

Behringer, David. "The Nailed Sculpture of Robert Kobayashi," *Design Milk*, 26 October 2020.



Robert Kobayashi's intensely nailed sculptures are a textural treat for the eyes. Each object radiates the inspiring spirit of an artist who blazed his own path to eventually find his home (and personal art gallery) in a former butcher shop in Little Italy. "Moe's Meat Market", a selection of sculpture and a documentation of his unusual art space, is on view at Susan Inglett Gallery in New York through November 7th.



Glass Cup, 1998

Kobayashi (1925-2015) used thin metal strips cut from metal he found in Little Italy (old ceiling tin, Café Bustelo coffee cans, beer cans and more) that he painted, and nailed to wood supports. The sculptures echo the neighborhood itself - perhaps the flower arrangements at nearby sidewalk flower shop - and also prove a great love of Art History.



Still Life in the 1930's, 1997

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Still Life in the 1930's, 1997 (detail)



Flowers Seeking Attention, 2002

Robert Kobayashi was born in 1925 in Honolulu and served in the military during World War II. After studying at the Honolulu Academy of Art, he moved to NYC in 1950 to attend the Brooklyn Museum School of Art and was soon hired by MoMA to tend to a Japanese house and garden. He stayed on staff for more than two decades and was a regular in the gallery world - showcasing his work at 25 solo exhibitions and countless group exhibitions. In short, Kobayashi was tightly connected and involved in the art world, which is what makes his move to his own "gallery" inside a former butcher shop - and outside the typical "gallery neighborhood" - so intriguing and inspiring.



Kobi, His Daughter Misa, and Janice Parente during "Red Curtain", 1990, by Kate Keller Kobayashi

He purchased the former butcher shop at 237 Elizabeth Street in Little Italy in 1977 with his wife, the photographer Kate Keller Kobayashi where they lived and created art. Susan Inglett Gallery has compiled a fantastic [digital catalog](#) with more photographs and personal stories told by his wife (click to the back of the e-book) that is well worth a click-through.

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Wild Flowers Gathered Along Route 80, 2009 (detail)



Robert Kobayashi: Moe's Meat Market. Installation at Susan Inglett Gallery, 2020

This 2020 re-introduction of his life and work includes a small back room with a facsimile of the original tile floors and various joyful photographs through the decades of his space. We dare you not to smile.

Kobayashi's story would be a great movie, but his actual artwork is even more magnetic. The hundreds of nails go far beyond their "function" to give an energetic visual sparkle. You can almost hear the tapping with your eyes.

For the subject matter - in addition to the neighborhood references and whimsical nods to art history in several "nudes" and still lifes, there are a number of very clever visual plays. The glass bottles for example, are defined only by a ghostly cut outline but punctuated with a deep black shadow.



Eastern Standard Time, Vermont, 2001

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Tablescape #2, 1999



White Sheet, 1997



Morning in the Adirondacks, New York, 2005

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White on White, 2012



White on White, 2012 (detail)

The original location of "Moe's Meat Market" closed in 2017, two years after his death at the age of 90. You should not miss your chance to see THIS exhibition in person.



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Kobi in Front Room of Moe's Meat Market, 1978-179, by Kate Keller Kobayashi

What: Robert Kobayashi: Moe's Meat Market
Where: Susan Inglett Gallery, 522 West 24th St, New York, NY
When: September 17 - November 7, 2020
All images Courtesy of Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC