

Kathleen Jacobs

Fergus McCaffrey Tokyo

May 21-July 16, 2022

CADAN Yurakacho

May 17-June 5, 2022



Fergus McCaffrey is excited to present *Kathleen Jacobs* at our Tokyo location from May 21-July 16, 2022, with an opening reception held on May 21 from 5-7 PM at Fergus McCaffrey Tokyo. This solo exhibition of new work by American artist Kathleen Jacobs will include 7 of Jacobs' large oil paintings and 1 small painting presented at our Tokyo gallery, as well as 11 small paintings, 1 large painting, and 6 sculptures presented off-site at CADAN

Yurakucho from May 17-June 5, 2022. The exhibitions will also be accompanied by the publication of a beautiful new monograph in three languages, which includes plates of Jacobs' work, scholarly essays, and an interview with the artist.

Born in Aspen, Colorado, Kathleen Jacobs attended Pine Manor College in Massachusetts and returned home after graduation, where she worked seasonal, outdoor jobs for a few years before moving to Milan to work for global design firm Unimark International. While studying graphic design in Milan, Jacobs met and began dating her first husband, fellow student Huang Heiman, leading to her spending several years living in Beijing, where she studied with Heiman's father, the esteemed Chinese artist Huang Yongyu. Jacobs later returned to Colorado, where she combined the calligraphic techniques that she had studied in China with new skills that she developed in encaustic painting, ceramics and welding—and a continuous practice of observation of her natural environment.

Jacobs creates her signature paintings using a unique technique known as frottage, by which she wraps tree trunks with canvases and linens, resulting in idiosyncratic markings caused by divergent weather patterns and bark textures. Jacobs often wraps and re-wraps materials many times on different trees, and leaves them outside, exposed to the elements, sometimes for up to three years. She then removes the canvases, soaks them in water, and stretches and re-stretches them onto bars, rotating them from vertical to horizontal as she completes the pieces. The monochromatic, dream-like canvases that result from this process draw the viewer into a trance-like experience. Like gravestone rubbings, the pieces provide a tactile record of place that brings the viewer into a specific site, while simultaneously creating an otherworldly, altogether new landscape,



one that occurs at the intersection of artist, tree, and viewer.

At times executed in more neutral whites and greys, and at times—as in *JONDA* and *KUMBA*—in surreal, technicolor palettes, Jacobs’ work brings the viewer into an experience of nature that feels at once intimate and removed. Despite the canvases’ abstract nature, they remain firmly geographically grounded in the environments in which Jacobs created them. Serving as experimental field notes of sorts, they bring viewers in Tokyo into the hyper-locality of individual trees in each of these American locales, while simultaneously evoking a feeling almost like floating amongst clouds—inspired by Jacobs’ longtime avocation of flying planes. Jacobs’ work serves as a profound demonstration of the potential for peaceful synthesis rather than violent modes of relation between human and nature, emerging from her study of Daoist



philosophy. Such a message feels particularly urgent in this time of accelerating climate catastrophe. In Dr. Erin McCarthy’s scholarly essay for this exhibition catalogue, she writes about the way in which Jacobs’ work draws from the Zen Buddhist symbol of the *ensō*, which “exemplifies how emptiness is, in fact, not a bottomless nihilistic void, but the source of all creation.”¹ Like the famed Zen *Heart Sutra*, which intones, “form is emptiness, emptiness is form,” Jacobs’ process of turning her canvases on their side mid-creation “negates the human perspective of looking at a tree as an object and allows for between-ness unmediated by conceptual ideas and prejudices we might bring to the work if we consciously see it as a tree,” McCarthy writes.²

Jacobs’ work draws inspiration from a range of cross-cultural traditions, from the vast scale of fourteenth-fifteenth century Chinese landscape paintings to the linear nature of Chinese calligraphy to various traditions of minimalist and experimental art. Her paintings bring to mind the playful, repetitive compositions of *Dansaekhwa* (Korean monochrome painting), as well as American avant-garde artists such as Jackson Pollock and Carolee Schneeman, for whom chance and temporality is central to process.

Jacobs’ salt-fired porcelain sculptures, presented alongside her smaller paintings at CADAN, are elegant yet playful log-like appendages. Created by covering sections of tree trunks with low-fire clay and then porcelain, they appear somewhere between branches and candles. Singular and crooked on their pedestals, the sculptures are like ghostly ritual objects. Whereas the exhibition’s accompanying paintings juxtapose the textured surfaces of bark with the straightforward shape of a canvas, these sculptures contrast the delicate forms of tree branches with an



¹ Erin McCarthy, “In Betweenness with the Trees: Kathleen Jacobs’s Art in Japan” in *Kathleen Jacobs* (Fergus McCaffrey, 2022)

² Ibid.

eerily smooth ceramic sheen. Similarly to her canvas works, Jacobs' sculptural pieces clearly draw from the aesthetics of East Asian cultural objects—here, bringing to mind Chinese porcelain pottery. And, like traditional Japanese *torii* gates, which delineate sacred sites within natural settings in order to, as McCarthy writes, “mark a place that we might otherwise walk past,” Jacobs' sculptures compel the viewer to consider even a singular tree branch as holy, and as wholly worthy of our attention.³

“the tree already holds within/the light that molds it from without,” poet Christopher Cahill writes in response to Kathleen's work.⁴ *Kathleen Jacobs* presents, in gorgeous array, Jacobs' rare ability to excavate the light held within trees; to transform it into painting and sculptural form via her brilliant and patient artistic process; and ultimately to help us as viewers bear witness to the awe-inspiring power of the natural world.

About Fergus McCaffrey

Founded in 2006, Fergus McCaffrey is internationally recognized for its groundbreaking role in promoting the work of postwar Japanese artists such as Sadamasa Motonaga, Kazuo Shiraga and Jiro Takamatsu. The gallery also exhibits the work of emerging and seminal Western artists including Anna Conway, Marcia Hafif, Birgit Jürgenssen, Richard Nonas, Sigmar Polke and Carol Rama. In keeping with the gallery's commitment to Japanese art and culture, McCaffrey opened its Tokyo outpost in March 2018. Fergus McCaffrey has locations in New York, St. Barth, and Tokyo.

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Images: 1. Installation view of Jacobs's, *JONDA*, 2020. Oil on canvas. 30 x 30 inches (76.2 x 76.2 cm) at Fergus McCaffrey Tokyo October 2022. © Kathleen Jacobs. Photo by Ryuichi Maruo; 2. Aspen grove, White River National Forest, Colorado, 1988. Photo by Korusch; 3. Kathleen Jacobs, *UUNIX*, 2018. Oil on canvas. 66 x 51 inches (167.6 x 129.5 cm) © Kathleen Jacobs; 4. Installation view of Jacobs's *Untitled*, 2012 at Fergus McCaffrey New York, June 2015. Photo by ShootArt.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Christopher Cahill, “SEEP” in *Kathleen Jacobs* (Fergus McCaffrey, 2022)