

ROBERT MAH

MARION MEYER CONTEMPORARY ART

As a Professor of Environmental Microbiology at UCLA, Mah's research focused on anaerobic microbial environments, their ecosystems and interrelationships with other microorganisms. In his scientific studies deductive reasoning and planned experiments were essential to the process. Attracted to these analytical elements, Mah's compositions delve into the tenants of the composition. Line, form, color and design are explored. He concentrates on geometrical shapes in subdued colors to reference the world around us. Rather than the literal experience of figurative or landscape painting, Mah asks the viewer to engage in the non-representational. His works question intellectual arguments such as color theory, abstraction, line and form. There are suggestions of context and meaning but ultimately the audience is challenged to be a participant and interact with the artwork. The meaning of the painting lies in the conceived rather than the perceived reality. But most importantly, Mah's works challenge the idea of the accident. Accident is the ability to believe in the possibility and essentiality of the spontaneous. In the creation of this suite, Mah allows for the entrance of the accident. These elements occur organically during the process and cannot be planned or controlled. These 'happy accidents' present themselves as a fluidity and expressiveness. As in the journey of life, those moments which are not expected often are perceived as the most fulfilling and exuberant.

Born in Fresno, California, Robert Mah graduated from San Joaquin Memorial High School. He went on to St. Mary's College in Moraga, CA for his freshman year and transferred to UC Berkeley. From 1954 to 1956 Mah supported our country with his service to the US Army. He was awarded his Bachelors of Arts from the University of California, Davis and continued on to receive his Masters and Ph.D. from this institution. It was with the creative entry of the sixties that Robert Mah began his career in art. Mah had just accepted a position as Assistant Professor of Environmental Microbiology at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill when he was introduced to the visual arts. In addition to teaching as a tenured professor, Mah took undergraduate courses in drawing and painting at the university. Prior to this, Mah studied studio oil painting with Tom Kobata in Studio City, CA. Drawn to the creative nature of the arts, Mah thrived in this environment. At this time, he was introduced to the Abstract Expressionists: Hoffman, Motherwell, Rothko, De Kooning and Pollock. Instantly he was attracted to the freedom and vision of these innovators. Theirs was a reliance on the spontaneous. Every type of medium was used. The meaning was in the process as well as the end result. Nothing was controlled and exploration was vital. >From 1965 to 1969, Mah participated and won acceptance in Juried Art Exhibitions at the SPH Exhibition in Chapel Hill, NC. In 1970, Mah relocated to California to accept a tenured position at UCLA in Environmental Microbiology. In 1971, Mah expanded his creative talents and studied under the tutelage of celebrated ceramicist and sculptor, Toshiko Takaezu in Penland, NC. During the next decade, Mah found his time diversified between teaching, grant writing and raising a family in Huntington Beach, CA. He continued in extensive reading in art history and international travel including many of the great museums and collections throughout the USA, Europe and Asia. In 1995, he became Professor Emeritus and re-immersed himself in his art. He enrolled in Goldenwest College in Huntington Beach and took courses in life drawing. Currently Mah is completing a suite of abstract paintings and continue to head up classes for figurative drawing.

Additionally, Mah has authored and co-authored more than 150 original publications in professionally peer-reviewed journals and books. *Methanohalophilus mahii*, a species of halophilic methane-producing bacteria was named for his work on these organisms. *Mahella australiensis*, a new genus of halotolerant anaerobic bacteria, was also named to recognize his contributions in the scientific community.