

A photograph of Katherine Kadish, a woman with short brown hair and glasses, smiling in her studio. She is wearing a black turtleneck and a dark, paint-splattered apron. She stands behind a workbench with various art supplies. In the background, there are wooden shelves and a large window.

Katherine Kadish in her Clifton studio.

Heavenly Hues

Painter Katherine Kadish punctuates her canvases with a "color thrill" that delights her many fans. *By Ron Rollins • Photography by Jim Noelker*



These aren't just flowers. They're billowing, pillowy

These aren't just colors, for that matter. They belong to an unusual palette that generally abstains from primary colors and yet is always bright and distinctive, even when the overall feeling is quiet, muted.

"I'm interested in complementary colors and secondary colors; colors that when they're next to each other, produce a little surprise — a kind of color thrill," Katherine Kadish says, taking a break in her studio near Yellow Springs on a sunny Sunday afternoon.

A color thrill, indeed. Kadish's work has made her one the most collected, successful artists in the Dayton area. Today she is using oil pastels to rework an abstract monotype print

she made earlier. Atop the more muted orange and tan of the print, she's painted vibrant lines and dabs of red and yellow that seem to draw new energy from the softer shades. The final result will be a complex, vibrant layering of lines and color patches that dance across the paper and draw the eye like a whirlpool into its center. Works similar to this one are included in collections from London to Seoul; she participates in one or two solo shows per year, and several group exhibitions — enough to keep anybody busy.

On a wall in her comfortably messy studio, Kadish is working large: a canvas nearly 5 feet square is hanging from the wall and well under way, though where it will end up is

"WATER GARDEN," 2006



"LILIES," 2008

still hard to determine. Even Kadish is a little amused by what she's coming up with, happy that the painting in progress signals a new direction in her work that is turning out so far to be satisfying.

Emerging from a warm, smoldering background is a human form — a man who is crouching, or sitting, in a posture that suggests reflection or remorse. Or at least now, he does. What he may look like when Kadish is done with him remains to be seen.


"I was a little surprised to start working with the human figure again," she says, laughing. "But I thought, 'What the hell, why not?' It's been a while, and I like where this is going."

"I was painting a garden scene a while ago, and I put a little stone figure in it. It didn't work, so I turned it around and put a woman in it — and suddenly, it cheered me up. I'd avoided the figure for a long time, but I realized, I invent everything else, and I can invent figures. I can paint them like shapes, flowers, leaves — and once I get going, I paint really fast, to get the ideas down."

Under that fast hand, landscapes frequently recur and foliage plays a prominent part, though Kadish in recent years has produced series that feature houses, ladders, trees, horses and other easy-to-identify forms in her otherwise abstract compositions. She admits to being heavily influenced by the color-obsessed Fauve painters of the early 20th century, and to being easily bewitched by such inspirations as Korean women's dresses, and the color combinations they employ. "I like to keep experimenting," she says.

bursts of color so vivid they nearly fly off the canvas.





“When you get to a place where you’re not pushing yourself enough, you want to be able to trick yourself into trying something new.” — Katherine Kadish

Add to all this a fact that becomes most intriguing in the context of the art she produces: Kadish is legally blind, having dealt with macular degeneration in both eyes since high school. All her life, however, she’s molded her style around the difficulties with her sight — “Well, I see color just fine,” she says, again with a laugh — and has turned painting into the way she takes in, and reacts to, the world as she finds it. Far from seeming frustrated by the shortcomings in her vision, Kadish seems to have turned them into an aesthetic strength — a way of viewing, and showing us what she sees, entirely on her own terms.

And after many years of working as an artist, she takes it all in stride. She shows a visitor a painting she made when she was in college, an abstract that is clearly a younger person’s work but shows a resemblance to Kadish’s mature style. “I’ve been doing the same thing for 40 years,” she says. That laugh again.

Her eyesight has been stable for a long time, she says, and her style has “gone in ways I never would have expected. I think about it a lot more, and I’m more confident. But I think it’s gone the way I wanted it to — I focus on color, I work large. You always want

to push harder, to surpass yourself; when you get to a place where you’re not pushing yourself enough, you want to be able to trick yourself into trying something new.”

Regarding the figurative painting still in progress on her wall, she notes that she’s ready for a change — for that push to something different. The New York printer who had worked with her to develop a striking and unusual series of oil-and-wax monotype prints, Sheila Marbain, recently passed away in her 80s, and Kadish was lamenting not only the loss of a dear friend, but of a valued collaborator. “I decided not to get frantic about it,” she says.

Not getting frantic, but patiently trying one new thing after another, has led her from a New York teaching career to a settled-in life as a studio artist in Ohio, to freedom and skill with a variety of media — from drawing to printmaking to painting, the thing she likes the best, though she confesses to “mixing up” her media.

Her studio, a home away from home, is a character in all this. As she works, the light streams in through the tall windows of what used to be a classroom in a red-brick, two-story schoolhouse from 1873 in the center of

To see more of Kadish’s work, visit www.katherinekadish.com. An exhibit of her paintings and monotypes runs throughout this month at The Art Exchange Ltd., 17 E. Brickel St., Columbus, 614/464-4611.

Clifton, the Greene County village most famous for its large, still-working grist mill, a few blocks away. Kadish has been working here since 1984, when she moved to nearby Yellow Springs to be with the man who became her husband — Robert Fogarty, the editor of the prestigious literary journal, *The Antioch Review*. The couple is very much a part of the village known for its artists and musicians. One of Kadish’s hobbies is singing with Sokolitse, a group of women there who specialize in learning and performing Eastern European folk music.

“Yellow Springs is a great place for people who like lots of activity,” she says. “When I first saw it, I thought it was beautiful.”

And she knows beauty when she sees it — we know, because she shows us in her paintings, again and again. ■