

Scott Kahn

Once in a Blue Moon

November 19, 2024–February 22, 2025

6/F, H Queen's,
80 Queen's Road Central,
Central, Hong Kong



Scott Kahn, *Blue Moon*, 2023. © Scott Kahn

David Zwirner is pleased to present an exhibition by American artist Scott Kahn at the gallery's Hong Kong location. *Once in a Blue Moon* will feature a body of new paintings that focuses on different types of full moons—with its myriad connotations—as their central compositional element. Also on view will be a selection of landscapes from throughout Kahn's career, several of which include the moon, often glimpsed in the background, materializing as a sort of omen for the scene laid out beneath. Viewed together, these works exemplify the artist's distinctive approach to the genre. This will be Kahn's first solo presentation in Asia and his first with the gallery since his representation was announced in May 2024.

Rooted in his everyday life and experiences, Kahn's enigmatic landscapes, portraits, and dreamscapes blend real and surreal elements. The artist has remained committed to a figurative mode of expression over the course of more than five decades, using a distinctive formal language to achieve a nuanced and poetic rendition of the simultaneous splendor and mundanity of the world around him. His surfaces are meticulously constructed according to precise geometries and chromatic and spatial relationships, wherein the artist employs perspective and light to establish an illusory sense of depth that underscores the resonances imparted by the recurring cast of people, places, and symbols. Kahn's works evidence his individual point of view while opening out onto universal themes, offering viewers a conduit through which to access a wide range of emotions.

The exhibition takes its title from a 2023 painting, *Blue Moon*, that features the silvery orb of the full moon seemingly in the midst of merging with its blue-toned doppelgänger. As a lunar phenomenon, a blue moon refers to the occurrence of two full moons in one calendar month, an event that comes around every two to three years, though the term itself originated from the sixteenth-century expression "The moon is blue," meant to convey something so outlandish as to be impossible. In his new works, Kahn cannily plays with the chromatic implications of this phrase, presenting moonscapes that unfold as near facsimiles of lived experience but that are shot through with electric color or ghostly shadows that pull the viewer into another realm. A pair of related small-scale compositions, *Blue Moon II* and *Sunset*

Behind the Privet Hedge (both 2023), seem to zoom in on elements of the larger *Blue Moon* painting, carefully reworking them in order to tease out new formal possibilities and thus evoke distinct responses.

In another recent work, *Wolf Moon* (2023), Kahn divides the canvas roughly in half, essentially creating two interlocking but independent compositions that each inform the other in turn. The wolf moon—the year’s first full moon, so named for the howling wolves that are said to emerge in January to hunt for food—hangs low, its large form seemingly floating in the center of the dark, starless night sky in the top portion of the composition. Below, a field of bare trees rendered in crimson and dashes of blue stretches into the distance, establishing a sense of depth that reinforces the illusion of the hovering moon. Kahn conceptualizes space in a different way in the painting *Spring Moon*, made a decade earlier in 2013, which features a faraway moon veiled by cloud cover. Glimpsed through a clearing in a thicket of trees, Kahn utilizes a symmetrical composition to build a sensation of vast and receding depth across the flat picture plane, casting the orb as both ominously present and just out of reach.

Also on view will be two significant large-scale early works from the 1980s that speak to both the consistency and the evolution of Kahn’s painterly inquiry. *The Cliffs at Stoke Fleming IV* belongs to an important series of works from 1987 that features the picturesque English countryside with fog rolling in over the verdant outcroppings. At center, a small and mysterious opening suggests a portal to another world. Finally, *The Card Game* (1985) bridges Kahn’s landscapes with his portraits, loosely evoking the composition of Leonardo da Vinci’s *The Last Supper* (1495–1498). The artist himself sits in the middle of a long table, hands outstretched to reveal four upturned playing cards (which, read in sequence, give Kahn’s birthdate), and flanked by two male figures each gazing in different directions. Behind the table, an idyllic tripartite landscape extends the space of the painting, though it is unclear if the scene is glimpsed through a window or reproduced in a painting. Mimicking the construction of an altarpiece, Kahn’s trompe l’oeil paradise encapsulates many of the key themes of his practice, existing on the precipice between the real and the imagined.

As writer and poet John Yau observes in a new essay on Kahn’s landscapes, published on davidzwirner.com on the occasion of this exhibition: “Originating with something the artist has experienced, the paintings exceed their realism and seamlessly attain a heightened clarity akin to a hypnagogic state. Standing before a painting by Kahn, we begin to see ourselves seeing a world, which, despite its plethora of precise details, remains a mystery, like a beautiful box that cannot be opened up.”

Scott Kahn was born in Springfield, Massachusetts, in 1946. He received a BA from the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, in 1967. The following year, Kahn took classes at the Art Students League in New York, where he studied under the painter Theodoros Stamos and encountered other influential artists such as Mark Rothko, though he soon moved away from working in an abstract idiom in favor of the figurative style for which he has become known. Kahn subsequently completed an MFA at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, in 1970.

A seasoned painter who has been exhibiting steadily since the 1970s, Kahn began to garner widespread attention in 2018. That year, he made one very significant sale to his good friend and fellow painter Matthew Wong (1984–2019). Kahn and Wong had connected a few years prior via Facebook, where they bonded over their mutual artistic interests, eventually meeting in person and sharing their work. Wong posted Kahn’s painting *Cul de Sac* (2017) on his social media and praised Kahn as an important influence on his work, leading to increased public awareness of Kahn’s practice.

Kahn has since been the subject of numerous solo presentations, including *Now and Then*, Ober Gallery, Kent, Connecticut (2018); *Diary*, Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York (2019); *Diary Continued*, Harper's Gallery, East Hampton, New York (2019); *Soul States*, ATM Gallery, New York (2021); and *Afternoon of a Faun*, Harper's Chelsea and Harper's Apartment, New York (2021). In 2021 and 2022, Almine Rech held solo presentations of Kahn's work in Paris and New York.

Kahn has been the recipient of two Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grants (1986 and 1995) and a residency at The Edward F. Albee Foundation in Montauk, New York (1975–1977). His work is held in institutional collections including the He Art Museum, Foshan, China; Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami; Long Museum, Shanghai; and Rachofsky Collection, Dallas.

The artist lives and works in Westchester, New York.

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