

Robert Kushner: I Still ♥ Matisse



La Desserte III, 2025. Acrylic, oil, conté crayon on linen, 72 x 144 inches

February 12 – March 14, 2026

Opening Reception: February 12, 6 – 8 pm

Artist Talk: Thursday, February 26, 6 pm

Robert Kushner in conversation with poet Ed Friedman

Robert Kushner: I Still ♥ Matisse finds Kushner in an ongoing dialogue with Henri Matisse and a range of other influences and collaborators. This exhibition, on view at DC Moore Gallery from February 12 – March 14, presents two new and interrelated bodies of work. Three monumental variations on a 1915 Henri Matisse painting expand upon Kushner's series of paintings inspired by Matisse still lifes, first exhibited in the 2021 exhibition *I ♥ Matisse* at DC Moore. Shown alongside are a series of paintings of seasonal flowers which intertwine elements from Kushner's recent investigations of still life, varied approaches to flowers as a subject, and commitment to pattern. These paintings represent a new confluence of these longstanding interests, marked by a color palette influenced by European Modernism, sensitivity to line, and an expansive use of white as form and ground.

In the winter of 2024, Robert Kushner began his study of Henri Matisse's major 1915 painting, *Still Life after Jan Davidsz de Heem's "La Desserte."* He became fascinated by the history of this Matisse painting, which is itself a variation of a 1640 still life by the Dutch painter Jan Davidsz de Heem (1606-1684). He learned that this 1915 painting was the second time Matisse had painted

a copy of the de Heem, and that it was in fact a variation of a copy done by Matisse as a student in 1893. Kushner was captivated by imagining why Matisse chose to revisit his student copy, and in 2024, decided to create his own full-scale version of Matisse's 1915 painting.

Reworking the composition with beloved objects from his own collection, Kushner embarked on a new collaboration with Matisse and de Heem. Kushner borrowed some elements from the original de Heem that Matisse had removed. Soon after completing this first variation of *La Desserte*, Kushner then expanded the composition onto two canvases, freeing himself from the proportion of the original painting. Now looking more at his first copy than the Matisse painting, Kushner continued to improvise, substituting more of the color palette and objects in the composition. A year later, in 2025, Kushner returned to *La Desserte* a third time, introducing vibrant color and pattern, as well as more fruits, flora, and objects of his own.

As Robert Kushner and art historian Charles Stuckey put forth in the catalogue essay, Kushner and Matisse were pursuing the same question in their endeavors: In this painting, how can I incorporate everything that I've seen up until now? The three *Desserte* paintings and the series of flower paintings reflect Kushner's deep engagement with visual history and art historical inheritance over the course of his career.

Flowers have been a principal subject for Kushner for many years, recently combined with elements of still life. In 2023, influenced by his time spent at the Woodman Family Residency in Antella, Italy, Kushner began experimenting with new color harmonies and relationships of space created by the presence of a window and curtain. Throughout the new works, Kushner plays with the capabilities of white to diffuse space and evoke light and air. He was thinking particularly about the abstract paintings of Shirley Jaffe, who used white as a mediator between other colors and forms. He also cites as influences Florine Stettheimer and the late paintings of Willem de Kooning. Kushner juxtaposes planes of white with patterned textiles recalling his early Pattern & Decoration paintings on fabric. A wind-rumpled, striped curtain reappears throughout the series, suggesting an environment in flux and an ambiguous boundary between inside and outside, flatness and depth.



Blue Curtain – Regal Irises, 2025. Acrylic, oil, conté crayon, and gold leaf on linen, 72 x 54 inches

Focusing only on seasonal blooms, Kushner chooses flowers with personal significance for him. The series serves as an autobiographical record of the flowers selected by Kushner at his local farmer's market, as well as his memories associated with dahlias, mums, irises, and more. He asserts the individuality of each bloom through a diverse range of drawing styles, in vertical compositions suggesting portraiture. A series of twelve works on paper titled "Ode to Jakuchū,"

revels in the specificity of summer flowers, paying homage to Japanese painter Itō Jakuchū (1716-1800) who was known for lush botanical paintings often hung in monasteries.

This exhibition is accompanied by an illustrated catalogue with an interview by Charles Stuckey.

Since the 1970s, Robert Kushner's work has been exhibited extensively in the United States, Europe, and Japan. He has been included in the Whitney Biennial three times and twice at the Venice Biennale. He was the subject of solo exhibitions at both the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Brooklyn Museum. A mid-career retrospective of his work was organized by the Philadelphia Institute of Contemporary Art. Recent museum exhibitions including *Hokusai: Inspiration and Influence*, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA (travelled to Seattle Art Museum, WA and Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO); *Risarcimento. Per non dimenticare*, Uffizi Galleries, Florence; *Somewhere Downtown: Art in 1980s New York*, UCCA Beijing, China; *Pattern and Decoration: Ornament as Promise*, Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst, Aachen, Germany (traveled to mumok Vienna and the Ludwig Museum, Budapest); *Pattern, Decoration & Crime*, Le Consortium, Dijon, France; *Less is a Bore: Maximalist Art and Design*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; and *With Pleasure: Pattern and Decoration in American Art 1972–1985*, Museum of Contemporary Art, LA and the Hessel Museum of Art, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY.



La Desserte after Matisse after de Heem, 2024. Acrylic, oil, conté crayon on linen, 72 x 86 inches.

DC Moore Gallery specializes in contemporary and twentieth-century art. The gallery is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10am-6pm. For more information, photographs, or to arrange a viewing please call 212-247-2111 or email Caroline Magavern at cmagavern@dcmooregallery.com.