

Kikuo Saito

James Fuentes Press

Kikuo Saito

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Design
Other Means

Publisher
James Fuentes Press

Printer
Gruppo Industriale FG s.r.l.

Typefaces
Magister (Omnitype), Totally Gothic (Emigre)

Artwork Photography
Jason Mandella

The James Fuentes team would like to thank the team at KinoSaito for their collaboration and dedication to Kikuo Saito's work: Mikiko Ino, Joshua Cohen, Sarah Strauss, Kanako Nagatomo, Olivia Drusin, Alexa West, and Alexandra Rojas. Special thanks to Lucas Zwirner.

ISBN 978-1-7365415-1-7
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Cover: detail from *Wine Garden II*, 1999. Oil on
canvas. 57 ¼ × 78 inches.

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The Cloud Paintings

Kikuo Saito was born in 1939 in Tokyo, and from 1966 until his death in 2016 created his art in New York. As a young and not-quite-legal immigrant, he worked what jobs he could, doing the assistant shuffle with Helen Frankenthaler, Kenneth Noland, and Larry Poons, and using his carpentry skills to build out Soho, converting the warehouses and factories of the formerly industrial neighborhood to galleries and studios and lofts; the first step (as he later lamented) of the neighborhood's terminal gentrification by Prada and Chanel and Gucci. Primarily a painter, he came from no school: he was always Abstract with a Big A and abstract with a little a, resident of a basement apartment underneath the Color Field. A man whose Japanese was frozen in the 1960s,

and whose English comprehension became perfect but whose spoken English could be shaky, he was obsessed with his adopted language's graphemes, its visual expression, along with the internationalism or universalism of numbers, and other more parochial and even hermetic systems of notation, including but not limited to those of music and choreography. Performance to him was key: the way he painted was performative (he used to refer to it as "playing"), and he painted performances too, filling canvases with recurring characters, such as the Lady with the Parasol and the Iguana, meeting, or failing to meet, in imaginary scenes. When he finally got the chance to work onstage, he painted backdrops that were also paintings, and something more: they were paintings that changed as they were moved against, as they were danced. He collaborated on these productions with La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club and did further phantasmagoric stage work with Robert Wilson, Peter Brook, Jerome Robbins, and Eva Maier—the lattermost of whom was also his wife, and my cousin, who died young in 1997.

I grew up around Eva and Kikuo—they were our summer neighbors in Cape May, and my childhood was filled with painting, drawing, fishing, Kikuo's favorite activities that were all essentially the same activity: patience. Here's how Kikuo and I used to fish: We got our rods and our tackle and our bait together and we crossed the street and

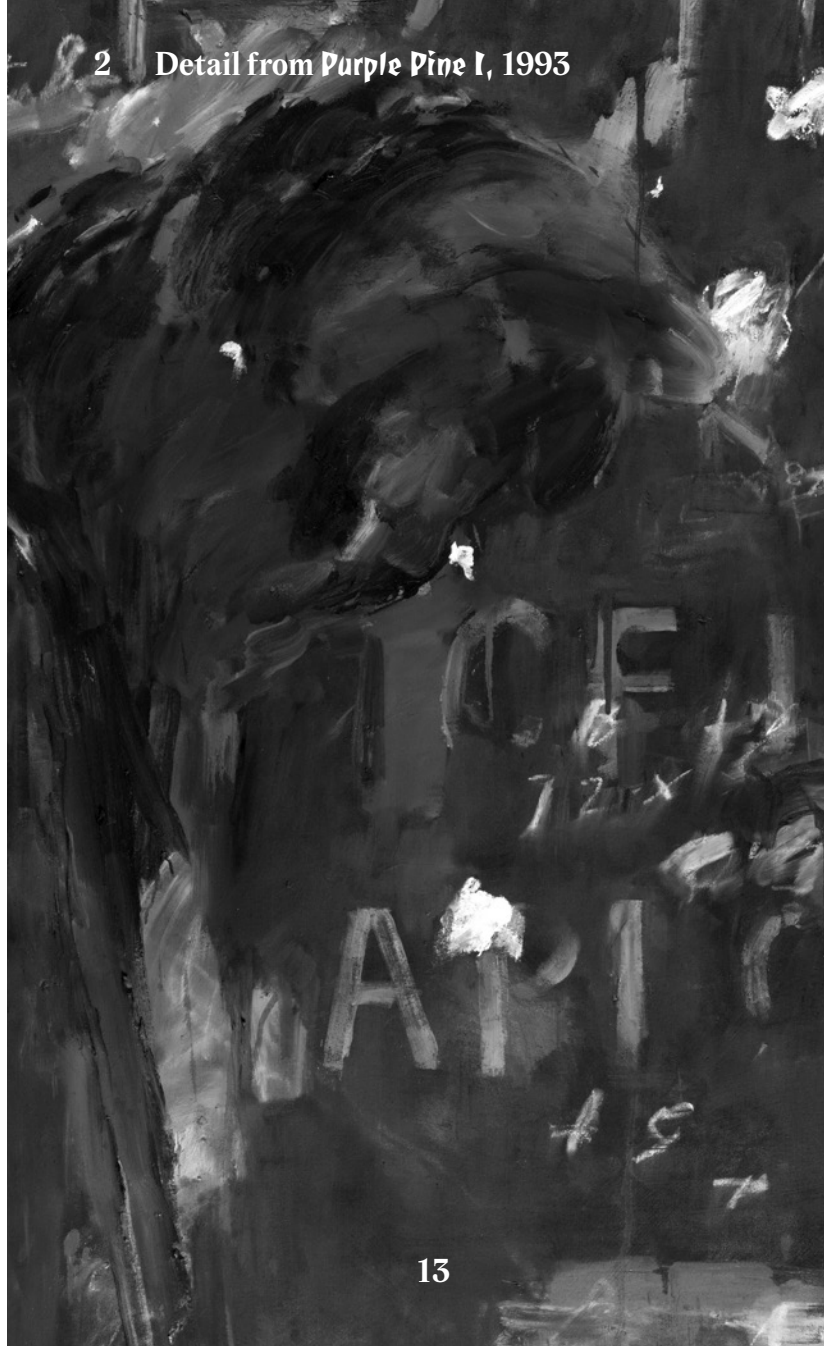
went up through the dunes and looked around to see where the other fishermen were, *and then we went as far away from them as possible*. If they were on the beach, we went to the jetty. If they were on the jetty, we went to the beach. If they were using lures, we used live bait (usually squid). If they were using live bait, we used lures (ours were dull and rusted). If they cast long, we cast short; if they cast short, we cast long... you get the point. If they caught something, and they always did, we caught nothing, and then we'd sneak back to the house, and stow rods and tackle in Kikuo's studio out back, and I'd be sent creeping inside to steal the car keys, without being noticed by Eva or my parents. If they caught me, I was supposed to say: "Kikuo needs more beer," or "Kikuo forgot his lighter," and then they'd give me a beer, or give me a lighter, with an indulgent sigh, and I'd run back out with my free hand stuck in my pocket to keep the stolen car keys from jingling. Once outside, Kikuo would take the keys from me and we'd drive over the bridge to the fish market and he'd have me choose a fish and he'd pay for it and we'd bring it back and he'd say, "Look what Josh caught," and Eva and my parents would be impressed, or would act impressed—I'm not sure what I noticed then, or allowed myself to believe. Anyway, this is what first comes to mind when anybody nowadays asks me about Kikuo's "process" or "practice."

I also think about looking at the ocean. Rather, I think about the "field" of it that I can see, which

1 **Purple Pine I, 1993**
Oil on canvas
78 ³/₈ × 58 ¹/₄ inches



2 Detail from **Purple Pine I, 1993**



remains consistent in size while constantly changing in texture and color as “old” water flows in and “new” water flows out. I remember looking at this “visual field” and asking myself, Are there fish under there? I also remember adjusting my “visual field” and trying to find some surface elements (bubbles, rippling currents) that might promise better prospects: “I think we should try that patch over there”—which was pretty much what Kikuo used to do, when he painted. He would paint large stretches of canvas, sometimes on the floor, sometimes taped up to the wall: that would be the fast work, or it would seem fast. The slow work would come later, when he’d sit around deciding what patch of the canvas was going to be a painting. Should he cut the canvas here, so that what used to be at the center was now at the edge? Or should he cut the canvas here, so what used to be the middle was now the top or bottom? This was where his patience came in, and his thoughtfulness: he could deliberate for hours over which section to enframe, which scene to hook and pluck up from its context. I think I made this association at around the age of 10: this guy painted an ocean, very quickly, and now is spending forever trying to figure out what part of it to look at. Meanwhile, the corn on the grill was burning.

