

Smith, Roberta. "2 Art Gallery Shows to See Right Now," *The New York Times*, 28 October 2020.

The New York Times

Robert Kobayashi

Through Nov. 7. Susan Inglett Gallery, 522 West 24 Street, Manhattan; 212-647-9111, inglettgallery.com.



Robert Kobayashi's "Square Cup," from 1999 in the exhibition "Moe's Meat Market."
Robert Kobayashi and Susan Inglett Gallery

Robert Kobayashi (1925-2015) – whose work is the subject of the rigorous yet endearing show "Moe's Meat Market" – was one of New York's great outlier artists. He had a brief phase as an Abstract Expressionist, but in the early 1960s devised his own folk-artist version of pointillist painting, packing the signature dots of the style so close together that his textured images seemed solid. How solid? Trees resemble broccoli crowns.

In the 1970s, Mr. Kobayashi made this solidity real by nailing little brush-stroke-size pieces of cutout tin to wood, either flat or carved in the round. Animated by swarms of tiny dots – the nailheads – these surfaces are endlessly engaging: At once armored and delicate, fierce and charming, they record the forming process with unusual clarity. The colored tin might depict shadowy, Giorgio Morandi-like still lifes, as in "Square Cup," and hang on the wall, or cover portrait busts that sit on pedestals – in this instance the heads of two women with blown-back hair, "Fumiko in the Wind" and "Bobby Chung's Sister." Either way, Mr. Kobayashi's efforts operate in the gap between painting and sculpture; Donald Judd might have called them "specific objects."



"Summer Window," from 2010, ceiling tin, paint and nails on wood.
Robert Kobayashi and Susan Inglett Gallery

Having found his ideal medium, Mr. Kobayashi, who never took much interest in gallery representation, found his ideal showplace: the storefront of a tenement building at 237 Elizabeth Street that he bought in 1977 for \$35,000 (much of it earned working in the registrar's department at the Museum of Modern Art). He left the previous tenant's shop sign intact: Moe's Meat Market. And the rest is little-known local history. For the next 40 years, his displays startled and delighted passers-by and made him a neighborhood hero. This exhibition is his first in a Manhattan art gallery – other than Moe's – since 1981. It should not be missed. *ROBERTA SMITH*