

Cover: *Midnight in the Huntington Library Cactus Garden* (detail), 2014, Oil, acrylic and gold leaf on canvas, 108 x 132 inches

**375 Hudson Street**/Lobby Gallery

375 Hudson, NYC 10014, between Houston and King Streets

Gallery Hours: Monday – Friday, 8 am – 6 pm

### Acknowledgments

375 Hudson Street, through its exhibition program, actively contributes to the cultural community as an expression of ongoing commitment to excellence in the visual arts and architecture.

We thank the artist **Robert Kushner**, and the **DC Moore Gallery**, 535 W 22nd Street, New York, NY 10011, [www.dcmooregallery.com](http://www.dcmooregallery.com), (T): 212.247-2111, for the loan of the paintings in this exhibit and the use of the images in this brochure.

Curators **Jay Grimm**, Jay Grimm Art Advisory; **Lenore Goldberg**, Hines

Essay **Glenn Adamson**

#### About Glenn Adamson

Glenn Adamson, is currently Senior Scholar, Yale Center for British Art, Yale University.

#### About Jay Grimm Art Advisory

Jay Grimm is an independent arts professional with over 25 years of experience in the New York gallery world. For more information please contact [Jay@jaygrimm.com](mailto:Jay@jaygrimm.com), (T): 917.690.0035

For more information about Robert Kushner, please contact [info@dcmooregallery.com](mailto:info@dcmooregallery.com).

## DEEP ROOTS | The Paintings of Robert Kushner

October 5, 2017 – April 6, 2018



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Robert Kushner makes majestic paintings. Majestic not only in their regal color and glorious floral depictions, but also quite literally. When set in impressive architectural surroundings, the sheer size of a work like ***Spring Scatter Summation*** may not be so evident; it scales quite well to a grand interior. But walk right up to this work, and think about covering its surface entirely by hand. Think also of making it in the confines of a New York City studio. The multi-panel work is sufficiently large that Kushner could only see up to seven of its panels at a time – the others had to be stacked against the wall, out of the way. Only when finished did he actually see the composition complete.

All this being the case, it still seems amazing that an artist can pack so much beauty into such condensed pictorial space. His works are extraordinarily full, bursting with color and animation, like the gardens that do so much to inspire him. He always paints his flowers directly from life. This means that his art is made “in season” – when zinnias are in bloom, he paints zinnias. This logic is made explicit in ***Spring Scatter Summation***, which was made in the spring months of 2005. Kushner worked from left to right, painting each varietal as it came into bloom, culminating in glorious June peonies. Each flower’s position was determined according to chance – he simply dropped a paper marker on to the canvas from a height, each time designating the spot for a blossom. While this tactic recalls the “chance operations” beloved of past avant garde artists, like those in the Dada movement of the 1910s and ‘20s, in this case it operates more organically. The flowers seem almost to sprout from the canvas, in the same slightly random way that they would from an actual garden bed.



This is not to say, however, that Kushner’s works lack structure. Though the three works on show here are very different, all are organized according to a principle of rigorous division. Blocks of color or metallic leaf demarcate them into zones, creating a push-pull of space, or as Kushner puts it, “a series of passages.” This is particularly evident in the 2014 painting ***Malinalco***, in which a boldly outlined group of zinnias is shot through with strong verticals. The work is named for a town in Mexico that Kushner had recently visited, and he says that the strong wall colors he observed there had an influence on the palette: “it’s not uncommon there to see red and chartreuse and purple side by side.”





Once Kushner has established his compositional framework, the work can really begin. He breaks up the pattern with the linear forms of flowers or plants, generally with the goal of making these forms seem to float atop the background. The effect could not be more painterly, yet it has deep roots in other disciplines. Given the gold leaf and the emphasis on the seasons, one thinks naturally of Japanese artists like Ogata Kōrin (whose monumental screen depicting irises and a zig-zag bridge is one of the greatest treasures in the Metropolitan Museum). Yet Kushner's approach is far bolder, perhaps more American, in its exuberant embrace of multiplicity.

Even more important than Japanese art is textile, the medium that anchors his sensibility. When Kushner was in his twenties, he worked as a carpet restorer, and the palette and logic of fabric, of warp and weft, has remained at the core of his practice. This is true at the level of structure, not just aesthetics. He has said that “even the most mundane textile is always of interest to me.” Note, for example, how he often incorporates “repeats” into his work, a single motif recurring in a regular pattern. In textile production, this is partly a matter of efficiency – the repetition deriving from serial stamping or the operation of a loom. But





the result is to establish a rhythm across the field of the cloth, which can then be enlivened with shifts of underlying pattern and other types of interference.

This is a principle rarely seen in modern painting, which tends either to single iconic representations or “over-all” dispersion, and it is hard to find precedents in canonical art history for Kushner’s subtle, syncopated compositions. He greatly admires figures like Pierre Bonnard and Édouard Vuillard, who infused quiet domestic scenes with pictorial incident and vibrant pattern. But for me, the artist that leaps

to mind most often when looking at Kushner is Henri Matisse. ***Midnight in the Huntington Library Cactus Garden***, which recalls happy times that the artist spent at the Huntington when growing up in Pasadena, also evokes several works that Matisse made centering on an open window, beginning in 1905. For both artists, the device opens up an otherwise flat plane with a rush of space. In Kushner’s night-time rendition, there is also a suggestion of sliding doors, which play sideways across that deep spatial recession. Are we outside looking in? Inside looking out? It is impossible to say, and it doesn’t much matter. The important thing is that we are, in fact, looking. And there is so much to see.