My city memories of Kikuo are from when I’m older. Here’s one: he was inordinately interested in traffic signs. The Yield sign and its

ambiguous arrow: Are you telling me to Yield, or someone to Yield to me? The Stop sign’s octagon, which means the same as the red light’s circle, but unlike a red light, a Stop sign’s shape allows it to be recognized from behind. One-Way: this way. Over the years, one corner on Houston Street had collected three signs: No Left Turns, No Right Turns, No Turns, along with No Parking and No Standing on a cross street. And of course the circles and diamonds of the subway lines, the mosaics of the subway stations whose tiles were like little chipped, cracked, rotted multicolored teeth, the M bus signs with their staunch, upright stencil-y numbers, which over the course of years became staunch, upright stencil-y numbers and letters, because (I’m told) the universe tends toward disorder/all closed systems tend to maximize entropy. I remember one sign Kikuo liked particularly, the one that was red and just read: RED ZONE. We’d read them to each other as we walked to Katz’s, or to the Second Avenue Deli, back when it was on Second Avenue. Or to the Broome Street Bar, or McSorley’s. He’d read the signs, he’d see the red lights and the flashing DO NOT WALK, and yet he’d always walk; he’d always cross just when a taxi was turning to flatten him. I’d have to grab out for a sleeve and tug him back. His paint-coated sleeves. His paint-coated pants. His paint-flecked long black-and-white hair. He was a walking sign himself,

amid the Soho-poseur couture. A sign that contradicted his abashedness by seeming to speak: I AM AN ARTIST AND WHO ARE YOU?

Other artists have periods; Kikuo had styles: his paintings can be grouped—the Color Field Paintings, the Theatre Paintings, the Alphabet Paintings, etc.—but not neatly periodicized. He would spend a few weeks or months making Theatre Paintings and then he'd spend a few weeks or months making Alphabet Paintings and then he'd spend a weekend or whatever scribbling the arrows of the Theatre Paintings across the gridded letters of the Alphabet Paintings, themselves superimposed over a Color Field wash. The one exception to this cyclical output is the grouping called the Cloud Paintings, all 16 of which were painted in the same stretch, the early to mid-1990s. Their name was given to them by Kikuo's second wife, Mikiko Ino, whom he met in 2007 and married in 2010 (he'd introduced himself to her as a carpenter). Miki's idea, quite direct, is that the large single blob in each of these paintings is a cloud. I am not sure whether Kikuo thought of them as clouds, or what he called them, but I am certain that if he were still alive to hear Miki call them clouds, he would agree with her. He was always quick in his agreement and he was very much in love. Some of the titles that Kikuo gave the individual paintings make me think of these vivid blobs or splotches as rocks, as islands viewed

from above, as ripe fruit hanging from a bough. Each Cloud Painting has a line, a lower or higher margin, like a horizon, and when that horizon is lower, at the bottom of the painting, the cloud can seem like a moon or planet or exploded star. For nearly half my life I've been trying to figure out what these "are," or "were," to Kikuo, playing a game with the Cloud Paintings that kids usually play with clouds themselves: *And what do you think that one's shaped like? Do you see the whale? Do you see how it thins out into a snake? And breaks apart like a line of ants heading to an anthill?* These paintings are about these questions: they're about what you see and what Kikuo saw, and the hasty notations doodled here and there and below the fold are the calculations of the distance between those visions, signs pointing to some passage between them, and the magic formula that, once unscrambled and incanted, finally brings you, the viewer, together with him.



















Hal Foster

A Note on Kikuo Saito

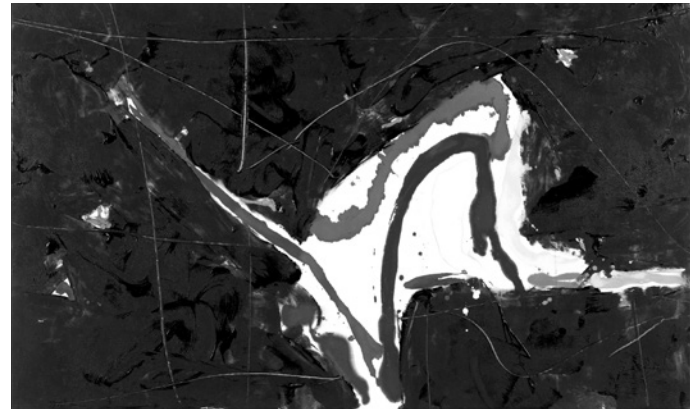
At once wholly visual and utterly philosophical, the art of Kikuo Saito prompts essential questions about drawing and painting—and makes them almost impossible to answer. What counts as a gesture, and when does it become a sign? How does a figure come to be, and does it always produce a ground in turn? Can these roles be reversed, a figure become a ground, a ground become a figure, and can this reversal occur within the same work?

How does an image appear, and can it be made to disappear at the same time—or, better, coaxed to linger in a limbo between these two states? By what criteria do we designate an image as representational or abstract, and might a drawing or a painting claim a space between or beyond these

two realms? What part does color play in all these tentative designations? (Sometimes Saito reduces his palette to black and white, but it is not really a reduction in his hands: his black can evoke a deep night, and his white can call up chalk lines on a wiped blackboard.) How is a symbol formed, and how might it be unformed? How is a language put together, and how might it be taken apart? Are these processes opposed to each other, as we usually think, or can they chase each other around a single sheet of paper or stretch of canvas? Saito makes these categories appear before our eyes, as if magically, and, just as magically, he makes them disappear, but never entirely so. At the same time, he lets us see the working of his magic—it is that labor that we behold—and yet this disclosure hardly dispels our wonder.

Talk of signifier, signified, and referent à la Saussure doesn't get us very far with Saito. Although he is deeply interested in language, it is not so clear what that language is. Gestures seem more important than words, numbers, or other symbols, but they all appear in his work, and sometimes they appear together, at once alike and unlike. More pertinent to Saito is the typology offered by Peirce—of an icon, which resembles its object; a symbol, which has an arbitrary relation to its referent; and an index, which bears a physical connection to its cause (like a footprint in wet sand). Or rather, this typology would be more

1 *Untitled*, 1980
Acrylic on canvas
48 × 80 inches



2 **Irish Wind, 1980**
Colored pencil and oil on canvas
87 × 58 inches



A Note on Kikuo Saito

pertinent but for the fact that Saito combines all three kinds of signs in his work, and so breaks up its tidy systematicity.

His invocations are paradoxical because what Saito invokes one moment withdraws the next. This happens on an art-historical plane too. For example, *Untitled 1980* calls up Jackson Pollock, especially the blinding cutouts of his drip paintings, but only for a second, and then the allusion is gone. *Irish Wind* summons Cy Twombly, especially the scattering effects of his scribbled graffiti, but this reference also fades like a ghost almost before it speaks. The great grace of this art is that no strong subject—no proper name—is pronounced in its gestures and signs. Even though they are fixed for us to see, they also seem ephemeral, even precarious. And thus do they invite us to contemplate the persistent fleetingness of our own thoughts, visions and lives.

1 Kikuo Saito's photograph documenting his painting with his brother Mamoru, 1958



Reiko Tomii

Kikuo Saito's Early Years: A Painting in the Field and Other Archival Vignettes

“America made me an artist.” These are the words that Kikuo Saito often used to describe his early life to his second wife Mikiko Ino.¹ Born in 1939 in Tokyo, Japan, Saito came to New York in 1966 at the age of 26. While working as a stage designer for La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club under

- 1 In this essay, Japanese names are rendered in two ways. The Western name order is used for Kikuo Saito and others who have made New York their permanent home, while the traditional East Asian order, surname first, and the macrons, is used for those residing in Japan—both historical and contemporary figures—including Saitō Mamoru.**

Ellen Stewart, he served as assistant for such prominent painters as Helen Frankenthaler, Kenneth Noland, and Larry Poons. By 1980, he established himself as an evocative Color Field painter in his own right. He would remain active both as a painter and an occasional stage designer until his death in 2016. Since then, a concerted effort has been made to preserve the artist's legacy by documenting his artistic and personal trajectories. One difficulty in exploring his life, especially his early years, is the paucity of material, which is partly due to his reluctance to discuss himself in public. He left few statements and oral histories, and most of his personal materials in Japan, such as his letters to his family, have been lost. Furthermore, he himself destroyed his pre-1966 works when he left Japan. Under these circumstances, his art and life are slowly being researched and reconstructed.

What I have narrated here is a glimpse into Saito's early years based on a few archival materials and interviews, in an attempt to understand why America, and not his homeland of Japan, made him an artist. My research has been assisted by Mikiko Ino, Joshua Cohen, and the KinoSaito staff, along with Saitō Mamoru, the artist's younger brother in Japan.

A Painting in the Field, 1958

One day in 1958, Saito had an outdoor photo session to document one of his paintings in the field spreading across from a prefecture-run housing complex, where he lived at the time with his family, in Fussa, in an outskirt of Tokyo [fig. 1]. Held by his brother Mamoru, then nine, the painting, now lost, measures probably about 40 by 30 inches. It is an abstract canvas horizontally divided into two unequal color halves, almost Rothko-like. Whether he knew of the American painter at the time is an intriguing question. However, this single existing monochrome photo reveals many fine details of Saito's painting that signals that the resemblance is probably more resonance than connection.

Between the two halves, the top one, paler in hue, seems to have been treated thinly, showing a veil of color over the darker ground. Two rows of whitish circular shapes hover over the horizon. The bottom half, rougher in treatment with some impastos visible, shows a row of what appear to be scraped, irregular marks. A closer inspection also reveals traces of slightly paler paint dripping down over the surface. It is tempting to see a future Saito here by the precocious hand of a 19-year-old Saito.

The painting exquisitely echoes the landscape it was placed in. The horizon in the canvas

is roughly aligned with that of the landscape that separates the vast sky and the field, fringed by trees and low-rising plants far away. Although it is no more than a speculation, even the color schemes might have been in parallel. It must have been Saito's express intention to photograph this canvas in this way. Indeed, Mamoru recalls the canvas felt rather experimental.

Around this time, Saito tried to show at a few of the many open-call salon-style juried exhibitions held in Japan by art associations. This work's relatively large size indicates that it was likely a proud submission to one of these programs. Yet, the work was rejected, as were several others. (The fact that these exhibitions were, and still are, held in spring and fall, combined with the undergrown appearance of the field, provide a plausible seasonal timeframe for the photograph: spring.)

2 Paintings Lost and Found

My research indicates that there are only three known works by Saito from or before 1966. (I am leaving out a fourth painting, an early self-portrait, long cherished by his family, because it was a youthful practice piece by an aspiring artist, not intended as a "work" as such.)

In chronological order, the first of the three, from 1958, exists solely in the photograph

examined above. The second, from 1961, is documented only in a publication without illustration, and thus we will never know what it looked like. The third, exact date unknown but from the mid-1960s prior to his departure to New York, is extant thanks to his sister Noriko, who has kept it in her house.

The 1958 work was made after Saito was rejected, most likely for the second time, by the prestigious national Tokyo University of the Arts (Tokyo Geijutsu Daigaku), known for its strict standards for academic life drawing. Though Saito did manage to get accepted to the municipal Kanazawa College of Art in Ishikawa Prefecture on the Sea of Japan, he and his family were unable to afford the entrance fee of 10,000 yen (approximately \$28 US), equivalent to the starting monthly salary of college graduates working for the national government in the early 1960s.²

Disappointed by his failure to attend art school and to start building an artist's career through the open-call salons, Saito opted to show his work in the 1961 Yomiuri Independent Exhibition, an annual non-jury, non-award-granting exhibition that anybody could participate in by

2 "Kokka kōmuin no shoninkyū no hensen" [Changes in the national government employees' starting wages], http://www.jinji.go.jp/kyuuyo/kou/starting_salary.pdf (accessed April 15, 2021).

paying a modest entry fee. His contribution, titled *Work* and now lost, is listed among numerous entries for the painting section.³ It is curious why Saito decided to show in the Yomiuri Independent. A potential key to his thinking is found in a set of casually torn-out pages from *Bijutsu techō* (Art notebook), a leading Japanese contemporary art magazine, which have been found in his archives. The pages, which are from the magazine's January 1961 issue—published two months prior to the Yomiuri Independent of that year—consist of a special feature, “Exploring the State of Art Today in the World.”⁴ The feature includes three survey-style essays by major art critics: Tōno Yoshiaki on America, Tokudaiji Kimihide on Europe, and Haryū Ichirō on “Nippon.” With no marks made by Saito on these pages, it remains a mystery as to what impact these essays had on Saito beyond the mention by Haryū of the Yomiuri Independent Exhibition and the vanguardism of Anti-Art (*Han-geijutsu*) at the exhibition. Still, the mere presence

3 Segi Shin'ichi, ed., *Nihon andepandan-ten zen kiroku 1949–1963* [Complete records of the Japan (Yomiuri) Independent Exhibition 1949–1963] (Tokyo: Sōbisha, 1993), 236.

4 “Sekai no bijutsu/konnichi no jōkyō o saguru” [Exploring the state of art today in the world], *Bijutsu techō*, no. 183 (January 1961): 1–33.

of this Japanese material is notable, when few Japanese-language items this old can be found among his possessions.

Around 1962, Saito entered Itō Painting Institute (Itō Kaiga Kenkyūjo), a private painting studio headed by the establishment oil painter Itō Kiyonaga (1911–2001), known for his Renoiresque portrayal of women.⁵ Ino remembers Saito recalling that his father had heard of the newly inaugurated studio from an acquaintance and pressured his son to attend, in the hope that Saito would gain practical professional experience. Given Saito's impoverished circumstances, he maintained a nominal work-study status, in effect serving as an unpaid hand for menial studio and daily chores that completely deprived him of time in which to work on his own art.

The third pre-1966 painting, a small still life reproduced above [fig. 2], could have been painted during this period, just prior to his departure for New York. Small though it may be, the untitled work reveals a competent hand that recalls the amorphous transparency of Cézanne's watercolors, accentuating lines that only vaguely allude to

5 For Itō's biography and art, see <https://www3.city.toyooka.lg.jp/virtual/3itokiyo-naga/itounenpu.html> and <https://www3.city.toyooka.lg.jp/virtual/3itokiyo-naga/itou.html> (accessed April 7, 2021).

- 2 Title unknown, mid-1960s
Oil on canvas
27.5 × 22 cm (unframed)



Kikuo Saito's Early Years

the grid structure of Mondrian's gingerpot still lifes, and the dignified serenity of Morandi's bottles. It is dangerous to predict a painter's future from his early works, but one thing that can certainly be sensed, from his 1958 work in a photograph and this painting, is Saito's innate affinity for thinly painted color fields. It would seem no coincidence that, once in New York, he would gravitate toward such Color Field painters as Frankenthaler, Poons, and Noland, in whose studios he happily served his final apprenticeships, in his own words "training his eyeballs."⁶

3 Departing for New York

Saito's Japanese passport, issued on February 25, 1966, records many vagaries of a Japanese citizen's travel abroad [fig. 3]. In April 1964, the year of the Tokyo Olympics, foreign travel was liberalized for all Japanese citizens with a foreign exchange allowance up to \$500. This amount, the equivalent of 180,000 yen at the time, is documented in Saito's passport, with an additional 20,000 yen also noted for travel. Saito saved this considerable sum by working at Moulin Rouge, a popular cabaret in Shinjuku, as a lighting engineer,⁷ a trade he'd

6 Saito quoted in "Me' o kitae, egaku" [Train the eye and paint], *The New York Yomiuri*, January 18, 1991.

learned from Toshirō Ogawa. Ogawa was a lighting designer at Waseda University in Tokyo and later taught at various universities in the States, and served as a stage designer for the American Ballet Theatre and the Triplex Theater in New York, among other important venues.⁸ This familiarity with stage design would also help Saito earn money and gain a visa and green card once in New York.

With the rise of American abstraction, New York increasingly became the destination for postwar Japanese artists with the means to travel — a phenomenon that might be said to begin with Kenzō Okada, who in 1950 at age 48 moved to New York and quickly established himself as the master of Yugenism. Numerous Japanese artists followed to make their marks in the city, including On Kawara, Kusama Yayoi, and Ushio Shinohara, to name just a few.⁹ What set apart Saito from his

7 Ibid.

8 He also authored *Theatre Engineering and Stage Machinery* (Royston, Hertfordshire: Entertainment Technology Press, 2001).

9 For more on Japanese artists in New York, see Eric C. Shiner and Reiko Tomii, ed., *Making a Home: Japanese Contemporary Artists in New York*. (New York, NY: Japan Society and Yale University Press, 2007).

3 Kikuo Saito's Japanese passport, issued in 1966



fellow expatriates was the fact that most of them had gone to art school in Japan, and some had even had careers in Japan, prior to their arrival. Put another way, most of them were already artists to varying degrees before trying to establish themselves in the capital of international art. By contrast, all Saito had was an intense desire to be an artist. We find his keen aspiration expressed most poignantly in the way he identified his occupation in his passport: ARTIST. On March 26, 1966, Saito flew from Tokyo for the United States and arrived in Honolulu on the same date.

Coda

By 1980, Saito had established himself as a painter of note. In that year, he was included in the prestigious group exhibition *The New Generation: A Curator's Choice*, curated by Kenworth Moffett for the Andre Emmerich Gallery in New York. Coincidentally, the formalist art critic Fujieda Teruo happened to see the exhibition and decided to write on Saito, becoming the first champion of Saito's work in his native country.¹⁰ Furthermore, the January–February issue of *Art International* carried a review of his solo exhibition at Salander

¹⁰ Fujieda Teruo, “Minimaru āto o koete” [Beyond minimal art], *Graphication* 40 (December 1988): 48.

