

KAHN'S ART EVOKES ENERGY THAT TRANSFORMS

Among the more pleasant tasks involved in producing an issue of *Health Progress* is selecting and working with the artist whose work will illustrate our theme. In the run-up to this issue, an artist came to mind who, for me, exemplifies formation — not in health care leadership, but in a deeply personal sense. Recalling his name — Tobi Kahn — took me back two decades, to an article I wrote in the early 1990s. I was working on a series of articles linking spirituality and art for Religion News Service, my employer at the time. I don't remember how I first heard about Tobi Kahn, but I distinctly remember riding the subway from my office in mid-Manhattan to Kahn's studio in a converted warehouse in an industrial section of Queens. It was a pleasant interview, and I left deeply impressed by both the artist and his work.

provides chaplains for a number of New York City hospitals.

"I think there is a redemptive quality to art," Kahn said. "I believe art takes you to a higher place, and I want to be a guide."

His images shown in the following pages are acrylic paintings on canvas or wood. They evoke cosmic and earthy symbols intrinsic to the Judeo-Christian tradition — sky, water, desert, the cycles of plant life. To eyes of faith, these images resound with the divine energy that renews and transforms.

Kahn's art seems appropriate in this issue, in which we write about moving forward in uncertain times, while holding firm to our roots.



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Kahn is a painter, sculptor and, more recently, a designer of meditation rooms. He and I have not been in contact since the early '90s, but intermittent encounters with his art have kept the memory of our interview fresh. I have seen

his work in exhibitions at MOCRA (St. Louis University's Museum of Contemporary Religious Art) and on display in New Harmony, Ind., a southern Indiana town noted for its installations of contemporary religious art. The MOCRA exhibitions are among some 50 of his one-man shows. I have also read articles on Kahn's work from time to time.

In the tradition of many abstract artists who wrote about the spiritual currents underlying their works — Mondrian, Kandinsky, Hartley, Newman to name a few — Kahn is not shy about discussing his spiritual roots. For Kahn, though, in contrast to some of those better-known abstractionists, spirituality does not consist of vaguely defined concepts. He is a practicing Orthodox Jew, though his work, like the best of religion, opens out to embrace the world.

As he and I discussed my interest in using some of his art in this issue of

Health Progress, we talked about his growing fascination with the relationship between art and healing. He designed and created a meditation room for the HealthCare Chaplaincy in Manhattan, a multi-faith hub for chaplaincy education, practice and research and a place where people suffering from illness from can find spiritual sustenance. (See photo.) The center



The meditation room at the HealthCare Chaplaincy in Manhattan.

JOURNAL OF THE CATHOLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES

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Reprinted from *Health Progress*, September-October 2011
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