
ALEX KATZ

FACE THE MUSIC

SALZBURG VILLA KAST

11 Saturday - 16 Saturday



Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac is showing the latest series of works by one of the most influential artists in the USA: under the title Face The Music, we present a new sequence of canvases, studies in oil, cartoons and drawings, on the theme of dance, by Alex Katz (b 1927), one of the undisputed key figures of American pop art. In the early 1950s, with his aesthetics schooled on American billboards, the principle of seriality, and his human representations, free of any kind of psychology, he was already preparing the way for pop art.

Although Alex Katz belongs to the pop generation of Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, it was not until the 1970s that his painting was exhibited internationally. Since the 1980s, Katz has been a protagonist of Cool Painting, and one of the most influential painters worldwide. He came to be a regular father-figure for a whole generation of contemporary young painters. Birth of the Cool was the title of an exhibition held in Zurich and Hamburg in 1997; it examines the way the musical coolness of American post-War jazz performed by musicians such as Stan Getz or Miles Davis became a new category of American painting.

Our exhibition also deals with the manifestation of music (and dance) in the media of painting and drawing. During the 1960s, Alex Katz collaborated for the first time with a dance ensemble. He created stage-sets for the legendary Paul Taylor Dance Company, and painted portraits of dancers and dance formations that were completely in tune with the spirit of the age. In 2010 he returned to this theme, and painted portraits of the protagonists of the New York dance scene.

»There's a sense he's elaborating (although that might not exactly be the most appropriate word) on Bonnard's nudes (and Katz's gym-slipped performers are no less erotic) or the dancers famously rendered by another hero, Henri Matisse. Dispensing with any attempt to portray the bending or dancing (this to Katz seems to be merely a matter of fact) entirely, to depict instead little more than the dance of his own pencil or brush: minimalising one thing (the ostensible subject) in order to maximise another (the process of rendering that subject in paint). The result is a world of will rather than representation. The dancers, alone, isolated and fixed, are subject to the artist's vision of the world, rather than he being subject to theirs« (Mark Rappolt, 2011).

With his figurative pictures, Alex Katz was always a somewhere on the boundary between abstraction and realism. He was doing figurative painting in American billboard format when the whole of American art had turned vehemently away from representation. Some painters persisted in their impulsive individual style or in the presentation of hardly perceptible differences; Katz countered these with his dry treatment of a visible, verifiable world. He was, he says, defending himself against abstract expressionism and the fervid self-representation of artists like Jackson Pollock. Werner Spies remarked in 2004 that the young painter was harking back, without any great detours, to America's usable past – to Georgia O'Keeffe, Fairfield Porter, Ralston Crawford and Edward Hopper.

Katz's works are divided almost equally into the genres of portrait and landscape. Since the 1960s he has painted views of New York (here

especially his immediate surroundings in Soho), the landscapes of Maine, where he spends several months every year, as well as portraits of family members, artists, writers and New York society protagonists.

His work has been exhibited worldwide, in one-man shows and retrospectives, and is to be found in the collections of many major museums, including the Museum of Modern Art/New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art/Tokyo, Tate Modern/London, Centre Georges Pompidou/Paris, Nationalgalerie/Berlin and Reina Sofia/Madrid.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a book with texts by Mark Rappolt, editor-in-chief of the British magazine Art Review, and Charles Reinhart, director of the American Dance Festival.