

Bellas Artes

PRESS RELEASE

WHAT: Robert Kushner's WILDFLOWERS/GARDEN FLOWERS

WHEN: June 30th – August 4, 2012

Opening: Friday, June 29th, from 5:00 to 7:00 pm

WHERE: Bellas Artes Gallery
653 Canyon Road, Santa Fe

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Combining the vitality of the Western painting tradition with the elegance of Eastern aesthetics, Robert Kushner's collages and paintings on board and canvas are masterful presentations of flowers and all that they connote: beauty for beauty's sake, faded romance, and the sweetness of love fulfilled. Art history abounds with exquisite floral still lifes, notably those created by the Baroque painters from the Netherlands, when the flower's iconography served as an indicator of mortality. The moralizing purpose of memento mori within the Christian Protestant tradition served as a warning: "Remember that you must die!" Humans, like flowers, are ephemeral. After blooming fully, they lose their fresh allure, and quickly wilt.

Ephemerality is a theme that Kushner's practice—using gold leaf upon the fragile pages of a book or on board—readily supports. His brushstrokes embody the calligraphic grace of traditional Japanese sumi-e, allowing his forms to lift and fall through space and time like fields of flowers in a summer breeze. Far from mere floral still lifes, however, the artist's expertise creates a kind of force field that mirrors sub-atomic theory: See his *Peony Damask*, in which the outlines of the flowers suggest the physical fact of painting's flatness, while the background, paradoxically, shifts viewers' dimensional perception nearly to optical illusion. *Cleome*, another oil painting on canvas, reverses the foreground's function with that of *Peony*; the former's background appears as a glorious wash of spiraling color. Kushner's picture planes vibrate between flatness and dimensionality, referencing the energy of 20th-century American modernism. For their part, Kushner's collage paintings suggest Robert Rauschenberg's screenprints as much as they do medieval illuminated manuscripts.

States Kushner, "These new works continue and expand my previous artistic explorations. I am combining my interests in Asian-inspired drawing, rich evocative color, and the swirling geometric patterns of Uzbek embroideries." According to the gallery's website, "Uzbekistan was crossed by caravans trading and traveling along the Silk Road, a network of routes that joined Constantinople (Istanbul) and ... China, beginning in 190 BC." Through his works on canvas, board, and paper, Kushner links an ancient tradition of ornate textiles with the late-1970s Pattern and Decoration movement, of which he was a key founder.



Robert Kushner, Peony Damask, oil on canvas



Robert Kushner, Cleome, oil on canvas

This show, which marks the artist's sixth solo exhibition at Bellas Artes, introduces a series of new collage paintings. Kushner combines oil paint and gold leaf with multilayered collages of pages from Eastern and Western books.

Robert Kushner's work is in many collections in the United States and Europe, including

at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Museum of Modern Art, and The Whitney Museum of American Art; The National Gallery of Art and The Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, DC; The Philadelphia Museum of Art; The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; The Denver Art Museum; The Contemporary Museum in Honolulu; The J. Paul Getty Trust in Los Angeles; The Tate Gallery in London; Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence; and Museum Ludwig in St. Petersburg. In 2004, Kushner installed two mosaic murals, *Four Seasons Seasoned*, at the 77th Street and Lexington Avenue subway station in New York. Another large public work of art, an 80-foot-long marble mosaic, *Welcome*, is installed at the Raleigh Durham International Airport in North Carolina.