

# Tobi Kahn

## Career Narrative

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Tobi Kahn is a painter and sculptor whose work has been shown in over 70 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, NC, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

For over 40 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 have added his fascination with contemporary science, inspired by the

micro-images of cell formations and satellite photography.

In the late 1980s, Kahn also designed sets for composer-director Elizabeth Swados at The Public Theater and for work by choreographers Muna Tseng and Gus Solomons.

For decades, Kahn has been making miniature sacred spaces he calls shrines. In 1993, the first full-scale shrine, *Shalev*, in New Harmony, IN, was commissioned as an outdoor sculpture by Jane Owen and the Robert Lee Blaffer Trust.

In 1997, Kahn created *Gan Hazikaron: Garden of Remembrance*, an outdoor installation of six bronzes as a Holocaust memorial for the Jewish Community Center on the Palisades in New Jersey. This was the first of his Holocaust memorials.

In 1999, *Avoda: Objects of the Spirit*, an exhibition of Kahn's ceremonial art curated by Laura Kruger, opened at Hebrew Union College, NY, and traveled for nine years throughout the United States. That year, 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. *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.

*Landscape at the Millennium*, curated by Douglas Dreishpoon, opened that year at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY, with an accompanying catalogue.

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 was conceptualized as a sanctuary for contemplation, to envelop those who enter it with the serenity of sky, sea, and horizon.

In May 2003, an exhibition of Kahn's Sky and Water paintings opened at the Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase, NY. An exhibition of selected paintings from the show traveled in 2004 as *Reflections: Tobi Kahn* to the Brauer Museum of Art and two additional museums. The catalogue included an essay by David Morgan.

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, WI.

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 published by MOBIA in New York in association with D Giles Limited, London, accompanied the exhibition.

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 10th anniversary of 9/11.

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* opened at the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia with an accompanying catalogue.

In 2015, solo museum exhibitions *Reverie: Tobi Kahn*, a show 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* opened at the Ft. Wayne Museum in Indiana. Both had accompanying catalogues. Later that year, Kahn was commissioned to create a meditative space for Auburn Theological Seminary in New York City.

In 2016, Kahn's sculpture, *M' AHL*, was included in the exhibition *Rendering the Unthinkable* at the 9/11 Memorial Museum in New York City. Paintings from the 1980s and 1990s were included in the exhibition *Golem* at the Jewish Museum of Berlin. Kahn also created ceremonial objects for the sanctuaries of Congregation Ohr Shalom in Summit, NJ, as well as Kehilat Keshet in Tenafly, NJ.

In 2017, *Anointed Time: Sculptures and Ceremonial Objects by Tobi Kahn* opened at the Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, OH with an accompanying catalogue.

In 2018, *AURA: New Paintings for Nature, Tobi Kahn* opened at The Museum of Art-DeLand, Florida with an accompanying catalogue.

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 25 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.