

## Robert Kushner

### I ♥ MATISSE



*Suzani and Sofa*, 2021. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 48 x 96 in.

*It is tempting to read Kushner's series not simply as the latest chapter in his long-running fascination with pattern within the picture plane, but rather as an engagement with historiographic structures and the larger patterns of influence and inheritance that weave through art history over time. -Peter Eleey*

**Robert Kushner's *I ♥ Matisse*, on view from May 6 - June 19 at DC Moore Gallery**, is a cheeky yet serious exploration. Among the varied influences in Kushner's oeuvre, from Japanese screen painting to American modernism, Henri Matisse's influence has often been a continual through-line as Kushner finds resonance in Matisse's inclination toward design, love of pattern, beauty, expressive drawing, and vibrant color.

During the time of Covid-19 lockdown and ongoing stasis, Kushner found himself by himself in his studio as the surrounding world became more ominous, and divisive. It was in this state that he began an imaginary dialog with the earlier artist and took pleasure and focus in the endeavor. In a statement of fanciful reverie at the beginning of the pandemic, a time when the sound of ambulances coursed through empty streets near his NYC home and studio, he wrote:

*I work thinking more about being an artist in the 1930s. I am a Danish (or maybe Finnish, or maybe Swedish) artist who studied at Matisse's academy in Paris (1907–1911) during the heyday of the Parisian avant-garde and of Fauvism itself. But right after that, I had to go back home to run the family business. But from then till now, over a century, in the dark attic of that old, sturdy family house, I have a studio in the garret. Only one small window. During the dark, cold gray winters, instead of going in the Vilhelm Hammershøi direction of silvery light and cool gray tonality, I summon in my mind the blinding light of the South of France. I remember being a student of the Master, watching him daily in awe, as I am now squeezing the entire world of color onto my palette and then letting it sing on the canvas. In my attic studio, I am carefree, wild, experimental, intoxicated by color harmonies and the sun-drenched tranquility and protection of being in the South of France. Or is it the South of California? The Mediterranean plants, the fruit, the vases, the fabrics... and that is what keeps going on in my head.*



*Still Life with Three Vases VI*, 2021. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 48 x 48 in.

As this painting series evolved, Kushner employed Matisse's still life compositions, color harmonies, and objects to create something new. Like Matisse, Kushner is fascinated by textiles. The vibrant presence here of fabrics became an important touchstone continuing his use of artisanal fabrics in prior works. Matisse's vases and objects have been replaced by Kushner's own collections of ceramics and textiles, each element carrying personal history and associations of travels and friendship, including a Delft vase from his friend and mentor, Amy Goldin, and a 1980s vase made collaboratively by artist friends Joyce Kozloff and Betty Woodman. These surrogates bring an autobiographic substrate and a sense of sweet, sometimes melancholic, personal nostalgia. Across these compositions, joyous colors run rampant over curvaceous flowers and fruits as well as the strict geometry of table tops, walls, and windows.

*Amid the enforced isolation and death of this pandemic, ... the banalities of domestic interiors take on a new charge, as does the vulnerable beauty of flowers. And it is hard to think of a time in recent memory where the suspended stillness of a still life had more relevance to life as we know it. -Peter Eley*

A catalogue with an essay, *The Matisse Line*, by Peter Eley accompanies the exhibition.

Robert Kushner has exhibited extensively in the United States, Europe, and Japan. Recent museum exhibitions featuring Kushner's work include, *With Pleasure: Pattern and Decoration in American Art 1972-1985*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA (2019). This exhibition will be on view in 2021 at the Hessel Museum of Art, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY; *Less is a Bore: Maximalist Art & Design*, Institute for Contemporary Art, Boston, MA (2019); *Les Chemins du Sud*, MRAC, Sérignan, France (2019); *Pattern and Decoration: Ornament as Promise*, Ludwig Forum for International Art, Aachen, Germany, traveled to MUMOK, Vienna, Austria and Ludwig Museum, Budapest, Hungary (2018-2019); *Pattern, Decoration & Crime*, MAMCO, Geneva, Switzerland, traveled to Le Consortium, Dijon, France (2018-2019).



*Pink Table*, 2020. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 48 x 48 in.

DC Moore Gallery specializes in contemporary and twentieth-century art. The gallery is open by appointment only Tuesday through Saturday from 10am-6pm. For more information, photographs, or to arrange a viewing please call 212-247-2111 or email Sabeena Khosla at [skhosla@dcmooregallery.com](mailto:skhosla@dcmooregallery.com).