



Tobi Kahn's "YA-IR XX," below right, an acrylic painting, and other pieces by Mr. Kahn, are on display at the Neuberger Museum of Art in Purchase, N.Y.

ART REVIEWS

By BENJAMIN GENOCCHIO

Nature's Majesty

More than 80 paintings by the New York artist Tobi Kahn are on view in "Sky & Water," at the Neuberger Museum of Art in Purchase, N.Y. All the works in the show are identical, consisting of broad horizontal bands of sky and water separated by a narrow horizon line. Subtle color variations and delicate surface effects enliven the reductive format, which could easily seem monotonous in other, less-skilled hands.

Mr. Kahn's landscapes are ravishingly beautiful. They are also ambiguously abstract, making them maddeningly tough to write about. My take is that they are blank screens, inviting us to project into them our own vagrant thoughts, feelings and desires. Either that or they are aids to meditation, for while staring at them over long periods, a wave of great calm swept over me. Partly

it's the repetition of the imagery, and partly the installation of the works around the walls of one high-ceilinged room. The place looks and feels like a chapel, or at least somewhere you might associate with the veneration of gods.



If there is a god here, it is the majesty of nature, long worshiped by Romantic painters as a divine phenomenon; they called it the sublime. Mr. Kahn is an heir to this tradition, with its emphasis on limitlessness, grandeur, and sometimes even terror.

The most spectacular part of the show is a cluster of little landscapes running up and along a wall. Their emotional range is remarkable, from the gloomy sadness of burnished images of twilight to the happy luminosity of yellow sunlit scenes. Then there is the sheer wall-power of the ensemble, which together resembles the disgorged contents of a packet of British licorice allsorts.

The show can be approached either as an installation or as a collection of discrete works. Either way it is impressive, the artist showing why he has been the subject of much curatorial and critical attention over the last decade.

Recently, he has branched out into architectural environments, with a commission for a private spiritual space in Indiana, and a multi-faith prayer room for a spiritual center in New York City. I have not seen either, although I have no doubt they are stunning.

"Tobi Kahn: Sky & Water" is at the Neuberger Museum of Art, 735 Anderson Hill Road, Purchase, N.Y., through Aug. 24. Information: (914) 251-6100.