



Tobi Kahn. *Patuach, Sagur, Patuach (Open, Closed, Open)*, 2012. Acrylic on wood. 9 x 12.5 x 9.5 in.

## Tobi Kahn

### *Patuach, Sagur, Patuach (Open, Closed, Open)*

The Tashlikh ritual allows us to enact the casting off of our inevitable shortcomings. On the second day of Rosh Hashanah, Jews have symbolically tossed their failings into the water, usually by emptying their pockets or throwing crumbs of bread into a lake or river. This vessel is designed to hold the invisible memories of our own darkness and harm, disappointments we accrue but can shed each year so that the radiant memory of those who are gone—revivified by the Yahrzeit lamp—can accompany and augment us.

This *Patuach, Sagur, Patuach* box is one of many ritual objects that I have created over the last forty years, including Omer counters, Shalom Bat chairs, huppahs, seder plates, Birkat Ha-ḥamah sculptures, Tu bi-Shevat

**The Tashlikh box clarifies what we must leave behind; the Yahrzeit lamp illuminates what we hope to revive.**

seder plates, menorahs, memorial lights, arks, Holocaust memorials, and meditative spaces, among others. This box is sculpted from wood, as are all my ceremonial objects, some of which I later cast in bronze. Multiple layers of gesso, acrylic modeling paste, opaque paint, and finally multiple translucent glazes are applied to the surface.

The Tashlikh box clarifies what we must leave behind; the Yahrzeit lamp illuminates what we hope to revive. These ceremonial sculptures live in relationship to one another—an intimate reckoning.

And so we weave our lives between the need to discard and the mandate to remember, longing to relinquish our transgressions, to take wing past hovering darkness, to amplify the light.

Like Jacob, we lay our heads on a pillow of stone to dream of angels. Bound to earth, dust to dust, we can—through art, through love—construct a ladder to transcendence, compelled to make something beautiful of loss, of limitation: the rent fabric of our unredeemed world.

All of my work has been a quest to distill what we remember into essential images, into archetypes that allow the past to be transformed by imagination. Art responds to the capacity of the soul to be at home in the world while signaling transcendence, to be faithful to ancient truths while leaping toward a future at the horizon's curve. Although Judaism has emphasized words and interpretation, I have found the visual elements of the tradition equally illuminating. For me, the life of the spirit is integrally bound up with the beauty of

the created world. My work is abstract, and yet always in relationship to the physical world, conveying its grandeur and simplicity.

**TOBI KAHN** *has been committed and steadfast in the pursuit of the redemptive possibilities of art in all mediums including painting, sculpture, meditative spaces and photography. His work has been the subject in over sixty solo museum exhibitions following his selection as one of nine artists to be included in the 1985 Guggenheim Museum exhibition, New Horizons in American Art. Kahn's work is in the collection of the Guggenheim Museum; the Houston Museum of Fine Art; the Phillips Collection; the Jewish Museum, NY; the Yale University Art Gallery; the Albright Knox Art Gallery; the 9/11 Memorial Museum; and the Minneapolis Museum of Fine Art, among others.*

## Douglas Rosenberg

### *Song of Songs*

In a moment in which we are experiencing a generational shift among Jewish identifying artists to a more inclusive and polyvocal, fluid understanding of Jewish identity, the politics and visual culture of Jewishness are foregrounded in astounding new ways. From graphic novels to digital art and highly charged dance and performance, to theater, music and literature, we see both a return to ritual and a search for new narratives of the contemporary Jewish experience. Thus, the field is expanded even while acknowledging its own histories.

While trying to define it, the modernist art critic Harold Rosenberg has referred to, the "ambiguous situation" of Jewish Art.<sup>1</sup> Such ambiguities are the product of resistance; a denial by artists of a Jewish visual canon, and of the constituents of an accepted visual

*Song of Songs is a  
performance without an audience,*

*in a quiet empty space,*

*a no-space surrounded by  
objects that move me,*

*dried and bronze cast sunflowers  
from my garden, a small bell,*

*tended to with love and affection,*

*and excerpts from Song of Songs  
printed on fabric that I can  
wrap myself in,*

*like a tallit,*

*imagined on  
quiet contemplative walks.*

*Douglas Rosenberg. Song of Songs performance. Design and layout by Jacob Li Rosenberg. Dance Today (Mahol Akhshav) 38, August 2020.*