



Susan Inglett Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of sculptures and paintings by Robert Kobayashi, curated by his daughter Misa Kobayashi, on view from 16 October – 26 November 2025. An opening reception held in honor of the artist will take place on Thursday, 16 October from 6 to 8 PM.

What makes it difficult to write about my father's art is that, in life, he hated talking about it directly. To attempt a posthumous artist's statement on behalf of someone who preferred to cling to the wall and simply observe rather than engage during his own openings is complicated. He liked the openings as much for the currents of strangers that drifted through like old friends. I remember one of the last big openings at Moe's Meat Market, three Scottish fellows wandered in and were speaking animatedly to my father, and it was only at the end of the conversation that each confessed that they couldn't understand a word the other had said. I imagine that's a bit like how Dad felt when people became too academic about his work. Asked about meaning, intent, inspiration, and Dad would tilt his head and deflect the idea about the academic side of his art, insisting that it wasn't about obscure and buried

symbolism in what he made; that he created just by doing, forging the path with each dot of a brush or minuscule strip of tin.

Sometimes he would allow that the time spent mentally crafting was the longest part of his process, a rare insight into the more complicated truth. I can imagine that pieces were constructed for years in his head, which is why once he started a piece with so many complicated, minuscule components, he was able to complete it with an intense single-mindedness. He was not someone to flail around in the dark and wait for some sign to guide him, though the mystery of his thought process circles back to the painful reality that it is impossible to fully know everything after someone has died.

All this to say is that I believe that one of my father's more urgent wishes for his art was that it was to be enjoyed and experienced, to be marveled at or laughed with, in those pieces that contained fragments of weird humor. To draw people in with the illusion of shimmery softness, only to be confronted by the hard reality of tiny steel nails. And while he would tend to decry those objects that were not meant to be Art, the art within them cannot be denied. I wanted this to be a feast for the senses, for his enduring sense of humor to be seen, and for the person, father, human, artist, that I knew both well and hardly at all, to let all of the art and art-objects speak. There were many moods and sides to my father, just as there were many seasons to the style and nature of his paintings. Perhaps his being so committed as an artist was simply because there was no other way for him to be—that he didn't want to be any other way, and he could strike the remarkable balance of practical and artistic, and that the force and drive of creation was fundamental to his nature.

This body of work, some familiar and some new, is a more expansive take on the artist I felt he was. To me, it was so much more than what could be framed and hung. It was the fiberglass racecar that could be driven along the bumpy sidewalks of the Bowery, the fighter pilot waving from the cockpit sent to my grandfather, an Air Force vet. These were the private facets of art he made, intended to express a vulnerable side of himself. The underpinning of these objects would eventually find themselves in his more traditional works, but I believe the seeds were planted the moment my dad's mind fixed on some theme or idea or shadow or angle, and from there, the construction of an intimate conversation piece could begin.

"Take it easy, kid," was always my dad's send-off for people he was fond of. He'd say it leaving dinners, to visitors he hadn't seen in a long time, people older and younger than him. For me, it was one of the last things he said to me in person before he died. That hallmark "Take it easy," is something I am constantly reminded of when things seem upended by chaos. His work was always labor-intensive but playful; when peering too hard at each individual nail or paint dot to be able to see the entire piece, I'm certain that he'd rather the viewer take it easy and step back to enjoy the whole.

ROBERT KOBAYASHI (1925-2015) traveled to New York City from Hawaii following WWII to study at the Brooklyn Museum School. After exhibiting with the AbEx artists at the Camino and Brata galleries, Kobayashi stepped away to explore materials and techniques informed by his personal history and immediate surroundings. In 1978, the artist purchased a building in Little Italy, transforming the former butcher shop, Moe's Meat Market, into a studio/gallery. There, Kobayashi drew his creative energy and materials from the neighborhood, exhibiting a mixed media style dubbed "clouage," composed of repurposed ceiling tin and metal cans. His work can be found in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, NYC; the Whitney Museum of American Art, NYC; the Brooklyn Museum; the New York Historical Society, and the Honolulu Museum of Art, among others.