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## ***Wolf Kahn, 92, Who Painted Landscapes Using a Vibrant Palette, Dies***

By NEIL GENZLINGER

Wolf Kahn, a landscape painter who applied a vibrant, adventurous palette to studies of tangled forests and fog-shrouded mornings, quiet brooks and solitary barns, died on March 15 at his home in Manhattan. He was 92.

Diana Urbaska, his longtime studio manager, said the cause was congestive heart failure.

Mr. Kahn, who divided his time between New York and Brattleboro, Vt., was part of a family of artists. His mother-in-law, who died in 1971, was the painter Alice Trumbull Mason, and his wife was Emily Mason, whose abstract paintings made striking use of color.

Ms. Mason, whom he married in 1957, died on Dec. 10.

Mr. Kahn, who emigrated from Germany as a child, studied with the influential artist and teacher Hans Hofmann, who had himself emigrated from Germany, and in 1952 he was among several former Hofmann students who organized the Hansa Gallery, a cooperative named for their teacher. Mr. Kahn had his first solo show there in 1953, a collection of indoor and outdoor scenes, and made a strong impression.

“The paint spills and runs,” The New York Times wrote of that show, “color crackles with vivacity and the brush might just as well have been guided by a tornado as by hand. Yet this is no manner for manner’s sake. Kahn is a high-spirited, lyrical artist who paints the way he does because a leonine manner seems to fit exactly his response to what he sees.”

It was the first of many solo exhibitions, in New York and around the country. Mr. Kahn came to focus on landscapes, especially once he and Ms. Mason bought a hillside farm in Vermont in 1968. They would spend summers and



“Thicket II” (oil on canvas, 1996). “I want maximum strength,” Wolf Kahn once said of his work, “along with maximum delicacy.”

falls there, and Mr. Kahn found inspiration in the bucolic scenes.

“I am attracted by the light, by the shifting horizons, by the variety and gentleness of the landscapes,” he told The San Diego Union-Tribune in 1983, when he had his first major West Coast solo exhibition at the San Diego Museum of Art.

His works seemed to radiate light, an intensity created by building up layers with intensive brushwork. The luminosity could be simultaneously comforting and assertive.

“It’s the idea of the iron fist in the velvet glove,” he said.

Mr. Kahn was especially admired in Vermont, where he and Ms. Mason were strong supporters of the Brattleboro Museum and Art Center. Danny Lichtenfeld, the museum’s director, summed up Mr. Kahn’s influence in an interview with the website VTDigger in 2017, when the institution mounted a major Kahn exhibition.



Left, Mr. Kahn in his studio. Above, “The Lamoille River at Ten Bends” (oil on canvas, 1990).

“Wolf Kahn,” he said, “is to southern Vermont what Winslow Homer is to the coast of Maine, Georgia O’Keeffe to the New Mexico high desert and Claude Monet to the French countryside.”

Hans Wolfgang Kahn was born on Oct. 4, 1927, in Stuttgart, Germany. His father, Emil, was a conductor who led the Stuttgart Philharmonic and other orchestras. His mother, Nellie Budge Kahn, died when he was a young boy, and he was sent to live with his paternal grandmother in Hamburg.

The family was well off, and Mr. Kahn spent his childhood in a house full of art; at 10 he began taking art lessons. But his father was Jewish, and the rise of Hitler put the family in jeopardy; in 1939 his grandmother arranged for him to be sent to England in the Kindertransport program, which spirited thousands of children out of Germany.

His father had left Germany earlier, and in 1940 young Hans (who later changed his first name to Wolf) joined him in New Jersey. In 1943 the family moved to New York.

After graduating from the High School of Music and Art and serving in the United States Navy, Mr. Kahn began studying at the New School in 1946, but he dropped out the next year to study with Mr. Hofmann, also working as his studio assistant. New York art aficionados got their first look at Mr. Kahn’s paintings in 1947 when he was part of a group show at the Seligmann Gallery featuring Mr.

Hofmann’s students.

In 1950 Mr. Kahn enrolled at the University of Chicago on the G.I. Bill. He earned a bachelor’s degree there the next year before returning to New York.

Mr. Kahn exhibited frequently in the ensuing decades, drawing attention for his technique and his unusual use of color.

“He is an artist concerned primarily with the direct, sensual experience of color, in the tradition of Bonnard more than of Monet,” Peter Schjeldahl wrote in *The New York Times* in reviewing an exhibition at the Grace Borgenicht Gallery in 1972. “His colors are brilliant and often searing — hot magenta shadows and grass of acidic yellow green. These are not colors that sunlight finds in nature; they are colors that an aroused sensibility finds, with joy, in the act of painting.”

In a 1999 interview with *The Richmond Times-Dispatch* of Virginia on the occasion of an exhibition at the Reynolds Gallery in Richmond, Mr. Kahn talked about what he was trying to achieve with color.

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“My choice of color is dictated by tact and decorum stretched by an unholy desire to be outrageous,” he said. “I’m trying to get color to the danger point where it’s too sweet or too noisy without actually making it too sweet or

too noisy.”

The ground in one of his scenes might be green or bright yellow. Trees in his forest-scapes might be brown or black or orange or pink.

“I want the color to be surprising to people without being offensive,” he said. “By offensive, I mean something that makes the teeth grind. I like shock effect, but shock that settles into a harmonious whole.”

Mr. Kahn is survived by two daughters, Cecily Kahn and Melany Kahn; four grandchildren; and two step-grandchildren. The Miles McEnery Gallery in Manhattan, which represented him, has an exhibition of his work scheduled for January 2021.

Mr. Kahn’s paintings didn’t often include figures. In his interview with The Richmond Times-Dispatch, he talked about his affinity for painting trees rather than people.

“Trees have a terrific attribute in a landscape,” he explained. “You can add a branch or another tree, and nobody is the wiser. If you paint a figure and add a third leg, everybody wonders what the artist is doing.”

In an interview with the gallerist Jerald Melberg in 2011, he described working on a painting in Italy in 1963, trying to create a modern-day version of van Gogh walking through an Italian landscape.

“I kept moving the figure,” Mr. Kahn said. “First it was here. Then it was there. And then finally I put it over here. Then finally I painted it out altogether.”

“As soon as I painted the figure out, I was happy,” he added. “Because I felt free.”