

Robert Kushner

Summer Sun: Open my Heart

September 5 – October 31, 2026

3, rue du Cloître Saint-Merri, Paris 4^e



Fall Chrysanthemum, 2025
Ink, acrylic and gold leaf on Japanese paper, 94 x 66 cm (37 x 26 in.)
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels.

Galerie Nathalie Obadia is pleased to present a new solo exhibition by American artist Robert Kushner in Paris. Bringing together twelve works produced between 2019 and 2025—eleven works on Japanese paper and one painting on canvas—the exhibition unveils a recent body of work in which the botanical world intertwines with ornament. Cradled in gold leaf and expanses of colour, stems, leaves and petals unfurl. Through these works, Robert Kushner offers an attentive vision of the forms of nature, in which beauty is not a mere embellishment, but a way of contemplating the world.

Born in California in 1949, Robert Kushner was one of the founders of the *Pattern and Decoration* movement, which emerged in the United States in the 1970s in reaction to Minimalism and Conceptual art. Alongside Miriam Schapiro, Valerie Jaudon, Joyce Kozloff and Robert Zakanitch, among others, he helped restore pattern and craft-based practices to the field of art, after they had long been relegated to its margins. At a time when decorative beauty was regarded as secondary, even “suspect,” Kushner chose to take a different path. His use of colour, gold and materials associated with the decorative arts thus constitutes an intellectual stance as much as an aesthetic one: an affirmation of the power of visual pleasure and of ornament’s capacity to think.

Several of the works brought together in the exhibition originated in the south of France, in Sérignan, Occitanie, where Robert Kushner spent the summer of 2019. Invited to create a monumental painting for the exhibition *Les Chemins du Sud* at the Musée régional d’art contemporain Occitanie / Pyrénées-Méditerranée, he set up his studio in the garage of an abandoned house awaiting demolition. The memory of this place evokes for him an almost novelistic vision of the artist’s life: “It was very romantic in an old-fashioned way. *La vie de bohème* !” he recalls. Around the studio, wild plants grew freely. For three weeks, Robert Kushner drew and painted every day, describing this body of work as “a kind of diary of the floral abundance of a summer garden.”¹

Far from seeking to compile a botanical inventory, the artist attends to the singularity of each plant. Modest flowers, ordinary leaves and wild grasses hold his gaze more readily than the most spectacular species. “I tried to draw with accuracy, compassion and tenderness,”² he explains. The vegetal world becomes less a subject than a language: a repertoire of forms, rhythms and colours through which the artist explores the relationship between the observation of living forms and pictorial construction. Present in his work since the 1980s, flowers allow him to move beyond the opposition between figuration and abstraction. The botanical motif becomes a space of experimentation in which lines, materials, surfaces and ornament come together.

The works produced in Sérignan extend a line of enquiry begun several decades earlier. In 1990, Robert Kushner created *Perennial Diary*, a series of thirty-five floral portraits on Japanese paper, conceived as the diary of a year spent in his own garden. In Sérignan, this intimate form of observation shifted towards a transient landscape, encountered during a stay in France. The forms gathered there were later transformed in the artist’s New York studio.

¹ Robert Kushner, artist statement, July 2026.

² *Ibid.*

Executed in India ink applied with a sharpened stick, or in diluted oil paint brushed onto the surface, then heightened with gold leaf, these drawings retain both the spontaneity of the artist's gesture and the carefully considered structure of the composition. All the works on paper are made on *washi*, a handmade Japanese paper that Robert Kushner holds dear. He speaks of its many shades of white and ecru, its texture and its vegetal scent, each sheet responding to ink and paint according to its own character. "Working on *washi* is almost like having a collaborator in the studio,"³ he says. The support thus becomes a partner in the pictorial process. Gold leaf places these compositions within a broader history. Shaped by his travels in Iran, Turkey, Afghanistan and Japan, Robert Kushner has developed a vocabulary at the crossroads of Eastern and Western decorative traditions: the compositions of the *Rinpa school*⁴, Persian miniatures, Islamic art and motifs drawn from textile practices. He absorbs these various influences into a language of his own, in which ornament becomes a space of circulation and dialogue between cultures.

The artist's time in Occitanie also fed into a broader reflection on the history of painting. While researching the American painter Robert De Niro Sr.—who lived and worked in the south of France—Robert Kushner travelled through Céret, Sète and Perpignan, attentive to the Mediterranean light and to the fascination it exerted on successive generations of artists, including Chaïm Soutine and Henri Matisse. This artistic geography resonates with the enquiry he has pursued for more than fifty years into the place of ornament within contemporary painting. In the present exhibition, beauty appears less as an end in itself than as a way of perceiving the world.

— Marie Chappaz, editorial writer

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ A major school of Japanese art that emerged in the early seventeenth century, Rinpa is characterised by the stylisation of natural motifs, an emphasis on decorative rhythm, and the frequent use of gold or silver grounds.

Born in 1949 in Pasadena (California, USA). Lives and works in New York (USA).

Robert Kushner's work has been exhibited extensively in the United States, Europe and Japan since 1975 when one of his paintings was included in the Whitney Biennial. In 1984, Robert Kushner was the subject of one-person exhibitions at both the Whitney Museum, and the Brooklyn Museum, and in 1987, a mid-career summary of his work was organized by the Philadelphia Institute of Contemporary Art.

A monograph on Robert Kushner's three decades of artistic work, entitled *Gardens of Earthly Delights*, with text by Alexandra Anderson-Spivy and Holland Cotter, was published by Hudson Hills Press in 1997. A compilation of Kushner's recent paintings on Japanese screens as well as canvas, written by Michael Duncan, was published by Pomegranate in 2006.

In 2004, Robert Kushner installed two monumental mosaic murals, *4 Seasons Seasoned*, at the 77th Street and Lexington Avenue subway station. In 2010, an 80 foot long marble mosaic, *Welcome*, was installed at the new Raleigh Durham International Airport in North Carolina.

Robert Kushner's works are in the permanent collections of museums around the world: The Museum of Modern Art (New York, USA), The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, USA), The Whitney Museum of American Art (New York, USA), The National Gallery of Art (London, UK), The Corcoran Gallery of Art (Washington, USA), Tate Gallery (London, UK), San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (San Francisco, USA), The Contemporary Museum (Honolulu, Hawaii), The Denver Art Museum (Denver, USA), Galleria degli Uffizi (Florence, Italy), J. Paul Getty Trust (Los Angeles, USA), Museum Ludwig (Saint-Petersburg, Russia) et The Philadelphia Museum of Art (Philadelphia, USA). "Robert Kushner is arguably the most significant decorative artist working today... Kushner's art goes against the prevailing trend toward the anti- or nonaesthetic, which takes revenge on life. He chooses instead to affirm the wonder of existence." — Donald Kuspit, *Artforum*, Summer 2007.

Robert Kushner's newest work presents some striking departures and some reiterations of themes that have been integral to his work for decades. The most visible introduction is a bold use of geometricized patterns that swirl through the backgrounds of his new floral compositions, echoing, amplifying and sometimes even undermining the rhythms of the more naturally drawn floral elements.

In some ways, this use of pattern refers back to some of his early experiments from the 1970s combining geometric pattern with floral and figurative elements. However, he now utilizes a full spectrum of color, gold, silver and patinated copper leaf and a fracturing of the patterns to create paintings that are both complex and exciting to decode. Robert Kushner has continually addressed controversial and often subversive issues involving the interaction of decoration and art and has been considered one of the founders of the *Pattern and Decoration* movement. In this new body of work Robert Kushner's paintings remain overtly beautiful and unapologetically opulent. His exotic and unique color sense has become even broader within this new series, the emotional range varies from somber and contemplative to exuberant and celebratory.

Paris Saint-Honoré

Wang Keping
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Paris Cloître Saint-Merri

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Paris Cloître Saint-Merri - Espace II

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Brussels

Sophie Kuijken
September 10 – October 24, 2026

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