

NY Culture Saturday, April 27, 2013

***Kay WalkingStick: "American Landscape"***

**June Kelly**

**166 Mercer St., (212) 226-1660**

**Through May 14**

By Peter Plagens

Inevitably, the New Mexico landscape paintings of Kay WalkingStick (b. 1935) prompt the question, "What do they bring to the table that Georgia O'Keeffe's don't?" They're painted in a similar no-nonsense, basic-realism style, though Ms. WalkingStick's are more deadpan and



Kay Walking-Stick/June Kelly Gallery  
Kay WalkingStick's 'New Mexico Desert' (2011).

less ostentatiously lyrical. Ms. WalkingStick is an American Indian and—although educated at a college in Pennsylvania and the holder of an MFA degree from Brooklyn's Pratt Institute and a sketcher of landscapes in the same picturesque parts of Europe to which Western artists

have long flocked—she lays claim to an ethnic connection to our desert that Ms. O'Keeffe couldn't.

That's why the title of her exhibition of abutted two-panel arid-climate landscapes isn't as innocuous as it might sound at first.

Each of Ms. WalkingStick's pictures contains a frieze of precisely frisketed Indian glyphs applied across a good deal of their width. The landscapes behind the symbols depict mountains, arroyos and plain expanses of dry soil and scrub vegetation. The artist has talked about getting after "the truth of the subject," and in this case her meaning is clear: The adjective "American" can have an air of possession to it. In these good-looking, pictorially understated paintings, Ms. WalkingStick reveals who she thinks really owns our desert vistas.

—Mr. Plagens is an artist and writer in New York.