

ALEX KATZ

López de la Serna CAC presents an exhibition of the work of the American artist Alex Katz (b. 1927, Brooklyn), whose portraits and landscapes has condensed the essence of his contemporaneity, of the society and culture to which he belongs. He has succeeded in defining a “totally American” figurative style with which he sought to distance himself from the dominant aesthetics of the middle of the last century by reconciling abstraction with post-war realism. The group of paintings selected for the occasion offers magnificent examples of that pared-down and unmistakable style, with a predominance of large formats and two constants such as the female presence and the natural spaces of Maine.

In the words of Kiko Aebi, Katz’s curator at the Colby College Museum of Art in Waterville (Maine): “Over his more than seven-decade career, he has charted a singular path, producing some of the most iconic images of our time. Whether in his portraits of friends and family or depictions of the Maine landscape, his work attunes us to the very ways we see and interact with the world around us. Additionally, his contributions to theater and dance and numerous projects made in partnership with poets have expanded the notion of artistic collaboration. Few artists have so indelibly shaped the course of art in the 20th and 21st centuries.”

After his formative years, in the fifties, Alex Katz felt a predilection for portraiture, seeking to update the classical genre but avoiding a psychological approach. The impact of the new media, which made it possible to disseminate the image to an increasingly wider public, provided him with a field in which to measure himself, so he opted for large-scale compositions, dimensions that also wanted to compete with the paintings of Abstract Expressionism, which emphasized the two-dimensionality of the canvas surface. By then Pop Art was already presenting scenes from everyday life with a vibrant chromatic palette, generating icons through repetition and fragmentation of the motif.

From that stage his inspiration comes from his closest environment, being his wife Ada his main muse, and from then on he focused on the female figure as the protagonist of his most recognizable paintings. In his tireless search for beauty in what surrounds him, the faces of women from his circle of family and friends have always been present, as we can see in the portraits of *Ada with White Hat and Sunglasses* (2007) and his daughter-in-law *Vivien* (2009); as well as those of some of his regular models: *Katherine and Elizabeth* (2012), in a double portrait of summer tone, and *Ariel* (2011), in which the face of large proportions and in the foreground is cut out against a bold yellow background, so characteristic of some of his works of that decade but already employed in the eighties.

In the late 1940s Katz studied at the Skowhegan School on the coast of Maine, where he became interested in landscape as motif after experimenting with plein air painting, although it was not until the mid-1980s that he approached these compositions of the rural environment in which he spent his summers in a more gestural and abstract manner. A more instinctive than descriptive development refers to the spontaneity of the execution, although it follows a meticulous preparatory process. In some of these works, light itself becomes the defining theme; he is fascinated by the fleetingness of the reflections at different times of the day and his ability to translate this rapid perception into a lasting image.

Throughout his long career, Alex Katz’s work has been featured in a large number of solo exhibitions, as well as in group shows, and has been included in major public and private collections around the world. He has been recently awarded the National Medal of Arts “for conjuring an enduring portrait of America”. He has just closed *Seasons* at MoMA in New York, with four monumental landscapes at different times of the year, and *Claire, Glass and Water* at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini in Venice. He currently has on view *Portraits and Landscapes* at the Brandhorst Museum in Munich and *Theater and Dance* at the Baker Museum in Florida.

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