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Color and Complexity

An exhibition of new work by Wolf Kahn opens this March at Jerald Melberg Gallery in Charlotte, North Carolina

March 7-April 25

Jerald Melberg Gallery

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At first glance, the art of Wolf Kahn may seem like simple and abstract landscapes, but the works are neither simple nor abstract. They are complex creations based upon a lifetime of observation and experience. Born in 1927 in Germany, Kahn came to America as a child. He studied fine art with Hans

Hoffmann in New York City, and in 1951, he received a bachelor's degree from The University of Chicago. Now 87 years old, Kahn is still producing new works, a selection of which will be displayed March 7 to April 25 at Jerald Melberg Gallery in Charlotte, North Carolina. The exhibition, titled *Color & Complexity*, will feature both oil and pastel pieces.

"Wolf is considered by many, or most, to be America's greatest colorist," says Jerald Melberg, owner of the gallery. "Wolf has said in the past he's never met a color he didn't like. I think his work is about color, but in a particular sense, I've never found it artificial. When he has said, 'Well, that's a Pepto-Bismol pink,' your first

thought is that it doesn't appear in nature. But, when you're outside and the sun is hitting a particular bush, there it is."

There is also a sense of freedom to Kahn's landscapes, one that shows his favor for a subject that can be changed and enhanced. Kahn shares, "My problem is I'm not really terribly interested in landscapes, but I'm very interested in painting. I find landscapes to be the best vehicle to express that interest. If you need an extra branch in a tree, you can add it, but if you need an extra leg on a model, you can't put it in. Landscape allows you the most flexibility of all subject matters."

In Kahn's artwork, viewers will notice organized complexity, from intentionally placed strokes, to the colors and textures that permeate the canvas. Also, according to Melberg, Khan is "not afraid at all of incorporating into a landscape different types of trees that perhaps don't exist together in nature. I think, again, that's part of the complexity. I'm not sure in most cases you can look at one painting and say, 'That's an oak; that's a maple.' That's not interesting to him, I think. What is interesting to Wolf are the forms and the way he can combine forms."

One of Kahn's new paintings in the show is the oil on canvas *Copse*, which has horizontal bands of color in the background and foreground and also plays with the formations of the trees. His works never show a particular tree species, but rather a

Wolf Kahn (b. 1927), *Stand of Trees*, 2014. Oil on canvas, 40 x 52 in.





Wolf Kahn (b. 1927), *Copse*, 2014. Oil on canvas, 36 x 48 in.



Wolf Kahn
(b. 1927),
*Two Roads
Diverged*, 2014.
Pastel on paper,
9 x 11½ in.



Wolf Kahn (b. 1927), *Barn Beyond the Ridge*, 2012. Pastel on paper, 11 x 13½ in.

conglomeration of ideas the artist has witnessed in nature. “Kahn discovered a while back this grove of pine trees, and he said with pine trees, you have the big tall trunks and little spindly branches, and he said it stuck with him in a way he hadn’t noticed before,” Melberg describes. “Those spindly branches started to show up—not to say this is a grove of pine trees, but to say, look at the complexity nature gives us.

“I’m fond of saying ‘All art is

fiction.’ Wolf’s paintings are fiction, portraits are still fiction,” continues Melberg, and adds of Kahn’s work, “These aren’t trees—they’re depicting trees. If they were trees, they’d be 40 feet tall; instead, they’re 30 inches tall on the canvas. At the same time, they have a complexity and grandiose quality to them that is equal to real nature. Every time I go back to one of these paintings, I see something I didn’t see before. There’s a freshness. There’s an immediacy. They always

appear to have been almost made in a moment, as far as time is concerned. They have a feeling of just being there and appearing, but yet, there is a lifetime that made that possible.”

With decades of painting experience, Kahn still finds himself creating new work. He modestly says, “I try to work on the highest moral plane and with the greatest amount of freedom and inventiveness, but everybody has limitations, and mine are very great.” ■