After the death of his father, Monkey A. Miller, artist Max Miller began his career as a painter of Kaddish, the Jewish prayer for the dead. Though he later would come to use the name God, is noted in the presence of a congregation daily for many years, Miller, who grew up with Yiddish as his first language, "The Kaddish provided me with time to grieve and reflect on my past as an artist, and more recently, about my work, and because of this I felt compelled to create images that transcended meaning and spoke to what I was experiencing."

The artist's grief provided the inspiration for his vivid and emotive account of his experience of Kaddish through the daily recitation of the Kaddish.

Accompanying the images are the artist's commentary, based on his thoughts, feelings and experiences with those he met during this period. While honoring the Jewish traditions of Kaddish, Miller has captured the essence of this ancient Jewish text.

Though the daily ritual of saying Kaddish has formally ended for Miller, its influence on his life continues. "The Kaddish provides an opportunity for those within the Jewish community, and for those in other communities of all ages, to witness and honor the Jewish tradition of Kaddish, and to reflect on their own humanity and spiritual journeys."

This exhibition by Max Miller originated at the Yeshiva University Museum and is sponsored by the New York Foundation for the Arts. It will be on display at 3205 5th Avenue through May 30, 2003.


The 50 vibrant watercolors, considered by the artist to be a coherent unit, are painted on paper. As a whole, the collection suggests the diversity of the social and religious settings that Miller frequented, as well as the breadth of personal transformation and learning he experienced over the course of three years.

Through the forms, variously, an expression of mourning transcends time, space, and society. The extraordinary body of work that earned an intense focus of Miller's faith, and lends insight into the Jewish community. The ultimate utility of the Jewish community is revealed in these remarkable works.

Each image is distinct in its orientation, composition and focus. Depictions range from exterior to interior, from human to anthropomorphic to being, to various Kaddish imagery or color schemes. The richness of his color and line invites the viewer to reflect on the challenges of faith and continuity of ritual and tradition.

About the Artist

Max Miller is known for his expressive paintings that embody color and line, as well as his figurative paintings of humanized animals. Miller has had exhibitions in New York City and throughout the East Coast. He received his BFA from Rhode Island School of Design and MFA from Yale University. He has been awarded numerous fellowships, including a New York Foundation for the Arts, Guggenheim, National Endowment for the Arts and two Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grants.

As an historic record and for personal reasons, Miller created a watercolor of each of the synagogues he visited during the days of saying Kaddish in New York, Vermont, Ohio and Florida (including Congregation Beth Jacob that is now 3205).