



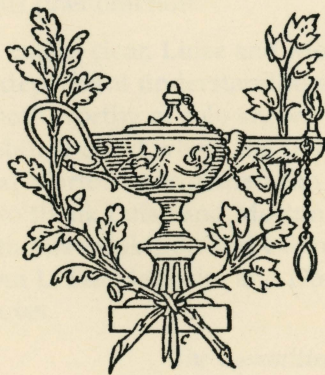
CENTURY MASTERS

LUISE and MORTON KAISH
Kx2:11

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Kx2:II

April 19 – May 24, 2012



The Century Association
7 West 43rd Street, New York, New York

CENTURY MASTERS

The Committee on Exhibitions has the delightful honor of adding Luise and Morton Kaish to its Century Masters program, a series of exhibitions devoted to the Century's "living treasures."

Among the many outstanding artists in the club are a handful of men and women who, in their eighties and even nineties, continue to produce powerful and vigorous works which enhance and embellish the quality of life for both their fellow Centurions and for the art world at large. Luise and Morton Kaish personify this phenomenon.

As this exhibition makes clear, Luise and Morton each have unique visions, independent understandings of art and the world which are both worthy of solo shows. And yet we also rejoice in this combined effort where the sixty years of mutual devotion Luise and Morton have shared can be viewed side-by-side. We wish to thank Luise and Morton for permitting us to honor them with this exhibition and extend our warm appreciation to Tom L. Freudenheim and Donald Holden for the following tributes.

The Committee on Exhibitions

CENTURY MASTERS: MORTON KAISH

"A painting is a garden for the eye to walk around in." Those words (from a forgotten source) distill the magic appeal of Morton Kaish's art.

The first Kaish painting I saw was, in fact, a "garden," a field of wildflowers in a meadow. This mosaic of light and color and vivid detail was as refreshing as a fragrant breeze—lifting my spirits and "giving my heart a change of mood" in the words of Robert Frost. The detail and the design were so convincing that the painting seemed to be the product of precise observation. But it actually was an invention—a triumph of the artist's imagination.

The landscape was simply a point of departure, an image in the mind's eye, an inspiration. The final painting was not a literal rendering, but a glimpse of what the Chinese masters called the spirit of nature.

Morton returns periodically to a similar subject—another vision of a field of flowers, perhaps—to discover new riches. Like Degas and Monet, he paints a series of related images, a series of variations on the theme.

Morton's studio looks north from Manhattan across the planes and architectural detail of the rooftops. Again and again he returns to this collage of shapes to invent the cityscape in various moods: a sunlit day that shows off the bright warm and cool hues of the buildings; a wintry day in which the architectural forms are interrupted and framed by patches of luminous snow; another wintry day in which the blowing snow partly hides the buildings in clouds of white. Over the years, Morton adds new variations to this series of views from the studio.

And a startling feat of the imagination is a series of close-ups of barn doors. The texture of the weathered wood, the intricate patterns of the grain, the corroded surface of the hinges and other hardware are rendered with such precision that we're convinced that Morton found the barn on a country road. The paintings in the *American Series* are a blend of memory, fantasy, and invention! Morton did not stand in front of that barn for weeks, propping his easel against wind, rain and snow. He paints at home.

Morton, like Whistler, believes that "panting from nature should be done in the studio."

Morton Kaish's work is in the great tradition that Michelangelo called "invenzione." The landscapes of the Song Dynasty, the heroic figure paintings of the Renaissance, the historic narratives of the romantic era are *inventions*, improvisations, constructions of the mind. And now we know that the greatest impressionist landscapes were products of the studio.

And what we respond to in Morton's art is not just the beauty of the image, but the joy of the artist *conceiving* that image—the exhilaration of painting.

The *New York Times* said it all: "Is there a man alive who enjoys painting more than Mr. Kaish does? The impression made by these pictures . . . is that their production was a rapturous experience for the artist. His delight in painting is fully relayed to the observer."

Donald Holden

CENTURY MASTERS: LUISE KAISH

Reacquainting myself with Luise Kaish's extraordinary *oeuvre* is less an exercise in admiration than a cause for personal regret: why didn't I decide to be an artist and study with this amazing teacher? On the one hand, that probably would have made me feel supremely inadequate; but on the other hand, I would have had the opportunity to learn from an artist endowed with an unmatched range of skills.

My first encounter with Luise was via images of her 1960s reliefs for Temple B'rith Kodesh in Rochester, New York. This early monumental work combined both abstract and figurative imagery, imbued with intellectual and mystical symbolism, and in many ways early on set out the several premises with which Luise has always worked. This work presages other liturgical commissions, reminding us of the time Luise Kaish spent as a Fellow at the American Academy in Rome and of the artist's continuing and deep attachment to Italy. There's also an appealing feeling of intimacy in Luise's work, even when it involves monumental scale, such as the splendid Christ figure executed for a Maryland seminary. This is an art that celebrates the viewer as an active participant, which is why luscious drawings of blossoming trees conjure up A.E. Housman's poetic suggestion that we treasure those too-few precious moments of being transformed by our surroundings.

Luise works from that kind of sensibility, so thoroughly informed by earlier art that teasing apart the subtle references can be challenging. Do the landscapes and skies celebrate Constable's glorying in nature's peace or a Fauvist examination of nature's harsh complexities? But perhaps there are also echoes of late 19th-century symbolist meanings lurking in

Hodler-like landscapes. Do we see references to early Mondrian trees in wonderful forested vistas, as clues to the layered abstractions toward which she develops her compositions? We see ourselves and our surroundings reflected in shining abstract sculptures, just as we can feel our own bodies mirrored in her figurative works. What a joy to be so repeatedly at one with the art!

There's an incessant and energetic visual interplay in a wide range of media in her work. But this also insistently defines her vast *oeuvre* of divergent works as part of a unified Luise Kaish aesthetic. And that may best be understood as a means of reaching out to the viewer—the way Moses and Christ reach out in Luise's compelling sculptural ensembles. Paintings, drawings, collages, and sculptures are never merely academic, because they are so incredibly masterful, self-assured, and comfortable. The present Century Masters exhibition, celebrating an unusually gifted couple, doesn't begin to do justice to the entirety of Luise's accomplishments. But it's an especially felicitous setting, because we can read broadly across the work of both artists on view while understanding them in the context of earlier masters whose work Centurions probably take too much for granted. Contemplating the power of Luise Kaish's vision within this very special milieu is a fortuitous opportunity.

Tom L. Freudenheim