

NINA KATCHADOURIAN

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Art in Review

We Could Have Invited Everyone

Andrew Kreps Gallery
516A West 20th Street, Chelsea
Through July 29

Depending on your capacity for information saturation, "We Could Have Invited Everyone" offers either total immersion in an immense subject — micronations — or merely the tip of the iceberg. Organized by the artists Peter Coffin and Robert Blackson, it is based on a similar exhibition in 2004 that Mr. Blackson oversaw at the Reg Vardy Gallery at the University of Sunderland in England, where he is a curator.

Micronations are largely landless countries or fictional states arbitrarily created by artists, eccentrics, political malcontents and power-mad egomaniacs. Motives for their creation include a disinclination to pay taxes, a love of royal titles and the desire to start a civilization, but out-and-out subversion and a distrust of authority, whether playful or dead serious, is a constant. With flags, passports, stamps, applications for citizenship and other accouterments of nationhood — including some exceptionally beautiful currency — the exhibition introduces about two dozen relatively recent micronations.

The nation-building artists represented here include Yoko Ono, Michael Ashkin, Jonah Freeman, Gregory Green, Andrea Zittel and Evru, formerly Zush, who created the Evrugo Mental State in 1968. But the nonartists are often equally imaginative, and more determined. Take the Kingdom of Talossa, which Robert Ben Madison established in his bedroom in Milwaukee, Wis., at the age of 13. Today, King Robert is the constitutional monarch of a nation that includes about 100 friends and acquaintances who keep in touch through e-mail messages. On view are a history of Talossa, journals of current events, a book on its language and the royal crown, a former Milwaukee fire department dress hat. For regalia, check out the copper scepter and orb of the Kingdom of Hay-on-Wye, founded by Richard Booth in his secondhand bookstore in Hay, Wales, on April 1, 1977.

The most engaging artist nation state is Elgaland/Vargaland, or KREV, established in 1992 when the Swedish artists Carl Michael von Hausswolff and Leif Elggren laid claim to all the borders of the world. It is represented here by an ingenious flag and map created by the artist Nina Katchadourian.

If you make it through the detailed labels accompanying the flags, you will gain a heady sense of the political and jurisdictional complexities that micronations face, stir up or exploit. A soundtrack of national anthems, some original, others borrowed from larger countries, adds an appropriate air of pomp and circumstance. Those whose appetites are merely whetted by these displays should consult the latest issue of *Cabinet* magazine, which has published several excellent essays on fictional states to coincide with the show.

ROBERTA SMITH