

Yutaka Ohashi (1923-1989)

Yutaka Ohashi was born on August 19, 1923, in Hiroshima. During World War II, he attended the Tokyo School of Fine Arts for three years, studying under painter Gen'ichirM Inokuma.

Precipitated by expanding postwar communication between Japan and the United States, Ohashi continued his studies in Boston at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts (1950-55).

Betty Parsons, the famed art dealer whose eponymous New York gallery gave many American avant-garde artists their first solo exhibitions, visited Ohashi's Boston studio in 1955 and expressed interest in his work, though nothing immediately came of this new connection. Shortly after his first solo exhibition at Boston's Margaret Brown Gallery in fall 1955, where he debuted paintings embellished with gold and collage elements, Ohashi received a two-year work-study fellowship in Europe. While abroad, Ohashi's paintings were displayed in group shows at the Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, Massachusetts (1956) ; Art Institute of Chicago (1957) ; and Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (1957).

Parsons's continued enthusiasm for Ohashi's paper-collage paintings and the growing exposure of his work led to the artist's 1959-60 John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship and move to New York. There he found a community of artists who were synthesizing the action-centric aesthetic of Abstract Expressionism with the flat, decorative traditions of Japanese painting.

Artists including Inokuma, SaburM Hasegawa, Minoru Niizuma, and Kenzo Okada experimented with gestural abstraction and improvisation in their paintings while Americans Sam Francis, Franz Kline, and others conversely adopted Japanese visual techniques such as the emphasis on negative space and the lyrical brushstroke. Ohashi was known for paintings that integrated the restrained, purposeful act of collage, adding texture and changing registers of density to large, encompassing abstract forms. He added semitransparent layers of rice paper to the foreground of his paintings and, at times, partly obscured the rice paper with layers of oil paint. This technique, combined with large swaths of negative space and occasional highlights in gold leaf, contributes to fluctuating perceptions of space within Ohashi's compositions.

In 1960, Ohashi received another Guggenheim Fellowship, enabling him return to Japan for a year. From 1961 to 1962, he was a visiting painting instructor at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, where in 1961 he had a solo exhibition at the university's Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art. He returned to his native Japan in the 1970s following the sudden passing of his wife. Ohashi died in 1989 in Tokyo.

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