4 Cover of *Art International* (January–February 1980), illustrated with Saito's *Tef Tef* (1979)



O'Reilly in New York,¹¹ but also illustrated his *Tef Tef* (1979) on the cover [fig. 4], marking a major breakout moment. In 1966, however, such recognitions were still just a dream. Having had no opportunity to develop his emerging aesthetic in the land of his birth, the young Saito could only hope that New York would open up a new horizon for self-reinvention.

11 Nina Ffrench-Frazier, "New York: Kikuo Saito," *Art International* (January–February 1980): 39.

Kikuo Saito, 1939–2016

When Kikuo Saito arrived in New York from his native Tokyo, aged 26, in 1966, it was as someone who had been designing stage sets for modern dance in Japan. In New York, however, he worked as a studio assistant for such artists as Larry Poons, Kenneth Noland, and Helen Frankenthaler. But Saito also reconnected with the world of performance and continued to design for the theater and dance until 1979, working internationally with some of the most innovative directors and choreographers of the period. Drawing on the Japanese theatrical traditions of Kabuki and Noh, he pioneered the use of water and other untraditional materials on stage. In addition to productions for the Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto, Italy, he created settings for plays at La MaMa in New

York, collaborated with Robert Wilson on projects in Shiraz, Iran, and in Paris, and created the set for Peter Brook's *Conference of the Birds*, in Paris. Enthusiastic supporters of this gifted young Japanese man included the choreographer Jerome Robbins and the founder of La MaMa, Ellen Stewart—who described herself as “Kikuo Saito’s mother in America.”

Despite his growing reputation for his stage work, Saito became dissatisfied with the complexity and the collaborative nature of designing for performance. Even before he completely abandoned theater projects, he increasingly concentrated on painting, developing a personal version of Color Field abstraction. Saito’s mature work is characterized by inventive, often surprising color, which ranges from frankly gorgeous, richly varied intensities to subdued near-monochromes, as well as by eloquent drawings. His paintings negotiate a tense coexistence between McLuhanesque “cool” and passionate individuality—perhaps a metaphor for Saito’s dual existence, over the years, in the collaborative world of the theater and the private world of the studio.

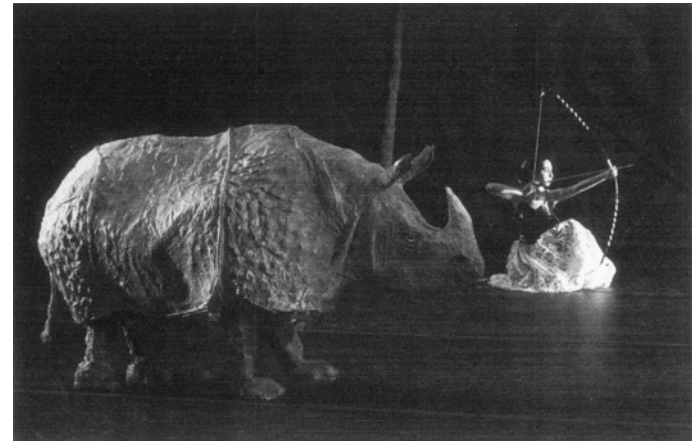
In 1996, Saito returned, briefly, to the theater, when he was artist-in-residence at Duke University. Collaborating with his first wife, the dancer and choreographer, Eva Maier, and drawing upon his extensive travels in Italy, he created the narrative concept, costumes, and sets for

1 *Water Play*, 1976, LaMaMa. Photo credit William Noland.



Toy Garden, a wordless, haunting performance involving students from Duke's dance, drama, and art departments. (**Toy Garden** was later performed at La MaMa.) The piece, loosely inspired by John Ruskin's writings on Venice, was, more specifically, Saito said, about what he imagined was happening in the missing half of Vittore Carpaccio's celebrated **Two Venetian Ladies**, a work whose amputated left side has long been lost. The long snout of an ambiguous dog cropped by the painting's edge generated a delightful iguana costume—the dancer stretched out on a low, wheeled platform—while Carpaccio's women's ample costumes and the birds perched on the railing became a generous cage-like wire skirt, filled with doves. A similar stint at New York's LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts, in 2001, produced **Ash Garden**, a meditation on Pompeii and its fate, informed, as **Toy Garden** was, by Saito's direct experience of place and relevant works of art, and performed by students. All of Saito's theater pieces involved slow progressions across the stage, stylized movement, evocative costumes, and repetition. "Repetition can be very important," Saito once told me, "but it has to mean something different every time."

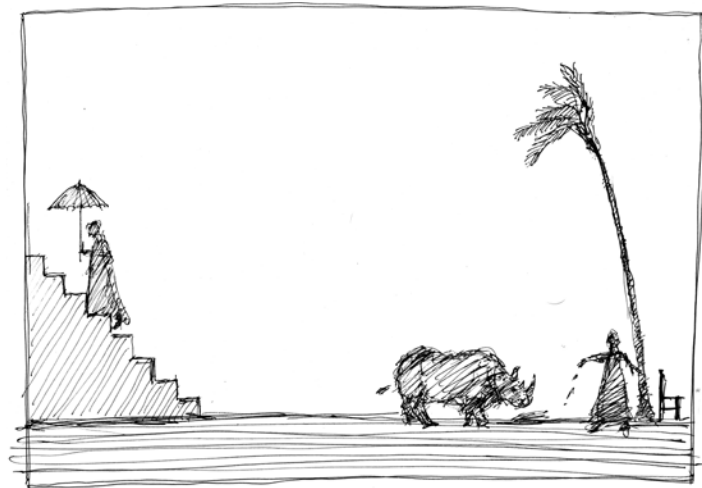
These theater works resonated in Saito's paintings. It's sometimes difficult to tell whether certain works on paper are preparatory for **Toy Garden** and **Ash Garden**—notes for costumes,

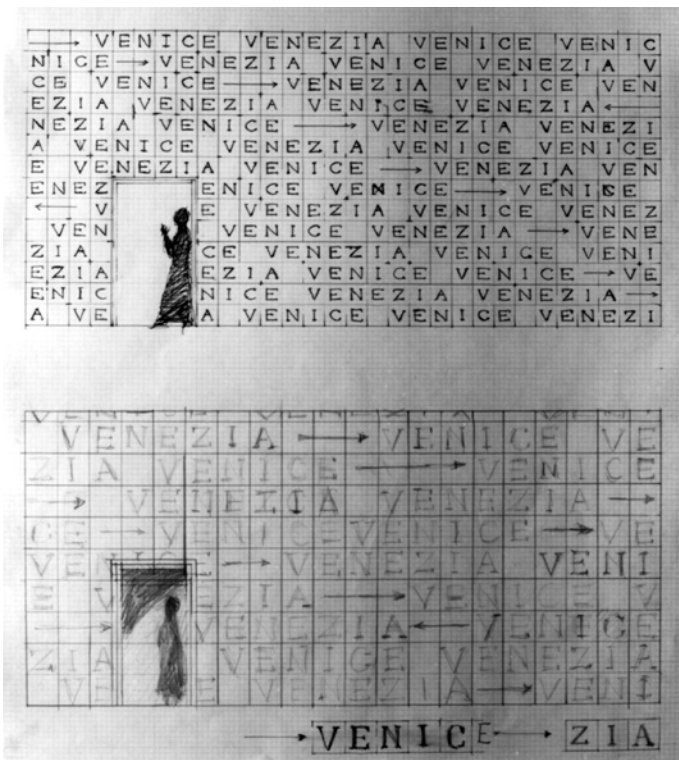


3 Sketch for Toy Garden, 1996



4 Sketch for Toy Garden, 1996





diagrams of movement patterns, concepts for drops—or investigations, in two dimensions, of the implications of those components and the performances themselves. As Saito's paintings matured, gesture, in many forms, became more and more dominant, without overshadowing his orchestrations of ravishing hues. Around the time he was working on *Toy Garden*, these gestures became increasingly calligraphic. The paintings that preceded and followed the production included everything from the energetic sweeps of a loaded brush and delicate lines to declarative stenciled Roman capital letters, and a lot in between, some of it suggesting cursive writing, but almost or completely illegible. Many of these mysterious scrawls proved to be shorthand, recontextualized versions of Saito's conceptual drawings for costumes and characters, while the elegant Roman letters, arranged at intervals on a grid, that form a kind of scaffolding for many of the paintings, had their origins in the backdrop of *Toy Garden*. In the same way, the subdued palette of *Ash Garden* had cognates in the paintings that followed. Yet there is nothing literal about how these “images” appear in the paintings. Memories or echoes of movement become autonomous sweeps across the canvas, fraying into scribbles and tatters, while configurations derived, perhaps, from characters in the theater pieces—the iguana, the woman with the skirt full of doves, dancers moving slowly carrying

lights—became sensuous tangles and swipes all but divorced from reference. (Interestingly, none of the suggested calligraphy ever appears related to Japanese characters.)

