

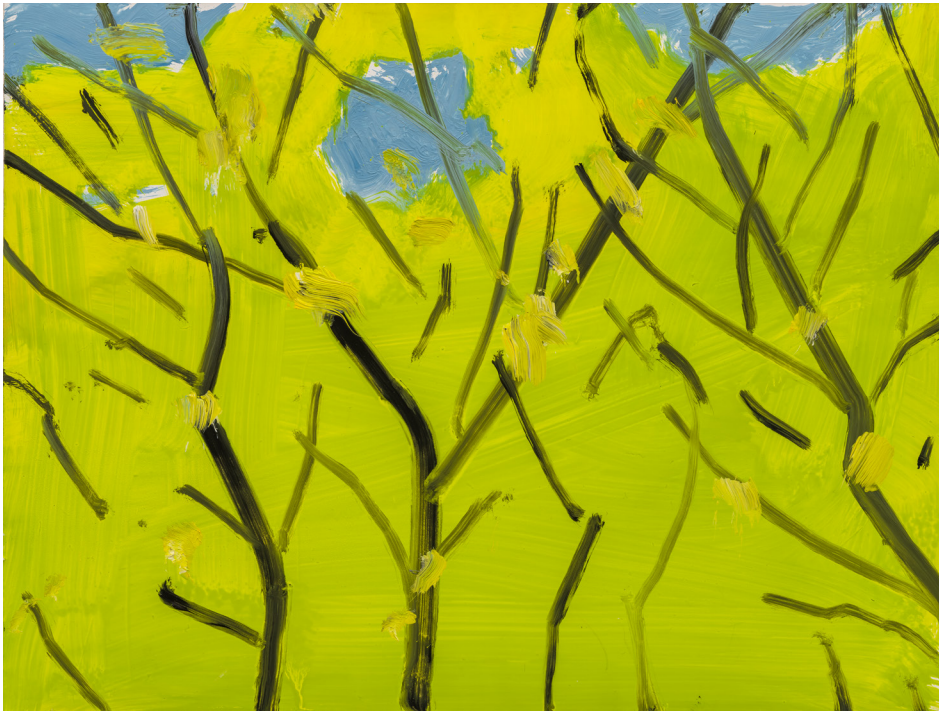
Press Release

Alex Katz

Studies

22 May—1 August 2026

Thaddaeus Ropac
Seoul Fort Hill
1F, 122-1, Dokseodang-ro, Yongsan-gu, Seoul



Alex Katz, *Study for Trees*, 2025
Oil on board, 22.9 × 30.5 cm (9 × 12 in)

Alex Katz is obsessed with capturing the present. His small-scale paintings, rendered instinctively from direct observation, achieve precisely this. Following the artist's first solo show at Thaddaeus Ropac Seoul in 2022, the gallery presents an exhibition dedicated to this rarely seen body of work, which provides an unparalleled insight into Katz's practice. Spanning the 1990s to the present, the works on view seize the artist's raw perception of his subjects of predilection – friends, flowers, forests –, while the inclusion of his large-scale *Lilies* (2025) sheds light on his assiduous process of pictorial refinement. *Studies* offers a rare glimpse into Katz's aesthetic vision and, indeed, his very subconscious.

Small-scale paintings have been integral to Katz's practice since its inception. In the late 1940s, the artist attended the famed Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine, where he first experimented with *en plein air* painting – an experience he likened to 'feeling lust for the first time'. Rendered rapidly *alla prima*, these small-scale studies in oil allowed Katz to probe the rich nuance of the natural light in Maine, yielding a mastery of luminosity that would pervade his oeuvre. In his own words, 'Light is the initial flash of what you see; that's what I'm after.' In the mid-1950s, in reaction to the hegemonic monumentality of Abstract Expressionism, Katz returned to small-scale paintings, seeking to channel his



Alex Katz, *Study for Sailing*, 1999
Oil on board, 21 x 40.6 cm (8.25 x 16 in)

peers' overflowing energy into a more intimate representational style. By the 1960s, Katz's small-scale works took on a primordial role within his deceptively meticulous pictorial process: they served as preparatory sketches in which he explored the light of his compositions, before refining them in drawings, blowing them up in Renaissance-style pouncing cartoons and ultimately painting them on the immense, billboard-like canvases that earned him critical acclaim. Katz's small-scale paintings thus constitute a key facet of his oeuvre as both a fundamental testing ground for his emblematic large-scale canvases and an autonomous body of work wherein he distills the essence of his opus: its supreme light.

