

Tobi Kahn



Tobi Kahn is a painter and sculptor whose work has been shown in over 40 solo exhibitions and over 60 museum and groups shows since he was selected as one of nine artists to be included in the 1985 Guggenheim Museum exhibition, *New Horizons in American Art*. Works by Kahn are in major museum, corporate, and private collections.

A museum exhibition of over a decade of his work, *Tobi Kahn: Metamorphoses*, curated by Peter Selz, traveled to eight museums from 1997 through 1999, including the Weatherspoon Art Gallery in Greensboro, North Carolina and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Dore Ashton, Michael Brenson, and Peter Selz wrote the essays for the catalogue of *Metamorphoses* (University of Washington Press). Kahn's work has received significant critical attention.

For thirty years, Kahn has been steadfast in the pursuit of his distinct vision and persistent in his commitment to the redemptive possibilities of art. In paint, stone, and bronze, he has explored the correspondence between the intimate and monumental. While his early works drew on the tradition of American Romantic landscape painting, his more recent pieces reflect his fascination with contemporary science, inspired by the micro-images of cell formations and satellite photography.

Kahn's belief in art's spiritual capacity is at odds with the contemporary emphasis on irony and displacement. As Peter Selz wrote: "His paintings and his sculptures, executed with consummate craftsmanship, are animated by a yearning for the transcendent...at a time when the concept of beauty has become anathematized in critical discourse and the perception of the spiritual remains marginalized in the discussions of the art world."

Much of contemporary art is detached from the meditative dimension of seeing. There are some exceptions, such as the Rothko chapel in Houston and James Turrell's light spaces. Kahn's fascination with the power of art for healing led to the creation, in 2001, of a permanent installation commissioned by the HealthCare Chaplaincy of New York: a meditative room consisting of nine sky-and-water murals and sculptural furniture made by Kahn. The room, in constant use, was conceptualized as a sanctuary for contemplation, to envelop those who enter it with the serenity of sky, sea and horizon. Kahn has also designed sets for Elizabeth Swados at The Public Theater, and for work by choreographers Muna Tseng and Gus Solomons.

In May 2003, an exhibition of his *Sky and Water* paintings opened at the Neuberger Museum of Art in Purchase, New York. The catalogue includes essays by Dede Young, who curated the exhibition, and Donald Kuspit. An exhibition of selected paintings from this show traveled as *Reflections: Tobi Kahn* to the Brauer Museum of Art and two additional museums in 2004. The catalogue included an essay by David Morgan. Kahn's solo exhibition, *Works from the Cape*, opened in July 2003 at the Cape Museum of Art in Dennis, MA.

In 2004, *Paradisus*, a solo exhibition of Kahn's paintings of flowers, curated by Mark White, opened at the gallery of Oklahoma State University. The show then traveled to the Century Club in New York.

In 2008, Kahn was commissioned to create the art and ritual objects for the sanctuary of Congregation Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Opened in Fall 2009, Kahn's work consists of 8 wall-scale paintings and the sanctuary's ceremonial art, including the eternal light, mezuzah, and panels for the ark doors.

In October, 2009, "Tobi Kahn: Sacred Spaces for the 21st Century", a solo traveling exhibition of Kahn's ceremonial and liturgical art, opened at MOBIA in New York City. The book, *Tobi Kahn, Sacred Spaces for the 21st Century*, edited by Ena Giurescu Heller and published by the Museum of Biblical Art in New York in association with D Giles Limited, London accompanied the exhibition.

Among the awards that Kahn has received are the Outstanding Alumni Achievement Award from Pratt Institute in 2000; the Cultural Achievement Award for the Visual Arts from the National Foundation of Jewish Culture in 2004; and an Honorary Doctorate from the Jewish Theological Seminary in 2007 for his work as an artist and educator.

Kahn also communicates his vision through his passion for teaching. For twenty-eight years, he has taught fine arts workshops at the School of Visual Arts in New York City. He also designed the art curriculum for several high schools in the New York area and co-founded and facilitates the Artists' Beit Midrash at the Skirball Center of Temple Emanu-El. Kahn lectures extensively at universities and public forums internationally on the importance of visual language and art as healing.



Pictures are from the second annual "Art & Innovation Design Gathering," a collaboration between The Phillips Collection and the University of Virginia at The Phillips Collection in Washington, DC, Monday, March 14, 2011. (Photos: James R. Brantley)