

Christie's Magazine, noviembre - diciembre 2019

## Alex, Ada and Vincent, 1961

One of the most important paintings of Alex Katz's stellar career, this work displays a vibrant and mysterious sense of inner light. It will be auctioned in New York on 13 November



Alex Katz and his son Vincent in the studio, 1962 (present lot illustrated)

**N**ow in his nineties, Alex Katz continues to challenge the boundaries of painterly representation. He has devoted more than six decades to creating large-scale portraits of his friends and family, deceptively simple paintings which are often described as timeless, but which continue to feel contemporary and new.

Painted in 1961, *Alex, Ada and Vincent* is one of the most important works of Alex Katz's career. It features two of his most cherished subjects – his wife, Ada, whom he married in 1958, and his young son, Vincent, here making his pictorial debut. Despite their radically simplified portrayal, the figures are remarkably animated, striding energetically towards the viewer. In this seemingly simple yet sophisticated image, Katz establishes the fundamental techniques that marked his career. In his direct and honest paintings, he has produced a fusion of many contradictory impulses, creating what has been termed 'a new American kind of social realism.'

In the early 1960s, as Katz began to develop a reputation, many artists expressed outrage at his work, which ran counter

to the prevailing abstract expressionist style of the time. His figurative paintings so shocked some viewers that they turned on their heels, while others accosted him with insults. 'There were those who liked it and others who didn't – but I mean *really* didn't,' Katz explained. 'An older painter gave me some advice: "Figuration is obsolete and colour is French." I said to myself, "To you, baby." Actually, I had no idea whether what I was doing was going to find an audience, but my instincts told me there was no other way.'

Katz met his wife Ada in the autumn of 1957 at the opening of an exhibition of his work at the Tanager Gallery, New York. Elegant, poised and classically beautiful, she captivated him. 'Ada had a tan, and a great smile, and she was with this... fantastic-looking guy. But he didn't put her coat on – I did'. Since then, Katz has painted Ada more than 250 times; she might be the most frequently painted artist's muse in history, on a par with, if not surpassing, Picasso's Dora Maar. ●

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**Alex Katz** (b. 1927)  
*Alex, Ada and Vincent*  
oil on linen  
84 × 74 in. (213.4 × 188 cm.)  
Painted in 1961  
\$2,000,000 - 3,000,000