



Tobi Kahn Career Narrative 2015

Tobi Kahn is a painter and sculptor whose work has been shown in over 50 solo exhibitions and over 60 museum and group 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 contributed the essays for the catalogue of *Metamorphoses* (University of Washington Press). 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."

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.

In 1999, *Avoda: Objects of the Spirit*, an exhibition of Kahn's ceremonial art, curated by Laura Kruger, opened at Hebrew Union College, New York, and traveled for nine years throughout the United States. Kahn and Carol Brennglass Spinner co-founded the Avoda project, an educational program that

accompanied the exhibition. Led by Kahn, over 10,000 university students of all races and religions made their own ceremonial objects for both traditional and contemporary ritual in their lives. For many, the Avoda workshops were their first experience in understanding the visual world. *Objects of the Spirit: Ritual and the Art of Tobi Kahn*, a book about Kahn's ceremonial art, edited by Emily Bilski, was published in June 2004 by Hudson Hill Press and the Avoda Institute. The catalogue included essays by Leora Auslander, Emily Bilski, Terrence E. Dempsey, S.J, Tom L. Freudenheim, Jonathan Rosen, Ruth Weisberg and meditations by Nessa Rapoport. In addition, *Landscape at the Millennium*, curated by Douglas Dreishpoon opened that year at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York, with an accompanying catalogue.

For over thirty years, Kahn has been making miniature sacred spaces he calls shrines. The first full-scale shrine, *Shalev*, is in New Harmony, Indiana, commissioned as an outdoor sculpture by Jane Owen and the Robert Lee Blaffer Trust.

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 the artist. 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 Kahn's *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 by Donald Kuspit. An exhibition of selected paintings from the 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 City.

In 2008, Kahn was commissioned to create eight wall-scale paintings and ritual objects, including the eternal light, mezuzah, and panels for the ark doors, for the sanctuary of Congregation Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

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. *Tobi Kahn: Sacred Spaces for the 21st Century*, edited by Ena Giurescu Heller and was published by the Museum of Biblical Art in New York in association with D Giles Limited, London, accompanied the exhibition. The catalogue included essays by Jeff Edwards, Ena G. Heller, Tobi Kahn, David Morgan, Klaus Ottmann, Daniel Sperber, meditations by Nessa Rapoport,

In September 2011, *Embodied Light: 9-11 in 2011, An Installation by Tobi Kahn* was commissioned by the Educational Alliance of New York in commemoration of the tenth anniversary of 9/11. Accompanying the exhibition was a catalogue with essays by Maya Benton, Norman L. Kleeblatt, James E. Young and meditations by Nessa Rapoport.

In November 2011, *ALIGNED, Paintings by Tobi Kahn*, a solo exhibition of Kahn's paintings, curated by John Shipman, opened at the Art Gallery at The University of Maryland with an accompanying catalogue.

In 2012, *IMMANENCE: The Art of Tobi Kahn*, a solo exhibition of Kahn's paintings from 1987–2012, opened at the Philadelphia Museum of Jewish Art, Philadelphia, PA. Showing concurrently, *RIFA-Sky and Water* Installation at the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia with an accompanying catalogue.

In 2015, two solo museum exhibitions: *Reverie: Tobi Kahn*, a solo exhibition of Kahn's recent work, opened at the Cornell Museum of Rollins College, Winter Park, FL and *Meridian: Paintings and Ceremonial Art of Tobi Kahn* at the Ft. Wayne Museum in Indiana. Both had accompanying catalogues.

Among the awards 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 over twenty-five years, he has taught fine arts workshops at the School of Visual Arts in New York City. Kahn has designed the arts curriculum for several high schools in the New York area, as well creating the program "Thinking Visually," an interdisciplinary arts program for Kivunim: New Directions, where he is artist-in-residence. He 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 on art as healing.