

## Six cultural institutions to be awarded \$800,000 in grant initiative honoring the joint legacy of the 62-years-married artists Wolf Kahn and Emily Mason

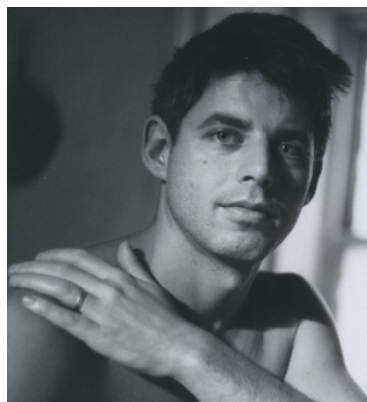
*The grant recipients' focus areas reflect the life that Emily and Wolf built together as prolific, academically influential artists living between New York City and Vermont, from their 1956 introduction until Emily's 2019 death*



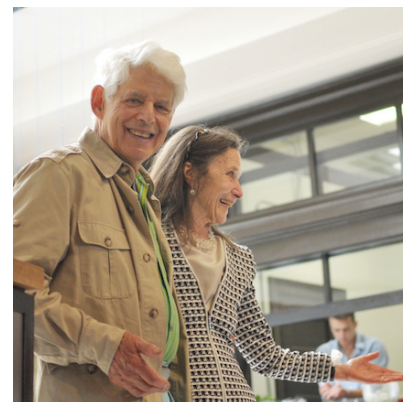
**1956**, Emily in Provincetown during the couple's courtship



**1957**, Wolf and Emily painting back-to-back in Venice, during Emily's Fulbright grant term



**1959**, Wolf posing for Emily in Martha's Vineyard; Emily was just days from giving birth



**2011**, Wolf and Emily at the dedication ceremony of their gallery at Brattleboro Museum & Art Center

**New York, NY — Summer 2022 —** The Wolf Kahn Foundation, jointly with the Emily Mason | Alice Trumbull Mason Foundation (the distinct organization devoted to the legacy of Emily and her mother), are pleased to announce \$800,000 in grants to six art institutions in New York City and Vermont.

Following the \$8.1M single-seller Christie's sale of works from the couple's art collection in May 2021, the gift round marks the first joint philanthropic initiative of the two sister Foundations and pays homage to Emily Mason and Wolf Kahn's personal experiences and collective passions across **five intersecting themes**: New York City; access to arts education; Vermont; gardens and the natural world; and printmaking.

### NEW YORK CITY

In 1940, the 12-year-old Holocaust refugee Wolf Kahn arrived in New York after having escaped Nazi Germany in August 1939 via *Kindertransport* to Britain. Wolf's first foster family in England – the patriarch of whom was a constitutional law professor at Cambridge – had rejected and traumatized him for "not fitting the mold of what a refugee should be;" Wolf was well-educated and spoke perfect English, his father having been a prominent orchestra conductor (who lost his job the day Hitler took power).

At the time of Wolf's arrival to America, Emily was an 8-year-old who had spent her childhood on Horatio Street in the West Village, sitting at her artist mother's feet at Eighth Street Club gatherings (with **Jackson Pollock**, **Lee Krasner**, **Franz Kline**, **Robert Motherwell**, **Helen Frankenthaler**, **Mark Rothko**, and others) while her father worked as a sea captain. Emily's family was particularly close with Sally and **Milton Avery**, as

well as Willem and **Elaine de Kooning**; the latter would later babysit for Emily, sipping cocktails and smoking cigarettes over board games with “the girls.”

Emily’s mother, Alice Trumbull Mason, had founded the American Abstract Artists Group with **Josef Albers** in 1936 and was a leading, avant-garde force among the “boys club” of Abstraction in the 1930s-1960s New York art world. Alice picketed MoMA in 1940; regularly corresponded with **Gertrude Stein** and **Piet Mondrian**; and trained under **Arshile Gorky**—this is the culture Emily grew up surrounded by. Said **Ad Reinhardt** in the early-1960s: “Were it not for Alice Trumbull Mason, we [the Abstract painters] would not be here, nor in such force.”