The largely unreadable calligraphic elements of all of Saito's work of his last two decades can be seen as expressive of deeply embedded experience. "Unreadable" is a key word. Even the elegant, clearly delineated Roman letters are detached from meaning, turned into purely visual phenomena. It may not be an overstatement to say that when we, as viewers, attempt to come to terms with Saito's invented calligraphy—now plainly visible, now veiled by layers of paint, now disintegrating—we recapitulate the artist's youthful experience of arriving in New York and being confronted by a new language and a new alphabet. The sensuality of Saito's color, the delicacy of his drawing, and the physicality of his paint-handling could be equivalents for his pleasure in overcoming those challenges. But part of the strength of Saito's work, on canvas or on stage, is its resistance to a single interpretation. The austerity of some of the theater paintings, which, at their most extreme, can resemble blackboards with complicated plottings and traces of directions, could be interpreted as emblematic of effort and concentration, or as a visualization of the preparation and realization of the theater pieces. Each discipline seems to have informed

- 6 Photograph of making of *Toy Garden* backdrop, 1996, LaMaMa. Photo credit Eva Maier.



**7 Photograph of performance of *Toy Garden*,
1996, LaMaMa. Photo credit Eva Maier.**



Kikuo Saito, 1939–2016

the other. The economy and sensuality of Saito's paintings manifested itself in the unexpected, slow, pared-down incidents and stage-pictures of his theater pieces—and, perhaps, vice versa. Both the theater works and the paintings are surprising, mysterious, and compelling.

Coda: Saito began to exhibit his paintings in 1976 and since then, participated in numerous solo and group shows in the US, Europe, and Japan. He is represented in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art and the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, as well as numerous private and corporate collections. In addition to being artist-in-residence at Duke University and LaGuardia High School, Saito was also a visiting professor at Musashino Art University, in Tokyo, and taught, until weeks before his death, at the Art Students League. He was an inspiring teacher whose students remained deeply attached to him, even as they established themselves in careers such as architecture. They form an extended family of adult surrogate children, further expanding the legacy of this notably modest, dazzlingly gifted man, whose multivalent abilities left their mark in many different disciplines.

Woman with the Bird Skirt

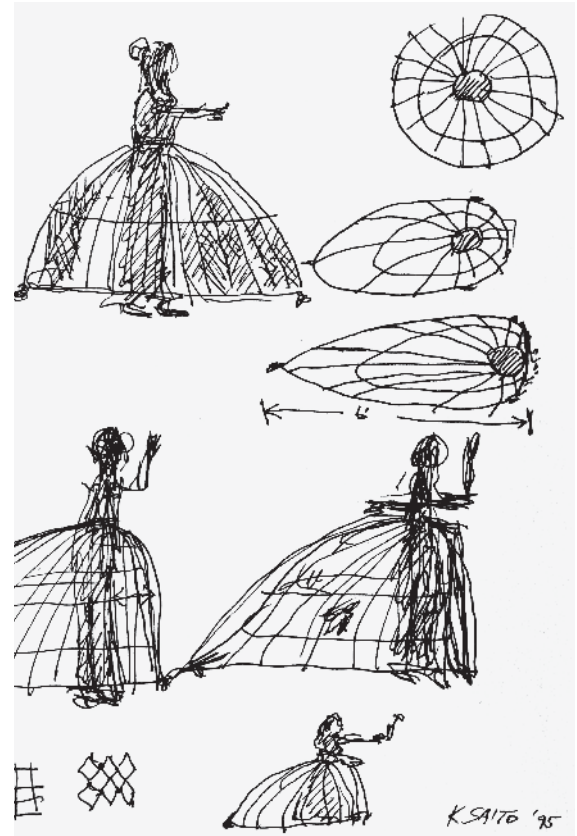
For a long time, I thought the woman was a ghost. I thought she was Eva Maier, Kikuo's first wife who died unexpectedly a few months before I met Kikuo. She seemed to be haunting his canvases the way Eva's belongings haunted Kikuo's apartment. In the fall of 1997, I spent two days a week as an intern in Kikuo's studio. Though I never met Eva, she was tangibly present. Her costumes, her hats, her shoes, hung about the Chambers Street studio as if she would return at any moment to inhabit them.

At that time, Kikuo was working almost exclusively on the Theatre paintings. He had me build small maquettes of a stage, one with red walls and a thin gold Pompeiian ornament, another with black walls. I understood these theater maquettes to be the ground color of his paintings, waiting to be

activated by some movement through space. And then I saw her, appear again and again on his canvases, this woman walking, cutting the space across his colored backdrops.

She arrived first in 1996 in *Toy Garden*, a theater collaboration between Kikuo and Eva, as an armature to be worn by a performer. It was a skirt filled with doves, taking the birds from a painting by Carpaccio and putting them inside a garment accelerated through time, into a structured underskirt—a wire-and-papier-mâché cage—not quite contemporary with 1490s Venetian courtesans. The skirt was so heavy it needed small wheels to allow it to glide across the stage, as the doves cooed along with the woman's strides. It was sad and beautiful—the cage around the woman sharing space with the fluttering doves. Constraint and freedom were merged into a single gesture, encircling the woman's legs, hampering them and yet also armoring them, as she moved determinedly about the stage.

But I knew this woman later, and best, from his paintings. She replaced the arrow of his earlier expressions—the arrow became a dancer. Recognizable in many forms, this woman usually appears in profile, as a gridded triangle—a cage rendered as a grid—leaning into motion. In the Theatre Paintings when she appears, she is the protagonist, reaching upward, sometimes holding a parasol, sometimes not, but always



- 2 **Vittore Carpaccio**
Two Venetian Ladies (detail), c. 1490
Oil on wood
94 × 64 cm



Woman with the Bird Skirt

moving, or trying to move. Painted events happen around her, but she slips through them, or out of them. Her movements carry her through the time of the painting, her appearances captured from that movement, as she flits about the canvas stage attending to one colorful event, then another.

To be precise, Kikuo didn't paint this woman so much as draw her onto the painting. Her shape cuts through the paint in pencil lead like the outline of a shadow, like the darkness on the wall traced by the Corinthian maid in depiction of her lover, in that mythical event that instigated the birth of painting itself: the desire to record an image as a memory of love. For six years, Kikuo practiced that desire, marking the woman into existence, drawing her close, and then—she disappeared.

By 2003, Kikuo no longer made Theatre Paintings. For that matter, he no longer made theater. **Ash Garden**, from 2001, was his last production, and a turning point at which his focus shifted from painting as theater, to painting as painting. The Theatre Paintings constitute a brief passage in this evolution, from a place of collaboration to a solitary, monk-like pursuit of color.

Today I can see the woman with the bird skirt more clearly, not as the ghost of Eva, but as a ghostly depiction or notation of the dance of their relationship. There she is—there they are—moving across the canvas stage, painting, dancing, the work they did together still going on.

Kikuo Saito: Matter and Action

I

1966, the year Kikuo Saito came to America from Japan, was rather late to drop in on the unfolding story of modernist painting. Saito was 26 years old. He found his way to abstraction via the Gutai Group, whose manifesto extols Jackson Pollock and Georges Mathieu thus:

Their work reveals the scream of matter itself, cries of the paint and enamel. These two artists confront matter in a way that aptly corresponds to their individual discoveries. Or rather, they even seem to serve matter. Astonishing effects of differentiation and integration take place.

By 1966 the scream of matter had gone hoarse. Painters only a little older than him such as Frank Stella, Walter Darby Bannard, and Larry Poons were painting concerted rebuttals to the emotive excesses of gestural oil-slinging, efforts that later would be called Post-Painterly Abstraction. However, the Gutai Manifesto goes on to read, "No matter how many Pollocks have emerged after Pollock, his glory will not diminish. We must respect new discoveries." The timing of Saito's immigration allowed him to exercise a natural catholicity in a cultural atmosphere of experimentation and freedom.

In one of the stranger coincidences of modern art history, Saito, en route to New York from Japan via Hawaii and San Francisco, encountered Ellen Stewart of La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club while they both were viewing the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago. Her beneficence led to his involvement in multidisciplinary performance, even as he developed his own voice with respect to abstract painting. Matter, as conceived by the Gutai, always remained at the center of his work.

It's worth noting how intense some of the arguments around art and art-making had grown at the time of Saito's arrival. In 1972, Bannard published an essay titled "The War Against the Good in Art," which observed,

Today this attack is manifold. It came to

the fore in the early sixties, when Abstract Expressionism had spread to a choking mass. The reaction came, as always, but this time it was different, for there was not one reaction but many. Suddenly, everywhere, the idea of innovation caught up to innovation itself, and everyone innovated with brutal regularity. Obvious newness was sanctified. Surprise became the safe substitute for esthetic experience.

Bannard, who described himself as an artist cursed with the ability to write, couldn't avoid getting drafted into that war. Saito, in contrast, was able to avail himself of this innovation without coming into conflict with it. His work entered the theater, and elements of the theater entered his work. Operating out of the reality of matter and action, at a distance from language, he found a way to situate himself, not via a dialectic of competing movements, but purely by way of his own inclinations, and achieve a rare and absolutely undogmatic modernism.

