

ALEX KATZ

CARTOONS 1979 - 2005 AND NEW PAINTINGS

SALZBURG VILLA KAST

14 Saturday - 18 Saturday



"I always wanted to make a painting that was strong enough to hang in Times Square."
Alex Katz, 1997

We are delighted to announce an exhibition of works by the legendary American artist Alex Katz – the first ever gallery exhibition to show the block of works comprising the monumental cartoons.

In the large-scale outline drawings, the objectivity and the subtle simplicity of his works on canvas are already fully developed. While in the paintings, each field of colour is clearly separated from the adjacent ones, the cartoons are characterised by many overlapping contours, thus forming a collection of unerased corrections in the search for the perfect form. Along with the blurred effect of the powdered burnt sienna or charcoal intended to trace the definitive line on to the canvas, they somehow create the effect of painting. Serving initially as a makeshift in the process of working on the picture, Alex Katz's cartoons assume an aesthetic expression all their own.

"It may appear surprising at first glance that the painter, who confronts the eye with blankness, focusing on surface and contour, prepares his paintings almost as the Old Masters did. This contradicts every idea of pop and media art. [...] The contours in the drawings waver, with a restlessness and nervousness no longer apparent in the finished paintings. We are reminded of Giacometti, who kept trying to capture his sculptures and drawings in new sketches" (Werner Spies).

Alex Katz was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1927. From 1946 until 1950 he studied painting at the universities in New York and Maine. Although he belonged to the pop generation of Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, his work was not exhibited internationally until the 1970s. Since the 1980s he has been the protagonist of "cool painting" and one of the most influential painters in the world. He became a kind of father-figure for a whole generation of painters now in their thirties and forties. Birth of the Cool was the title of an exhibition in Zurich and Hamburg (1997), showing how the musical "cool" of the American post-war jazz played by Stan Getz or Miles Davis grew into a new category of American painting.

In his figurative painting, Alex Katz was always somewhere between abstraction and realism. He was doing figurative painting when the whole of American art had turned decisively away from representation. At that time, Katz countered the painters who obstinately insisted on an impulsive, individual signature or the presentation of hardly perceptible differences, with his cool treatment of a fully visible, verifiable world. He was, he says, deliberately defending himself against abstract expressionism and the passionate self-representation of painters such as Jackson Pollock.

"With no great detours, the young painter harks back to the usable past of America, to Georgia O'Keeffe, Fairfield Porter, Ralston Crawford and Edward Hopper" (Werner Spies).

Our exhibition combines these cartoons – done between 1979 and 2005 and previously shown in the famous Albertina museum in Vienna – with Katz's latest works on canvas, dating from recent months in New York.