From 1946, still a decade away from meeting Emily and simply through an organic passion for creating artwork, Wolf independently became immersed in the New York art scene as a pupil under **Stuart Davis** then as **Hans Hofmann’s** studio assistant. At last, in April of 1956, Emily and Wolf met at a Friday night meeting at the Eighth Street Club, each unknowingly on the cusp of breakthrough in their art practices. Emily spent the summer with Wolf in Provincetown (where Wolf was studying under Hofmann), then Wolf followed Emily to Italy that fall (she had received a Fulbright to study in Venice). They married in March of 1957 and moved into Wolf’s studio at 813 Broadway in Greenwich Village.

Later in life, having both been active participants in the cultural moment that saw New York achieve international prominence as a hub of artistic innovation, Emily and Wolf were prolific supporters of the city’s younger generations of creators.

## **ACCESS TO ARTS EDUCATION**

Both Wolf and Emily had notable formal educations for their time, with Emily receiving a BFA from **Cooper Union** in 1955 (rare for a woman) and Wolf kicking off his art career in 1946, via the G.I. Bill and following a stint in the U.S. Navy, as a pupil under **Stuart Davis** then **Hans Hoffman**. Even after having established a strong foundational network to achieve success as an artist (including being curated into a group show by **Clement Greenberg** in 1947), education was most important; Wolf took advantage of the remainder of his G.I. Bill benefits and went off to earn a bachelor’s degree from the University of Chicago (fulfilling all credits in a single year) before coming back to New York to launch his art career in earnest.

For Emily in particular, rivaling her drive in the studio was her nurturing instinct to teach. From 1979 until just before her death, Mason taught art at Hunter College. A lengthy list of contemporary artists credit Mason’s mentorship as a guiding force of their career development. Said one former student of hers, **Nari Ward** (who is a board member of the Emily Mason | Alice Trumbull Mason Foundation): “Meeting her at that moment in my life changed everything ... Her method of teaching was radically informed by empathy, and this humanistic approach undoubtedly fueled her remarkable vision. ... For her, being an artist was about limitless options, and she understood that it meant sometimes breaking the rules.” Over the course of his lifetime, Wolf held various teaching roles as well, including but not limited to U.C. Berkeley (1960) and Cooper Union (1961 – 1977). Wolf and Emily were lifelong learners, steadfastly pursuing knowledge almost as fast as they could espouse it to others by way of their teaching.

## **VERMONT**

Since 1968, Wolf and Emily were deeply connected to Vermont by way of their beloved farm in Brattleboro. They ritualistically spent summers there as a key part of their art practices; while they first and foremost were “New York artists,” Vermont was where they found respite and were most productive, surrounded by nature.

The Vermont landscape is pervasive in Wolf’s oeuvre and the basis for some of his most vibrant compositions; “Wolf Kahn is to Southern Vermont what Georgia O’Keeffe is to the New Mexico high desert and Claude Monet

is to the French countryside," remarked Danny Lichtenfeld, the director of the region's largest art institution, Brattleboro Museum & Art Center (one of the 2022 grant recipients). While the finished result of Emily's work was more greatly informed by New York City and the aura of her Chelsea studio, her fundamental creative process (and approach to color) were undeniably affected by the time she annually spent in the wooded surroundings of her Vermont studio.



providing essential funds. IMAGE: *Emily Mason in her Brattleboro studio in 2018.* Photo by Joshua Farr.

## GARDENS AND THE NATURAL WORLD

In their Vermont home, second only to their poetry collection (Emily Dickinson in particular), Emily and Wolf had bookshelves of meticulously sorted literature on botany and other specific aspects of the natural world. Two shelves on "mushrooms" alone. This reverence had a pervasive presence in both of their art-making practices and lives, with expansive gardens and greenhouses in New York and Vermont alike. They were unorthodox green thumbs, throwing in something exotic or cultivating a wild plant into a feature – not unlike how they each delighted in defying formal tenets of art-making (through application methods, chemical paint dilution, etcetera). Their philosophy to creating the gardens they took pleasure in surrounding themselves in (and constantly nourishing and expanding) very much mirrored their art practices.

## PRINTMAKING

While Emily and Wolf were painters first and foremost, their advocacy of the print medium and willingness to push the form as accomplished printmakers in their own practices was evident throughout their lives. They particularly believed in the collaborative model of working with master printers around the country, as well as the multitude of notions of "access" – from art collecting to the creation process itself – that printmaking afforded.