II

Saito's work points out an uncomfortable gap in criticism and aesthetic phenomenology. Arranging an image inside of a rectangle is an ancient convention, dating at least to the low relief carvings of the Sumerians. Without ever formalizing their

knowledge, at least as far as we know, those early artists sensed that there were better and worse ways of organizing images within those rectangles. Abstraction, first as decoration and later as an explicit mode of art-making, demonstrated that composition hinges not on imagery but on shape itself. But what causes the feeling of rightness in certain arrangements of shapes with respect to their containing rectangle? If it's a special case of the ability to detect beauty in general, why does that case exist?

This problem has gone all but untreated since the days of the Sumerians. I know of two exceptions, both partial. One is from Paul Crowther's *Phenomenology of the Visual Arts* (even the frame):

Literally, the framing devices define and emphasize individual planes wherein specific items or states of affairs are clarified visually through selective presentation of their key aspects. Pictorial space becomes explicitly separate from the visual space of the physical world precisely through its role in this cognitive enhancement.

Framing devices, then, have the practical effect (intended or not) of clearly demarcating pictorial space, and signifying its difference from ordinary perceptual space.... [Rectangular formats have] the signal advantage of appearing to extend outwards in two equal directions,

either horizontally or vertically. This dynamism suggests the virtual extendability of pictorial space left, right, and above the stationary viewer as well as in front of him and her. Its framing function is thereby one which focuses on the main represented subject but which situates it in a relatively open space.

The other is from a charming and wise little book by the painter Terry Fenton, *About Pictures*. Having noted that pictures are usually rectangles probably because walls and pages usually are as well, he describes this phenomenon:

In its simplest sense figure and ground refers to figures in a setting, against a background. As painting became more abstract, foreground "figures" often threatened to detach from the ground, making pictures that looked thin and incomplete. There were as many solutions to the problem as there were successful painters, but three basic tendencies stood out. One was to make the "figure" occupy most of the picture surface, hence the all-over painting of Jackson Pollock, Jules Olitski, Larry Poons, and more recently John Griesen. A second was to make the figure and ground appear to sit side-by-side in a kind of optical space as with Adolph Gottlieb, Kenneth Noland, Jack Bush, William Perehudoff and several others. A possible

third was to make the ground, itself, take over much of the picture surface with various small accents added, for example Barnett Newman and Helen Frankenthaler. Needless to say, these aren't hard and fast categories. Some painters, among them the vastly underrated Darryl Hughto, used them all.

Saito too could be said to have used them all. But to my eye, his best pictures are of the second of Fenton's types, the side-by-side arrangement of figure and ground. This is to contrast his approach with the allover strategy, which prompted Allan Kaprow to say of Pollock that "the confines of the rectangular field were ignored in lieu of an experience of a continuum going in all directions simultaneously, beyond the literal dimensions of any work."

Saito's most productive conception of a picture—put in terms of these insights from Crowther and Fenton—sets up two forces for collision. One is the demarcated rectangle, the physical edge of the painting, exerting pressure towards its own center via an encroaching ground. The other is a "figure" that resists this encroachment as if in defense of its own existence, exerting pressure outward towards the rectangle. The equilibrium of the two produces a satisfying stability, as if one was pressing one's palms together.

Take for instance an untitled painting from 1980 (reproduced on page 35). The ground

1 Summerland, 1996
Oil on canvas
75 ½ × 46 ¼ inches



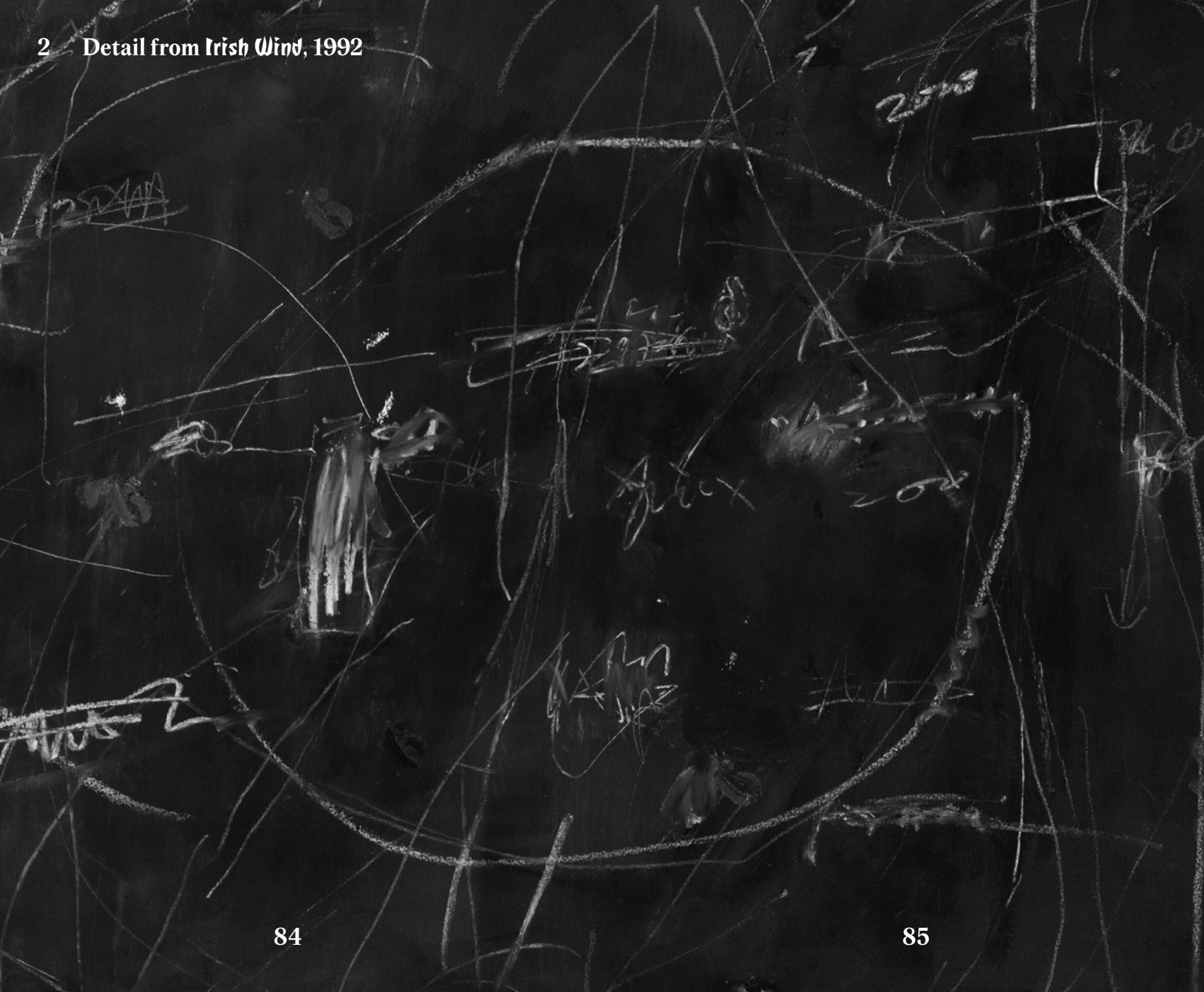
consists mainly of black acrylic paint, and the figure (I'll desist from putting it in quotes), mainly of raw canvas. Those elements by themselves would have resulted in the malaise of thinness that Fenton describes, an abandoning of the ground's encroachment on a helpless figure. But Saito creates the effect of opposing pressures by making the figure push back through pours of thinned acrylic, one ribbonlike shape each of fuchsia, crimson, teal, green, yellow, purple, blue, and white. Despite the relatively lower volume of paint application, the colors drip onto the black at the edges, causing paint otherwise soaked into the raw canvas to reach slightly in front of the dark ground. Around the rectangle, separate from the figure, small triangles of unpainted canvas, gaps in the encroachment, have also received dabs of color. This invokes Fenton's third type of abstract picture, in which accents have been added to an area overtaken by ground. As he remarks, one could build a whole picture this way. But in this case, the device serves to amplify the sensation of the figure's resistance.

Saito gouged lines into the dark ground with a brush handle, and they bear particular scrutiny. Some echo the outline of the figure, without redrawing it. Others echo the physical edges of the painting, without becoming strict horizontals or verticals. The gouged lines seem to bend in the compression between the centrifugal force of the

figure and the centripetal force of the rectangle.

This work was painted in a small number of moves, which is not to say that it was easy to make. The speed at which acrylic dries tells us that Saito painted the ground in one exuberant effort, as it would have been impossible to gouge those lines into it after a short while. Pours such as appear here can't be amended. If you imagine drawing abstractly by pouring a glass of wine on a tablecloth, you have an idea of what happened.