Thaddaeus Ropac Seoul presents an array of small-scale portraits in which Katz searches for 'the interior light of character,' as Ingrid D. Rowland has written. The artist imbues his kindred figures with a quasi-divine quality, evinced by the yellow hues that seep through the contours of the eponymous Emma, like a halo, or the stylised bust of his friend and fellow artist Nabil Nahas that harks back to Byzantine icons. His inventively cropped compositions, meanwhile, give these works a cinematic twist. This is epitomised by *Nikki* (2006), in which Katz focuses on the figure's face in a 'choker shot', arresting her penetrating yellow-tinted gaze amid the whirling backdrop. The sitter's prominent teeth are rendered with an expressive blurriness, akin to those of Velázquez's *Democritus* (ca. 1630), which illustrates the compelling inaccuracy of sheer perception. Katz's fluid, fibrous treatment of paint lends the studies an expressionistic quality reminiscent of his early masterpieces such as *Ada on Blue* (1959; Whitney

Museum of American Art, New York) or *The Black Dress* (1960; Museum Brandhorst, Munich). In *Nine Women 2* (2009), the entrancing formal delicacy of the subject's shoes encapsulates the fragile beauty of Katz's small-scale paintings.

An ensemble of landscapes, painted intuitively *in situ*, immerse the viewer in idiosyncratic vignettes, ranging from a quasi-abstract close-up of windswept blades of grass to a worm's eye view of luscious foliage pierced by slivers of sky. Katz's wet-on-wet technique imparts a tangible immediacy to these works, whose salient striated strokes seem to have barely had the time to dry. Staccato-like tree branches recur across his forested compositions, brimming with a vitality that exceeds the confines of the picture plane. For Katz, 'Each image reads like a ripe, forceful slice of light that lives and dies comfortably within the span of the frame but still must be consumed promptly if it is to be caught.' These studies herald the artist's epic 'environmental' paintings, which were recently showcased in *Alex Katz: Seasons* at



Alex Katz, *Nine Women 2*, 2009
Oil on board, 40.6 x 30.5 cm (16 x 12 in)

The Museum of Modern Art, New York in 2024, yet they remain remarkable works in their own right. Thaddaeus Ropac Seoul also presents three large-scale paintings from his illustrious series of *Lilies* (2025), which, alongside three small-scale studies of flora, elucidate Katz's process of Matissean formal purification. The artist translates the impulsive, interwoven brushwork of the preliminary paintings into his inimitably pared-back visual vocabulary. The quivering haptic petals of *Study for Lilies* (2025) morph into majestic diaphanous tepals in *Lilies 6* (2025), which retain the indelible impression that Katz crystallised initially.



Alex Katz, *Lilies 6*, 2025
Oil on linen., 152.4 × 91.4 cm (60 × 36 in)



Alex Katz in Maine, 2021. Photograph by Isaac Katz

About the artist

Over the seven decades since his first exhibition in 1954, Alex Katz has produced a celebrated body of work, including paintings, drawings, sculpture and prints. A pre-eminent painter of modern life, he draws inspiration from films, billboard advertising, music, poetry and his close circle of friends and family. Primarily working from life, he produces images in which line and form are expressed through carefully composed strokes and planes of flat colour. Born in Brooklyn, Katz lives and works in New York. He studied at the Cooper Union School of Art in New York and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine. He has created numerous public art projects throughout his career, including a Times Square billboard (1977), an aluminium mural for Harlem Station (1984), and a more recent installation of 19 large-scale works on glass for the New York subway. His work has been the subject of over 200 solo

exhibitions internationally, including at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1974, 1986, 2002); Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (1990); Baltimore Museum of Art (1996); Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (2007); Sara Hildén Art Museum, Tampere, Finland (2009); National Portrait Gallery, London (2010); Albertina, Vienna (2014, 2023); The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2015); Serpentine Galleries, London (2016); Tate Liverpool (2018); Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris (2019); Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid (2022); Museum Voorlinden, Wassenaar, Netherlands (2023); and Museum Brandhorst, Munich (2024). A major career retrospective was held for the artist at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York in 2022, followed in 2024 by exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini during the 60th Venice Biennale.

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