An overview of grant recipients is below, followed by details of the individual grants and their designation.

- Brattleboro Museum & Art Center
- The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts  
(Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop)
- International Print Center New York
- The New York Botanical Garden
- Hunter College  
(Advanced Curatorial Certificate Program)
- Vermont Studio Center



**Vermont Studio Center – \$100,000 – GRANT DESIGNATION:** Seed funding for the *Wolf Kahn and Emily Mason Fellowship*, granted to a visual artist annually and selected by VSC's admissions department. The organization will also be honoring this gift by naming a studio space in honor of Emily and Wolf. **NOTES:** Emily and Wolf both participated in residencies during their young careers and fervently believed that residencies provide crucial, formative spaces for new artistic ideas. **LONGSTANDING ENGAGEMENT:** Wolf and Emily were named "Honorary Founders" of VSC, having been involved since its 1984 inception. When Jon Gregg approached Emily and Wolf with his idea to establish an artist residency in Johnson, Vermont, the story goes that Wolf told him he was crazy. Despite Wolf's proclaimed skepticism, both he and Emily (who loved out-of-the-box thinking) proceeded to support VSC through its growth into one of the largest artist

residency communities in the United States. • IMAGE: *Wolf Kahn and Nari Ward at Vermont Studio Center in 1988.* Photographer unknown.

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**International Print Center New York – \$100,000 – GRANT DESIGNATION:** The establishment of and eight years of operational costs for the *Emily Mason – Wolf Kahn Artist Development Fund*, which will foster connections and advancement within the contemporary printmaking community by way of annual travel facilitation and programming support for artist-participants to meet with their cohort and attend networking sessions with critics, gallerists, printers, and publishers. The fund will also provide infrastructure for continued virtual support. **NOTES:** Emily and Wolf (and Emily's mother, Alice Trumbull Mason) were advocates of the printmaking medium, steadfastly throughout ebbs and flows in the practice's institutional and market popularity. In addition to supporting artists' printmaking, they believed in the importance of organizations dedicated to the curation and display of the medium. • **IMAGE:**

*In 1958, Wolf and Emily were living in Venice; Alice Trumbull Mason traveled from New York to Italy to visit them. Photo by Wally Barker.*



**The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop – \$100,000 – GRANT DESIGNATION:** For the next five years, this grant will support a Studio Immersion Program (SIP) Fellowship in Emily and Wolf's names, the *Kahn | Mason SIP Fellowship*, with additional funds devoted to the Workshop's publications program. **NOTES:** RBPMW is a fully-equipped, practitioner-focused printmaking workspace with a goal of providing need-blind access to master printers and equipment. Launched in 2005 and inspired by Robert Blackburn's vision of a culturally diverse artistic community, the organization provides affordable workshop access, unique learning opportunities, and integrated publishing services to expand the creation, understanding, and collection of fine art prints. • **IMAGE: Emily Mason**

*organizing her prints in her Chelsea studio in 2015. Detail shot of a photo by Gavin Ashworth.*



**The New York Botanical Garden – \$200,000 – GRANT DESIGNATION:** The establishment of and eight years of operational costs for a fund in Emily and Wolf's name, dedicated to the research and planning of an annual exhibition that is curatorially focused on the union of nature and the visual arts. **NOTES:** Emily and Wolf both took great pleasure in gardening and horticulture, with remarkable gardens in Vermont and a substantial greenhouse within Emily's Manhattan studio. They were unorthodox in that they would often plant something wild or exotic, not unlike how they each delighted in defying formal tenets of art-making (through application methods, chemical paint dilution, etcetera). When NYBG began staging comprehensive, large-scale exhibitions, starting with *Darwin's Garden: An Evolutionary Adventure* in 2008, both artists saw a clear alignment between their life's work and favorite hobby manifested in an institutional setting, leading to their regular annual support as members

and funders. Emily was also a hardcore enthusiast of NYBG's annual orchid show. • **IMAGE: Wolf Kahn in 1959, inspecting mushrooms and plants at Lambert's Cove in Martha's Vineyard. Photographer unknown.**

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**2017 at their beloved Brattleboro farm, where since 1968 they had spent summers.** Photo by Diana Urbaska.