This untitled Saito is typical of his work at the end of the 1970s and the start of the '80s, what we might call his classic mode. In the '90s, however, his grounds started to push out his figures, and were filled with a mysterious stenography. In these canvases, Saito improvised an indecipherable script in white colored pencil on blackboard-like applications of oil paint, sometimes appearing to read left to right, other times right to left, alternating between failed math, failed cursive English, and failed *hiragana*. They speak of the futility of language, perhaps personally in the artist's case, perhaps more broadly regarding its powerlessness in the face of art. Even so, a painting like *Irish Wind* (1992, reproduced in full on page 36, and in detail on pages 82–83), contains a central, drawn loop, serving as a kind of figure, from which radiate lines akin to the gouges of his classic period that flatten and square off as they approach the edge of the painting.



A few months after Saito arrived in the States, Barbara Rose conducted a panel discussion with Bannard, Poons, Donald Judd, and Robert Rauschenberg on the question, “Is Easel Painting Dead?” A recording of this sometimes illuminating, sometimes madcap exchange is preserved in the Archives of American Art at the Smithsonian. The transcript concludes with (I think) unintentional humor with a note from the editor that reads, “Not included here is an extensive question-and-answer session held at the end of the panel, which began with an angry audience member lambasting the panel participants for a number of minutes.” Saito’s whole career as a mature painter took place in the time since then.

Hardly anyone remembers the details of these hoary animosities anymore, and easel painting is obviously not dead. Myriad preconceptions about modernism and its dramas stand to be put aside, in favor of a renewed look at an artist whose work began in Nihonga, was informed by experimental theater and dance, and was conducted in an ethos that regards the wide variety of creative practices as sisters. Saito’s modernism was, and continues to be, of the most generous sort.

Saito's Gardens

“The best picture in the world,” according to John Ruskin, was Vittore Carpaccio’s *Two Venetian Ladies* (ca. 1490), a strange portrait of two ostentatiously dressed women idling in the corner of a palazzo terrace, accompanied by a menagerie of precisely rendered pets. They seem indifferent to one another, bored by their elegant surroundings: one half-heartedly plays with her dogs, the other ignores a strutting peacock at her feet, and both glance out at something more interesting happening on the other side of the terrace, just out of the frame. In *St. Mark’s Rest*, Ruskin describes the scene as “a study of animal life in all its phases.” What he doesn’t mention—perhaps didn’t know—is that the painting is only a fragment, believed to be the lower right quadrant of a much larger whole.

An upper panel was discovered in 1944, filling in a deep background of boats sailing off into a lagoon, but what captured the sitters' attention remains a mystery.

Kikuo Saito's 1996 play *Toy Garden*, a collaboration with the choreographer Eva Maier, his first wife, imagines what might have occupied the missing half. Developed while he was an artist-in-residence at Duke University, it was later presented at La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club, marking Saito's return, after a seventeen-year hiatus, to the theater where he had first found an artistic community in New York upon arriving from Japan in 1966. Saito's silent production unfolded as a sequence of dreamlike tableaux against a backdrop of the words "VENICE" and "VENIZIA" repeated in stenciled block capitals, a motif that subsequently found its way into many of his late paintings. In one preparatory sketch, Saito envisions the seated woman in the foreground of Carpaccio's painting toying with a giant iguana instead of a dog, while other figures race across the stage in opposite directions, wearing elaborate wire hoop skirts that double as cages for flying doves. (Other elements included a burning house, a tent city, and a parade of Ruskinian Venetian tourists.) In 2001, working with dance students at New York's LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts, he created a companion piece, *Ash Garden*, set in Pompeii in the aftermath

1 Photograph of performance of *Toy Garden*, 1996, LaMaMa. Photo credit Eva Maier.





of Mt. Vesuvius's eruption, imagining an alternate universe in which the city came back to life, still blanketed in ash.

But *Toy Garden* took its cues from the speculative character of Ruskin's writings on Carpaccio as much as from the painting itself. Ruskin posits that the painter, displeased with his apathetic sitters, turned an uninspiring portrait commission into his own private entertainment: "He has painted their pretty faces and pretty shoulders, their pretty dresses and pretty jewels, their pretty ways and their pretty playmates," Ruskin writes, "and what would they have more?—he himself secretly laughing at them all the time, and intending the spectators of the future to laugh forever."

Saito's *Twin Garden* (2002) invites a similar kind of imaginative projection. Instead of orienting the composition around a single center of gravity, Saito distributes little events across the canvas. A vertical strip of sky blue slices down the upper left corner, where it meets a watery grey wisp. A torrent of high-key green is bisected by a streak of pale red with fans of translucent pigment fanning down underneath, echoed below by a pool of saturated acid yellow that melts into thinned drips of green as the pigment makes its way down toward the canvas's lower edge, surrounded by agitated scrawls. These forms are augmented by loosely sketched marks, some painted, others drawn in pencil, that alternately

delineate and annotate Saito's shocks of color: for instance, a flourish of pink and lavender floats like a kite above a passage of muted brown crowned by orange-tinged white, tethered to it by swooping arcs of colored pencil; nearby, a pink orb hovers over a violet arabesque, linked by calligraphic sweeps of dry-brushed black. The painting is abstract only to the extent that its imagery is unfixed: brushstrokes appear to converge into nearly recognizable motifs—mountains, lagoons, creatures both real and imaginary—and then dissolve back into configurations of color and line.

Certain elements seem directly indebted to Saito's designs for *Toy Garden*: a suggestively animal form with a red tail crawls along the bottom of the canvas, while a dainty patch of yellow and peach recalls a preening figure, the vague outline of a wire hoop projecting from its back. But a work like *Twin Garden* also bears subtler traces of Saito's immersion in the world of theater and performance, attesting to the way it inflected his entire approach to painting. Having spent his career between the stage and the studio, Saito recognized that what his disciplines shared, at their most basic, was the need to activate the ground—to fill space with something worth seeing. He tended to move his canvases between the easel and the floor while working, conceiving of the painting as an environment in itself. Paint is thickly daubed, then thinned and poured, streaked and stained. At

times, the brushwork is controlled, deliberate—a single short stroke of turquoise suspended in thin air, or a precisely placed tangerine highlight lifting an area of earthy brown; at others, he trusted the pigment to go where it wanted. Animated by this accumulation of painterly incident, incongruous tones and textures, variations of line, the surface takes on a life of its own; each form seems to be on its way somewhere else, threatening to move if you turn away.

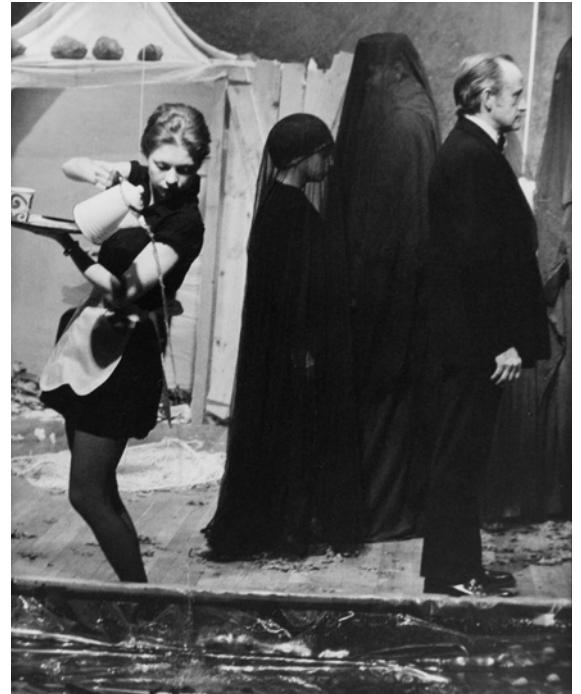
But just as important is what has been left out. The overall effect of the painting is active, but Saito's method is characterized by a remarkable restraint. Much of the surface remains unfilled, though not quite empty: the ground tone subtly modulates from pale, cool grey to cream, shadowed in places by a haze of smudged graphite. Tempered by blank space, the dissonant palette—contrasting shades of orange and green, purple and yellow—is an adventure instead of an assault. He sensed when to pull back and let color do its work, anchoring and defining areas of interest, drawing the eye around from one happening to the next, as if blocking a scene on stage.

