

[verso-hebdo]

The weekly letter from

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### **Robert Kushner and his wild garden**

Galerie Nathalie Obadia presents a show of Robert Kushner's work through October 23 entitled "Jardin Sauvage" that follows, in the same artistic inspiration, the New York show "I ♥ Matisse" that ran from May to June 2021. We know that this American artist born in 1949 in California was one of the principal founders of the Pattern and Decoration movement, theorized by his friend Amy Goldin in the seventies. A student in the department of studio art at the University of California beginning in 1969, he turned away from the reigning minimalist and conceptual tendencies of the time that were dismissive of all that was decorative. On the contrary, he was interested in Matisse, the master who taught at the beginning of the twentieth century that "composition is the art of arranging diverse elements in a decorative way so that the painter is able express his feelings." Pattern and Decoration is no longer a hot topic, but Kushner is always there, in good form, and more than ever a disciple of Matisse.

A central canvas of the Parisian show testifies to this: Emblem of Winter, 2020 (oil, acrylic and gold leaf on canvas, 160 x 320 cm). It is interesting to compare it to Interior with Eggplants (L'intérieur aux Aubergines, 1911) given by Matisse to the Grenoble Museum (tempura on canvas, 212 x 246 cm). In an important article from 1974, Dominique Fourcade wrote, "L'intérieur is perhaps the most radical decorative work that Matisse has ever painted." It is covered in patterns and colors, like patchwork, with each element having an esthetic quality: this is also a characteristic of Kushner's painting. In Matisse's work, nothing is left to chance, the floral ornamentation invades the entire space, canceling depth and perspective: same thing in Emblem of Winter. In l'Intérieur, the horizontals and the verticals create contrasts that never cease to redirect our gaze, there is no singular focal point, and that it is exactly what Robert Kushner has done, who, by the way, like Matisse, has traveled extensively and integrated Arabic script, Byzantine icons or Persian textiles in to his work.

Matisse in 1911 and Robert Kushner in 2020 create surface dialogues where volume no longer exists. There is no rupture in the circulation of patterns that

unify the exterior and the interior. More than a century separates these two artists who both reach an integral tension between decoration and representation. *L'Intérieur aux Aubergines* can be considered prophesying the end of a fixation on the image. Today Robert Kushner pursues his work, he does not share the point of view of his compatriot Clement Greenberg whose ideology of progress was for images to separate themselves from the subject. On the contrary, for now, like Matisse's elements of ornamentation, he sits, like his master, at a crossroads in art. Dominique Fourcade said that Matisse "debrutalises the violence of the rupture of imitation". Robert Kushner continues in his happy research of the immediate presence of the decorative which does not exclude allusions to diverse traditions of representation. Remi Labrusse speaks of "the experience of the painterly abyss addressing the enigma of representation." We share this experience with Robert Kushner today.