**Brattleboro Museum & Art Center – \$100,000 – GRANT DESIGNATION:** Creation of the *Wolf Kahn & Emily Mason Exhibition Fund*, a perpetual endowment supporting an annual exhibition with a special focus on emerging artists, historically overlooked artists, or curatorial projects dealing with issues such as social justice and climate change. **NOTES:** BMAC is Emily and Wolf’s Vermont hometown museum, a non-collecting contemporary art institution focused on the work of living artists. Founded in 1972 in the town’s historic train station, BMAC brings internationally notable art, artists, and curators to Brattleboro, and provides a prestigious showcase for the region’s own artistic riches. **LONGSTANDING ENGAGEMENT:** Emily and Wolf supported BMAC since its inception and are the most significant annual donors in the history of the institution. Wolf was an active member of the board, and the central exhibition gallery was named in their honor in 2010. **IMAGE:** *Emily and Wolf in*



**Hunter College (Advanced Curatorial Certificate Program) – \$200,000 – GRANT DESIGNATION:** The establishment of and eight years of operational costs for a fund committed to annual catalogue production associated with the Advanced Curatorial Certificate (a yearlong program in which participants each create an exhibition from concept to public installation). **NOTES:** Wolf and Emily believed in advanced education in the arts, and contributed through their participation as teachers and lecturers throughout their lives. Emily and Wolf also had a particular affinity for art show catalogues, especially if they featured exceptionally good writing. **LONGSTANDING ENGAGEMENT:** Emily taught at Hunter College from 1979 until her death. Said one former student of hers, Nari Ward, who first enrolled in her painting instruction in 1986:

“Meeting her at that moment in my life changed everything ... Her method of teaching was radically informed by empathy, and this humanistic approach undoubtedly fueled her remarkable vision.” • **IMAGE:** *Emily Mason teaching at Hunter College, circa early-1990s.* Photographer unknown.

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#### **ABOUT EMILY MASON AND WOLF KAHN**

In 1956, Emily Mason and Wolf Kahn met at The Artists Club in New York City and that summer, they worked in studios in Provincetown. The following year, Mason was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to study abroad in Venice. Kahn joined her in Italy and soon after, they were married at the municipal building in Venice. Mason and Kahn shared much in common – both grew up in artistic families and while they had formal educations, each had important and memorable artist mentors. Mason acknowledged valuable lessons from David Smith among others and Kahn studied under Hans Hofmann. Mason developed her individual approach to painting with veils of vivid pigments and spontaneous mark-making and found her place between Abstract Expressionism and Color Field Painting. Kahn became known for his unique combination of Realism and Color Field Painting, working across a range of media including oil, pastel and printmaking. When Emily’s mother Alice Trumbull Mason first saw Emily and Wolf’s work hanging side-by-side in 1956, she wrote to Emily: “I was so pleased to see that your work held its own so well and that you were a good influence on him.” While the question of formal influence between the two is a topic for academic debate, they each maintained an expert critical lens (and status as a sounding board) for the other’s practice.

#### **A STRUCTURAL NOTE ABOUT THE TWO SISTER ORGANIZATIONS**

THE WOLF KAHN FOUNDATION // THE EMILY MASON | ALICE TRUMBULL MASON FOUNDATION

In 1998, a foundation was established in Emily Mason and Wolf Kahn’s names, devoted to the couple’s philanthropic activities during their lifetime. In 2022, a reformed structure into two organizations was formalized, in order to delineate activities pertaining the the combined legacies of Emily and her mother Alice Trumbull Mason (1904-1971) from the those pertaining to Wolf Kahn’s artistic legacy. Together, these two Foundations (the Wolf Kahn Foundation and the Emily Mason | Alice Trumbull Mason Foundation) preserve the vision of three artists—in one family—through exhibitions, publications, research, archives, and philanthropy.

The 2022 joint giving initiative between the two Foundations honors the original spirit of Emily Mason and Wolf Kahn’s giving activities, which focused on exhibition grants, artist residencies, cultural facilities, and community arts engagement, with an emphasis on advancing opportunities for traditionally underrepresented artists.