The garden is a recurring theme in Saito's work, one he returned to at different moments in his career as his artistic priorities and style shifted and evolved. In 1972, he collaborated with Robert Wilson on *KA MOUNTAIN and GUARDENIA TERRACE* at the Shiraz Festival of the Arts in Iran,

3 Photograph of performance of *Water Play*, 1976, LaMaMa. Photo credit William Noland.



4 Photograph of performance of *Water Play*, 1976, LaMaMa. Photo credit William Noland.



a sprawling outdoor production that ran continuously for seven days across multiple sites in the Haft Tan mountains, opening with an overture set in a Sufi garden. (His contributions included set designs featuring giant painted animals constructed from papier-mâché.) Saito's own surreal *Water Play*, performed at La MaMa in 1976, set similar animal protagonists—most prominently a life-sized zebra—against a backdrop of running water, resulting in what he called a “living sculpture in motion and sound.” When he turned his attention to painting full-time in the late 1970s and early '80s, his works often took the form of thick, almost relief-like monochrome fields containing concentrated zones of bloomy stains and drips of boldly colored pigment sinking into raw canvas, the compositions loosely evoking distant aerial views. In one early painting, also titled *Toy Garden* (1980), a liquid ground of beige poured paint pulls opens at the center to reveal a serpentine passage of cornflower blue, bordered by a horizontal streak of deep green and pooling, earth-toned drips; rhythmic arcs and dashes of fuchsia and green suddenly burst from a gap in a sedate grayish-pink field in *Misty Garden* (1980), pressing against the border of their circumscribed space. Other paintings evoke garden motifs primarily through palette: in *Lemon Tree* (1984), the canvas is largely given over to a modulated ground of yellow washes, punctuated by two long sweeps of brown

branching across the upper edge and a cluster of red, green, and pink strokes congregating in the corner. The brushwork is freer in late paintings like *Garden Song* (2011) and *Copper Garden* (2012), with loose, gestural marks woven into tangled nets of warm color, offset by occasional ribbons of cool blue.

It is perhaps no surprise that Saito was drawn to the garden: in the history of painting, gardens often function rather like a stage, demarcating a space in the world but not quite of it—think, for instance, of the enigmatic pastoral of Giorgione's poesies, the aristocratic dreamworld of Watteau's fêtes galantes, the frisson of the impressionist park promenade. In the garden, nature is framed and put on display, instructed to perform a more perfect version of itself; in return, it demands a performance from its visitors. Saito's garden works do not so much represent the garden as channel its innate theatricality, distilling it into a mood.



















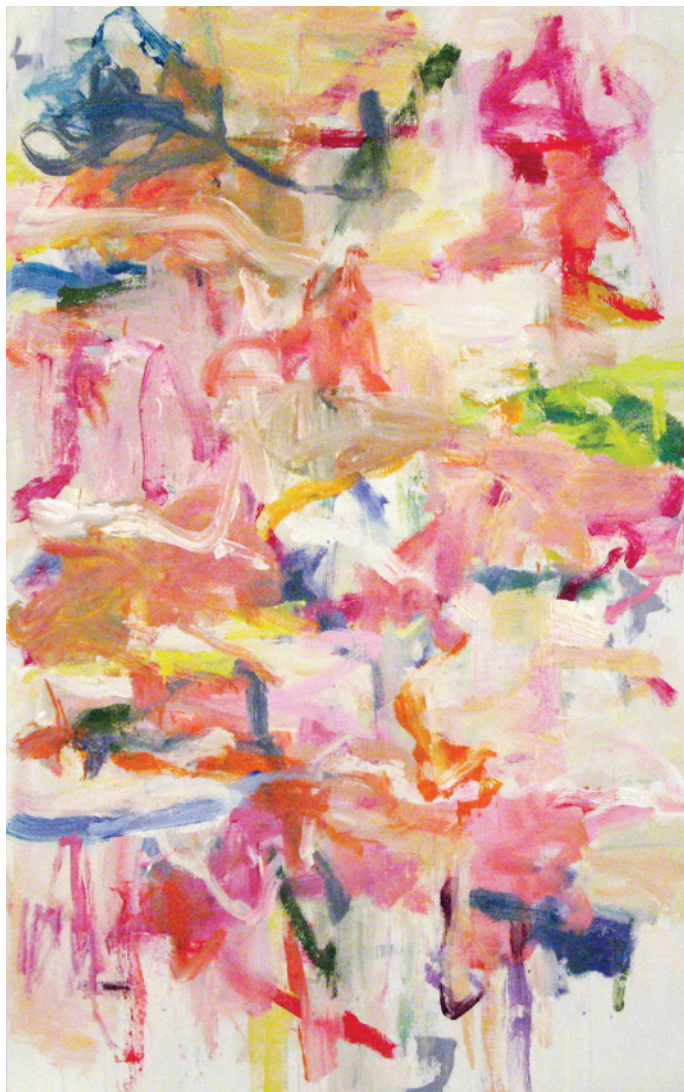












Contributors

Joshua Cohen

Joshua Cohen was born in 1980 in Atlantic City. His books include the novels *The Netanyahus*, *Moving Kings*, *Book of Numbers*, *Witz*, *A Heaven of Others*, and *Cadenza* for the *Schneidermann Violin Concerto*; the short-fiction collection *Four New Messages*; and the nonfiction collection *Attention: Dispatches from a Land of Distraction*. Called “a major American writer” by the *New York Times*, “maybe America’s greatest living writer” by the *Washington Post*, and “an extraordinary prose stylist, surely one of the most prodigious at work in American fiction today” by the *New Yorker*, Cohen was awarded Israel’s 2013 Matanel Prize for Jewish Writers, and in 2017 was named one of *Granta’s* Best Young American Novelists. He lives in New York City.

Franklin Einspruch

While maintaining a studio practice as an artist in Boston, Franklin Einspruch is also active in art criticism, comics, and alternative publishing. He has been a resident artist at programs in Italy, Greece, Taiwan, and around the United States, and was the Fulbright-Q21/MuseumsQuartier Wien Artist-in-Residence for 2019. He has authored 223 essays and art reviews for many publications, including the *New Criterion* and *Art in America*.

Hal Foster

Hal Foster is the author of numerous books, including, most recently *What Comes After Farce? Art and Criticism at a Time of Debacle*, and *Brutal Aesthetics*, a collection of his 2018 Mellon Lectures at the National Gallery in Washington. A member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, he teaches at Princeton University, coedits the journal *October*, and contributes regularly to the *London Review of Books* and *Artforum*.

Sarah Strauss

Sarah Strauss is a Registered Architect in New York State and Puerto Rico. Strauss founded XS Architect in 2015 as a practice dedicated to tropical architecture and new ornament, and co-founded Bigprototype LLC in 2004. Sarah received her Master of Architecture from the Yale school of architecture in 2002 and her B.A. in Art History, Fine Arts, and Chemistry from Duke University. Sarah currently lives between Brooklyn, NY and Rincon, P.R. and is a visiting associate professor at Pratt Institute.

Reiko Tomii

Reiko Tomii is an independent art historian and curator who investigates post-1945 Japanese art in global and local contexts for the narration of a world art history of modernisms. She is codirector

of PoNJA-GenKon, a listserv group of specialists interested in contemporary Japanese art established in 2003, and has organized a number of symposiums and panels in collaboration with such academic and museological institutions as Yale University, Getty Research Institute, and Guggenheim Museum. Her publication *Radicalism in the Wilderness: International Contemporaneity and 1960s Art in Japan* (MIT Press, 2016) received the 2017 Robert Motherwell Book Award and was developed into an exhibition at Japan Society in New York in 2019. In 2020, she received the Commissioner for Cultural Affairs Award from the Japanese government for cultural transmission and international exchange through postwar Japanese art history.

Rachel Wetzler

Rachel Wetzler is a New York-based writer and an editor at *Art in America*.

Karen Wilkin

Karen Wilkin is a New York-based curator and critic specializing in 20th century modernism. Educated at Barnard College and Columbia University, she is the author of monographs on Stuart Davis, David Smith, Anthony Caro, Isaac Witkin, Kenneth Noland, Helen Frankenthaler, Giorgio Morandi, Georges Braque, and Hans Hofmann, and has organized exhibitions and

lectured on these artists internationally. Wilkin was a juror for the American Pavilion of the 2009 Venice Biennale and a contributing editor of the Stuart Davis and Hans Hofmann catalogues raisonné. The contributing art editor for *Art for the Hudson Review* and a regular contributor to the *New Criterion*, *Hopkins Review*, and the *Wall Street Journal*, Wilkin teaches in the New York Studio School's MFA program.

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| 2 | Sanabria Trail, 1992
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| 3 | Green Ladder II, 1993
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| 4 | Sea Paper, 1993
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| 5 | Colonel's Umbrella, 1993
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54 $\frac{1}{4}$ \times 86 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches</p> |
| <p>17 Misty Garden, 1980
Acrylic on canvas
40 $\frac{5}{8}$ \times 70 inches</p> | <p>24 Copper Garden, 2012
Oil on canvas
56 $\frac{1}{2}$ \times 35 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches</p> |
| <p>18 Kagerow, 2012
Oil on canvas
57 \times 71 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches</p> | |
| <p>19 Rain Garden, 2005
Oil on canvas
60 \times 41 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches</p> | |
| <p>20 Umbrella Garden, 1995
Oil on canvas
60 $\frac{5}{8}$ \times 77 inches</p> | |
| <p>21 Twin Garden, 2002
Color pencil and oil on canvas
74 $\frac{3}{4}$ \times 117 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches</p> | |



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