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## Fight Doom with a Smile

### Roe Ethridge at Andrew Kreps



Roe Ethridge, *Johns Flag* (2011-17). Image courtesy of the artist and Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York

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**New York** – We have been receiving many emails in response to my [introduction](#) to the last issue of the newsletter. Art dealers, collectors and peers have written to say that my lament at the shrinking middle of the art market, as epitomized by Andrea Rosen's unexpected and instantaneous closure of her gallery, rang a loud bell of recognition.

The tone of what I wrote was perhaps somewhat apocalyptic (even if appropriately so). So it was a pleasure recently to walk into [an exhibition of new photographs](#) by Roe Ethridge at Andrew Kreps Gallery ("American Spirit", until April 8)—a fantastically uplifting experience created by a mid-market artist for a mid-market gallery. (OK, I won't use that phrase again; mid-market sounds so, well, middling. The problem isn't the art: it's the market that is failing the art.)



Roe Ethridge, *1/19/17* (2017). Image courtesy of the artist and Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York

With a characteristically broad range of images (both natural and staged photographs mashed together in a happy honeymoon), Ethridge seems to have taken the position that a down moment requires an up response. In this body of work, he fights doom with a smile: a fresh, direct but complex smile. There are pictures of beautiful women; blue roses on American Spirit cigarette packs; vast American landscapes; a calming display of crystals (heal thyself); and even a photograph of an American flag—a white Jasper Johns painting of the American flag which has been reproduced at such a low resolution that it would ordinarily not make the cut.



Roe Ethridge, *Yellow American Spirit with Blue Roses* (2017). Image courtesy of the artist and Andrew Kreps

Gallery, New York

But even this dirty-snow-white cloud of an American flag—iconic from afar and almost abstract up close—made me smile. The photograph, called *Johns Flag* (2011-17), somehow sums up an exhibition that reminds one of that specifically American brand of optimism that has been less evident in parts of our industry and country lately.

Ethridge has mastered a kind of synthetic naturalism with his works that are at once fabricated and yet convincingly real. I guess that I was more focused on their exquisite post-Pictures artificiality when I viewed them in the past, but with this new work, and its sly optimism, it is the warm, reassuring naturalism of Ethridge's staged vision that seems intentionally—perhaps willfully—well timed.