

Alex Katz: Landscapes, Collages & Portraits Opens at the Nassau County Museum of Art

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by Pat Rogers

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ROSLYN HARBOR, NY-

“Alex Katz: Selections from the Whitney Museum of American Art” opened this weekend at the Nassau County Museum of Art. The solo exhibition presents early landscapes, collages and enormous color portraits of family and friends that are Katz’s signature. The exhibition draws upon The Whitney’s extensive holdings of art by Katz. The exhibition remains on view through Oct 13, 2013.

Working in New York City during the 1950s, Katz rejected abstraction, which was dominant at the time, and associated with other figurative painters. Among his friends were painters Larry Rivers and Fairfield Porter, photographer Rudolph Burckhardt and poets John Ashbery, Edwin Denby, Frank O’Hara and James Schuyler.

By the end of the fifties, Katz’s work moved towards realism and he became increasingly interested in portraiture with monochrome backgrounds. Like Porter, he painted his friends and family—especially Ada, his wife and muse.



"The Red Smile" by Alex Katz, 1963. Oil on canvas, 78 7/8 x 115 inches. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase, with funds from the Painting and Sculpture Committee. Art © Alex Katz / Licensed by VAGA, New York, N.Y. Photograph by Bill Orcutt.

During the 1960s, panoramic films and billboard advertising became influential in his work. Katz began creating large-scale paintings and often depicted dramatically cropped faces that would become an artistic signature. The power of Katz's portraits, said Dana Miller, Curator, Permanent Collection, of The Whitney Museum of American Art, "...comes from their color and their scale."



"Eli" by Alex Katz, 1963. Oil on canvas, 73 5/8 x 95 5/16 inches.

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; gift of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Fischbach. Art © Alex Katz / Licensed by VAGA, New York, N.Y. Photograph by Sheldon C. Collins.

In 1965, Katz began printmaking in earnest. He produced many editions in lithography, etching, silkscreen, woodcut and linoleum cut. After 1964, Katz increasingly portrayed groups of figures. He continued painting groups into the 1970s. Katz's work often captured the social world of painters, poets, critics, and other colleagues that surrounded him, according to The Whitney. For instance, in the early 1960s, after designing sets and costumes for choreographer Paul Taylor, Katz started painting images of dancers.

Some of these paintings of dancers appeared in the 2010 solo show "Alex Katz: Seeing, Drawing, Making" at the Parrish Art Museum. The exhibition featured 50 figurative works and landscapes that used a wide range of materials and media including pencil, ink, oil stick, and charcoal, drawings, prints, and paintings. The exhibition, in part, aimed to reveal the ways Katz's repetitive method of working resulted in the distillation of form for which he is famous, according to The Parrish.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, Katz focused much of his attention on large landscape paintings, which he characterizes as "environmental," according to The Whitney. Katz's landscapes bring viewers so close to the scene that they can feel enveloped by nature, states the Whitney.

Katz begins his landscape painting with the concept of a landscape and then finds the images in nature for his work. Forms have loose edges and contain a "greater painterliness" than his earlier works, according to the museum. In 1986, Katz began painting a series of night pictures—a sharp departure from the sunlit landscapes he had previously painted, forcing him to explore a new type of light.



“Swamp Maple II” by Alex Katz, 1970. Lithograph, Sheet (Irregular): 40 3/8 x 27 3/8 inches. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; gift of the artist and Brooke Alexander, Inc. Art © Alex Katz / Licensed by VAGA, New York, N.Y. Digital Image © Whitney Museum of American Art, N.Y.

The Whitney Museum of American Art has organized several traveling exhibition of Katz’s work. In 1974, the exhibition focused on his prints. In 1986, the exhibition was a retrospective of Katz’s work. In 2001, the Whitney focused on Katz’s small paintings and co-organized the traveling show with the Addison Gallery of American Art and the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art. The current exhibition, “Alex Katz: Selections from the Whitney Museum of American Art” was organized by The Whitney with the Nassau County Museum of Art.

The exhibition also includes the screening of the film “Alex Katz: What About Style?” by filmmaker and art critic Heinz Peter Schwerfel. The documentary presents Katz working in his Maine and SoHo studios on the 32-foot painting *The Black Brook*. The film also includes a virtual tour of 20 paintings by Katz and, as a whole, portrays Katz’s unique artistic style.

Katz’s work has been the subject of more than 200 solo exhibitions and nearly 500 group

exhibitions presented in the United States and around the world. His honors include a Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Academy Museum in New York, a Philip Morris Distinguished Artist Award from the American Academy in Berlin, and the Annual Artist of the City Award for the Advancement of Science and Arts bestowed by Cooper Union.



“Lincolnton Beach” by Alex Katz, 1956. Oil on canvas, 48 3/16 x 70 5/16 inches. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; gift of the artist. Art © Alex Katz / Licensed by VAGA, New York, N.Y. Digital Image © Whitney Museum of American Art, N.Y.

BASIC FACTS: “Alex Katz: Selections from the Whitney Museum of American Art” opened on June 29 and remains on view through Oct 13. On Oct 12 at 3 p.m., art critic Bill Berkson offers insights into Katz’s painting.

Screenings of “Alex Katz: What About Style?” are held daily at 11 a.m., noon, and 1 and 3 p.m. Free with museum admission. Exhibition tours and lunchtime lectures on Katz’s work will be held on July 25, Aug 22 and Sept 26.

Also on view is “AftermodernisM”. The exhibition features art by five contemporary artists: Nina Chanel Abney, Justin Craun, Wendell Gladstone, Erik Parker and Tom Sanford. All of the exhibition artists, each between 31 and 44 years old, represent a movement of young artists involved in the use of very strong color. They share an interest in combining figurative and abstract elements in new and innovative ways. The works are presented on the Second Floor Galleries of the museum.

“AftermodernisM” is organized for the Museum’s Contemporary Collectors Circle by CCC co-chairs Elaine Berger and Alison Wolfson.

The Nassau County Museum of Art is located at One Museum Drive, Roslyn Harbor, New York

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