

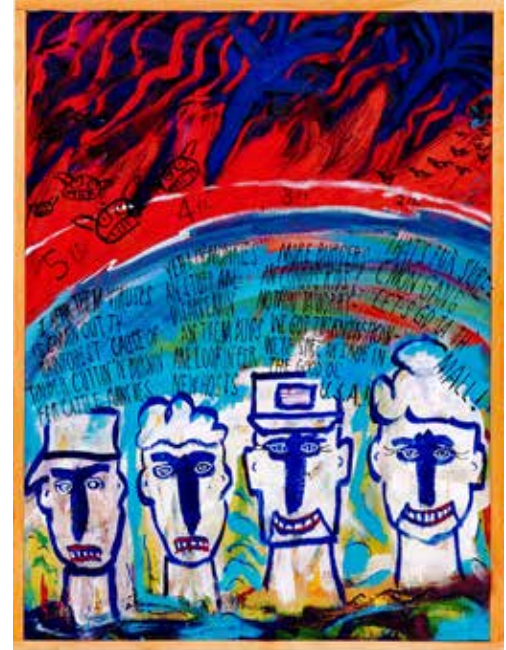


Hak Vogrin

Predominantly self-taught, Hak Vogrin could be considered an outsider artist but his strong artistic voice adds a powerful note to mainstream 20th century art. Beginning his career as an illustrator and comic book artist, his working class roots and penchant for storytelling led to works that offer unfiltered commentary on serious problems in the world such as poverty, environmental degradation, war, racism and discrimination against women.

Born in Brooklyn in 1920 to Slovenian immigrant parents, Vogrin spent his early childhood in the countryside of Modena, New York. During these years he enjoyed a simple lifestyle that he yearned to return to as an adult. When he was six, the family moved back to Brooklyn, a diverse working class neighborhood that introduced him to the problems facing the disenfranchised. Growing up during the '20s and '30s, he was an avid reader of comics and cartoon arts from the 19th and early 20th centuries. Fascinated by the works of talented artists such as Lyonel

Feininger, Harry Hershfield and George Herriman (creator of *Krazy Kat*), this interest led to his own career as a cartoonist and comic book artist. Self-educated, he was an avid reader of works on history, science and politics and studied paintings, drawings, advertising and movie poster art. Chinese and Zen philosophy and art had a strong influence on his lifestyle and work as well.



Let's Go t' the Mall!, 1999
Sign enamel on canvas



USA #1 in Everything, 1999
Oil on canvas

Vogrin lived and worked with his wife Jean, a potter and librarian, on the Lower East Side of New York in the early 1960s, operating the gallery space *One Flight Up* in their studio apartment on St. Marks Place. In 1967 they moved to the Pine Barrens of New Jersey, creating a refuge from society where they housed draft resisters during the Vietnam War. Vogrin's interest in environmental issues began while living there.

Vogrin was a part of the '60s and '70s underground *comix* movement. *Comix* appeared in the U.S. from 1968-1975 and were small press or self-published comic books with social commentary or satire containing content not permitted by the Comics Code Authority. Producing illustrations and comics, he created delicate, wistful drawings such as those featured in *A Moon Book* (1963), a counterculture book of moon imagery. The acclaimed poet James Broughton invited him to illustrate a small collection of haikus. *High Kukus* (1968) was published by The Jargon Society, and featured



Vegetarian Miss America 2001,
1996-1997, Sign enamel on canvas

brushstrokes expressed the outrage he felt about wrongdoing in the world. Early in his career he worked with oil and tempera paints but, as he became concerned about toxic fumes and the environmental impact of art media, he switched to water-based sign enamel. He liked the feel and intensity of sign paint for his work, which he saw as similar to posters and billboards demanding attention.

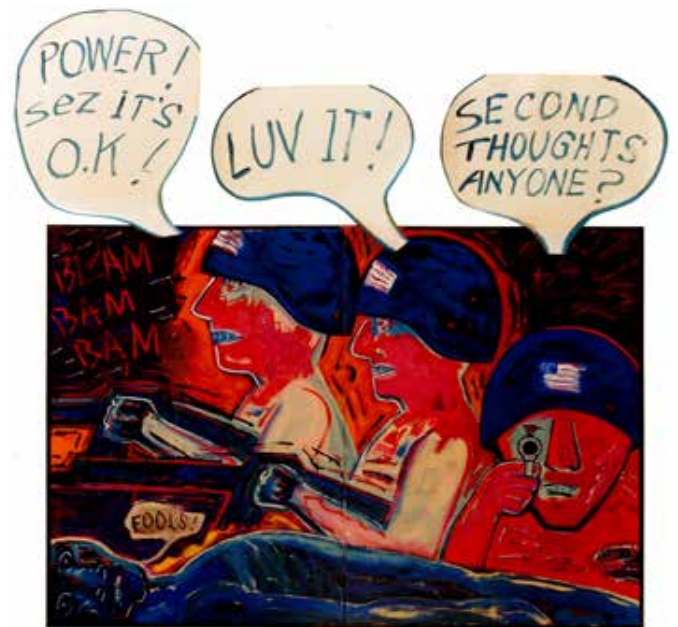
In later years, the subject matter of his work transitioned from political, feminist paintings to works of feminist eroticism. Portraying women as active subjects rebelling against their societal roles, they are often painted holding firearms and weapons, using force to demand representation and fair treatment within society.

Accepting the description of iconoclast and misanthrope, Vogrin could also be described as an optimist deeply disappointed by humanity. He identified as neither conservative nor liberal, and referred to himself as a painter, rather than as an artist. His artwork reflected his unpretentious and sharp mind, along with his will to lead by example. Vogrin was an idealist fueled by the hope that his artwork could change the world.
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playful drawings. The illustrations and comics were conversational and philosophical, a quality he retained in his later political paintings. *The Captain* (1972) a comic book, hints at a more ironic, lonely tone that his future work will adopt. Contributing cartoons and drawings to publications such as *Yellow Dog*, *Liberation*, *The Realist*, and the anarchist *Good Soup*, his years as a cartoonist proved to have a lasting influence. Most of his later work includes snappy text and comic-inspired compositions, with speech-bubbles floating above, directly provoking the viewer with ironic comments on the problems plaguing society.

During the '80s, Vogrin's work featured the Great Auk, an extinct bird species. It was the symbol for an innocent, all-knowing witness to human carelessness and cruelty. Originally an abundant species living in the North Atlantic region, it was threatened after settlers learned of the birds' valuable meat and feathers. The Auk appears in many paintings concerning American involvement in Central and South America, as an observer of the unreported atrocities committed under U.S. interventionist policies.

In the '80s and '90s, Vogrin's style ranged from expressionist and stream-of-consciousness to graphic and direct. Bold palettes and



Power! Sez It's OK!, 1992
Oil on canvas

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