a universe I could step into because I didn't fit in at school. I just wanted to create a world in which to escape. And it's something that I always have continued and drives my work."



The artist at his studio in the Paris area. Studio THE KID

KID was raised by his grandparents in a small mining town in southern Holland. “Everyone there has single brick houses. It’s a very gray environment, and everything feels the same,” he said. Despite this, his grandparents surrounded him with a vast array of cultural objects and books, further enriched by television, providing him with all the elements to imagine his own world. “It was really like the cavern of Alibaba because it was a mixture of multiple generations of objects, toys and books.” This blend of influences may explain why much of KID’s work is infused with a sense of nostalgia, reflecting a vintage era of media rather than the contemporary one familiar to millennials. He acknowledged that the nostalgia so many people are feeling is not for their own era but rather from one they never knew—connected to childhood memories created through exposure to imagery from an older time.

The America that KID conjures in this exhibition is more of a “platonic one”—a magical world known only through the fantastical products of its cultural exports, filled with the joy of Happy Meals, the sugar rush of Kellogg’s Pops and the timeless allure of Disney cartoons. “Many of these old images were promising something, were a prime of freedom,” he explained. More importantly, KID’s practice engages in a multigenerational reflection on this cultural and mass media propaganda, tracing its roots back to the period of the German occupation and the war. “Being raised by my grandparents, America was very present in my household. My grandmother lived in the South of Holland, and during the occupation, they had American soldiers living in their house. She would show me poetry they were writing to her. This idea of America was always associated with freedom, with something very positive. I grew up with this idea of America as a protector.” Contrast that with his grandfather’s experience in German-occupied northern Holland. “He was the only Dutch child in a German school, which was horrible. He would help Jewish people cross the border at night because he had a car.”



“Today, I think the only honest thing for me to do, is to refuse the pressure of being in a constant state of projected happiness and instead acknowledge that our world is fucked up and that we are driving straight off the cliff.” ©ROBIN KID, Courtesy the artist

This narrative of America as protector has been meticulously crafted by advertising and mass media, shaping the morals, fears and expectations of generations worldwide. As children, we don’t question the reality behind it, or recognize it as a calculated soft power operation that evolves into cultural imperialism, already carrying the seeds of interventionism, militarism, capitalist extractivism, inequality and a dangerous homogenization that manipulates contemporary history. We are naive as children, eager to believe, absorb and embrace the best. It’s precisely this type of naivete that KID’s work plays with, while also confronting, through a more critical lens, the complex implications and messages hidden beneath these seemingly comforting images of wealth, joy and happiness.

However, his art isn't an attack but a nostalgic longing for the imagination and ideals that were lost. "Searching for America is about looking for the kind of happiness that I felt as a child, like sitting in front of the TV watching, you know, Disney specials," he explained. It's a happiness that exists before understanding the broader implications of such a system and the complex reality of what America is today, both internally and in its role in recent world events. "I don't want to present a pessimistic point of view on my work. I'm just trying to reflect what I see. Everything I do comes from a love for America. I love the idea of America I had, and it's imaginary. But now I also know where this comes from."

In this sense, all of KID's work can be seen as an attempt to preserve and revive the iconography of Americana that he learned by heart in his childhood, letting the contradictions of American materialism and consumerist propaganda reveal themselves when staged in a space meant for critical engagement, like a gallery. Resurrecting, reactivating and confronting this symbolic code of familiar brands, cartoons, slogans and aesthetics becomes a way to question the semiotic mechanisms and dynamics behind them. As the artist sharply observed, "I think my work addresses a lot of promises made through the advertisements that I saw: buy this product, and your life can only become bigger, better, healthier. It's a continuous promise that the future can only be better. Now, we are at a point where ours is the first generation worse off than our parents, financially and otherwise. Our future appears much less bright."



"Searching For America" is a wide-eyed, provocative (and sometimes even offensive) journey through many different Americas, from one that comforts to one that worries... the one that creates to the one that destroys. ©ROBIN KID, Courtesy the artist

In bringing forward this provocation, KID is wittingly adopting the same language used by advertising and political propaganda, which links his practice to the pioneer artists in assemblages, combining mass media appropriation as [Jim Dine](#), [Robert Rauschenberg](#) and course, [Andy Warhol](#) have done. Similarly, his artistic process is based on an endless appropriation of images, objects and products that symbolically represent our generation. At night, he sifts through listings on eBay to buy Americana, magazines and other vintage elements. During the day, while he paints, he always has the TV on, constantly drawing inspiration from this endless flux of images and symbols. "I start painting at eight o'clock in the morning, and on the television, I start with *Good Morning America*, *Morning Joe*, Rachel Maddow and Joey Reed," he said. "Then I continue with documentaries and movies. Throughout the day, I'm always screenshotting. I'm always taking things from everywhere." He picks through those images, cuts them and extrapolates them with Photoshop from the original context to remediate them, cutting wood and painting in new visual assemblages, which, though dialectical juxtapositions, often reveal new meanings.



ROBIN KID's studio with works in progress. ©ROBIN KID, Courtesy the artist

KID clearly acknowledges these legacies, but he sees his approach as closer to the skepticism of a European cohort, more aligned with the capitalist realist movement, with artists like [Sigmar Polke](#) and [Gerhard Richter](#), who openly explored how the various forms of imagery—advertising, news, etc.—don't merely depict reality but actively shape it, complete with transmission errors. The artist also notes that his commentary on the endless flow of visuals and media comes from a distinctly different generational perspective. "I think Warhol was just the premise of our generation," he mused. "Our generation is no longer literate from reading books, but from the thousands of images we receive daily." At the same time, KID's process is unique to this era, blending digital manipulation through Photoshop with the authentic craftsmanship of laboriously working on wood and painting by hand.

That multifaceted practice seems perfectly suited to address the anxieties and concerns of a generation that has come to accept the chaotic media and ideological landscape as something to navigate with the right critical tools—analyzing the past and the roots of these phenomena while using humor as a strategy to subvert reality, expose absurdities, challenge norms and potentially create space for new ways of thinking and alternative possibilities of "world-building" beyond the American promise and dream. The show reflects an entire nation and generation searching for new models of diplomacy, trade and cultural exchange.

ROBIN KID's "[Searching For America](#)" is on view at [TEMPLON NYC](#) through **October 26.**