

Flash Art nº 289, marzo - abril de 2013

FlashArt

THE YEAR OF KATZ

Lucy Rees

Flash Art 289 March - April 2013

NEWS

Switzerland



Alex Katz, *Kym 2*, 2008. Oil on canvas, 114 x 172 cm. Courtesy Monica De Cardenas, Milano/Zuoz.

At 85 years of age, with a career that spans over six decades, Brooklyn-born painter Alex Katz has never had more energy nor been in more demand.

Developing his painting-from-life style at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine, his career tentatively began while he was in his twenties, finding his way in a 1950s New York art world dominated by Abstract Expressionism, Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko. Katz, however, forged his own decisive path and developed a figurative billboard style characterized by flat, slick, colored planes and inexpressive brush strokes. Art historian Irving Sandler believes that he is a one-man movement, and he points out how figurative artists owe much to Katz. His influence on a younger generation of artists like Elizabeth Peyton, Julian Opie, Merlin James and Peter Doig is especially clear.

In 2011, Katz made an unexpected career move and broke away from his dealer of ten years, the established Pace Gallery that represents blue-chip artists like Chuck Close and Lee Ufan as well as the estates of Rothko and Willem de Kooning, and signed on with the younger, more hip Gavin Brown's enterprise. Before Pace, the historic Marlborough Gallery represented Katz for thirty years. Katz also reportedly turned down an offer to sign on with mega dealer Gagosian. With a more informal, experimental approach, Gavin Brown's enterprise in the West Village seems to always have a finger on the pulse and might just be becoming adept at embracing the return of mid-career talents — also in 2011, Brown held the first show of Peter Nadin in NYC since 1992.

Katz's work is more abstract today but his subject matter of landscapes, friends, recreational scenes of middle-class America, and his wife and muse Ada is consistent and even timeless. Spanning the full breadth of Katz's career, "Give Me Tomorrow" in 2012 at the Tate St Ives and the Turner Contemporary in the UK grouped together his paintings, oil studies, collages and freestanding cut-outs on aluminum. A particularly interesting overview of Katz's work currently on display at the Yale School of Art's 32 Edgewood Gallery in Connecticut: "KATZ X KATZ" (January 4 - March 10, 2013), curated by Robert Storr, presents an eccentric selection of some seventy paintings, drawings and prints dating from the '40s to 2010.

In March 2013, Katz has three major museums shows opening in Switzerland: "Alex Katz and Félix Vallotton" at the Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts in Lausanne (March 22 - June 9); "Alex Katz: Maine/New York" at the Museum der Moderne in Salzburg (March 9 - July 7); and "Alex Katz: Landscapes" at the Museum Haus Konstruktiv in Zürich. Also, a solo exhibition at Monica de Cardenas in Zuoz (February 16 - March 30) presents the artist's more intimate side with a selection of his smaller paintings and preparatory oil on board studies.

One of the most respected living American artists and a well-known figure in New York, Katz was never as widely known on the other side of the Atlantic. Perhaps now he will receive the in-depth attention he deserves.