

Press release

Alex Katz

60 Years of Printmaking

25 May—23 July 2024
Opening Saturday 25 May 2024, 2pm—6pm

Thaddaeus Ropac
Paris Pantin
69, avenue du Général Leclerc, Pantin, France



Alex Katz, *Blue Hat*, 2003 – 2004
Aquatint in eleven colours
84.8 x 169.8 cm (33.37 x 66.87 in)

This exhibition at Thaddaeus Ropac Paris Pantin is the first at the gallery dedicated to Alex Katz's printmaking practice, bringing together prints spanning 60 years of the American artist's career alongside a selection of his stand-alone cutout works. Ranging from Katz's evocative early landscapes to his recent monumental portraits rendered in striking monochrome, the exhibition fills the luminous ex-factory building, giving visitors an unprecedented retrospective view on the artist's printing practice. *60 Years of Printmaking* coincides with an exhibition of Katz's

recent paintings at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice, as well as a solo presentation of four of his monumental paintings at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

This comprehensive survey of Katz's printmaking is bookended by defining early prints that shaped the development of the artist's practice and by arresting works made within the last year that demonstrate his continuing desire to innovate more than six decades into his career. One of the works on view, *Luna Park 1*, was the very first

print Katz made with a print house in 1965. The artist had begun experimenting sporadically with printmaking in the 1950s, making etchings, linoleum cuts and stencils, before abandoning the medium for a decade, only to return to it in the 1960s, when the Pop Art movement, to which Katz was an important precursor and contributor, was broadening definitions of artmaking to include mechanical reproduction and rendering techniques. As Katz puts it, 'there was a place in the world for prints'.

Since 1965, printmaking has continuously held an important place at the heart of Katz's practice, and reveals a more collected, measured side to his artmaking. In his canvases painted from life, often *en plein air*, in the manner of the Impressionists, he is known for his ability to encapsulate his fleeting impression of a scene through quick, syncopated brushwork and a wet-on-wet technique, where the entire composition must be finished before the first layer has time to dry. The process of making a print, on the other hand, requires more intention and calculation, making for compositions that the artist describes as more 'stabilised' than his paintings. As such, printmaking has often served, for the artist, as a means to develop, refine and reflect on the motifs in his paintings.



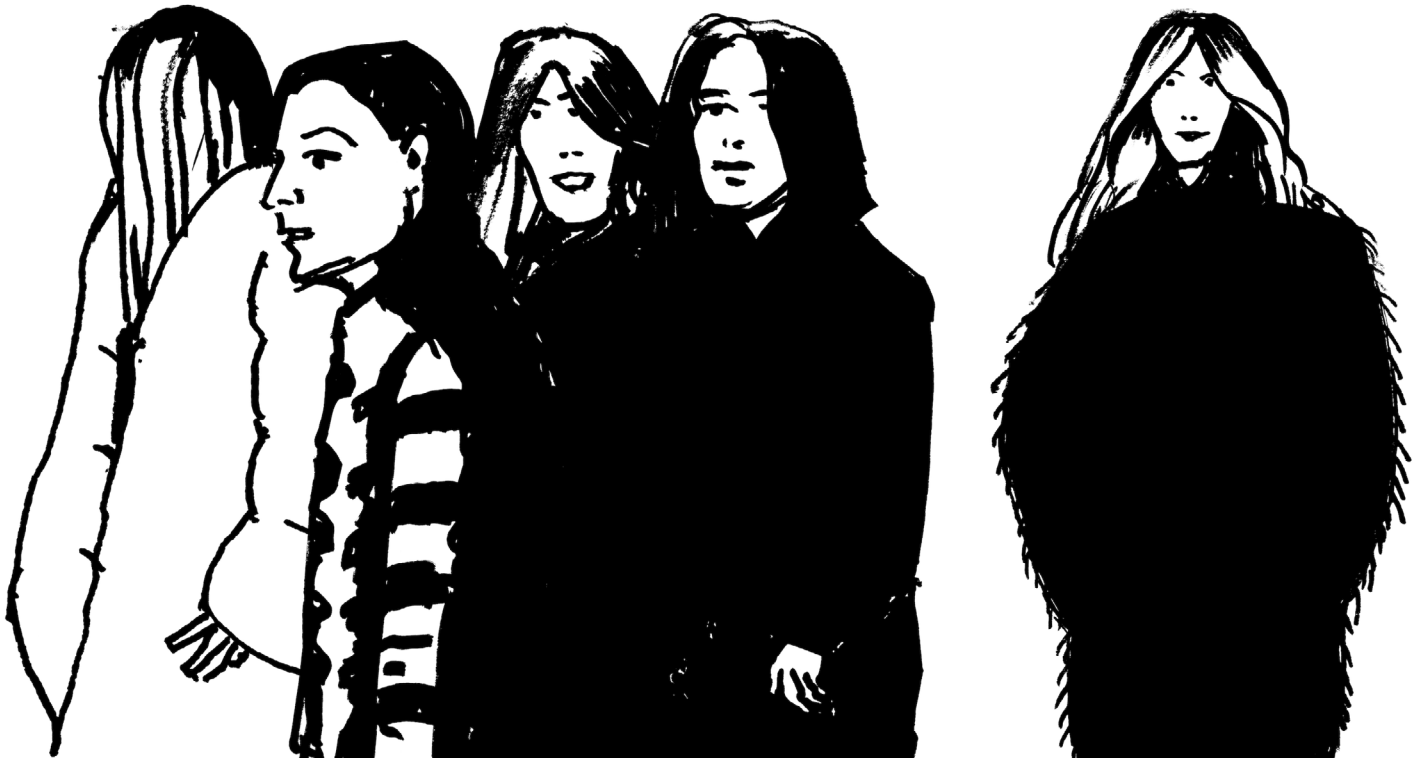
Alex Katz, *Blueberry Field*, 1968
Silkscreen in seven colours
35.6 x 43.2 cm (14 x 17 in)

The works in the exhibition represent familiar imagery from across key facets of his practice, from closely cropped, cinematic portraits to glinting seascapes and leafy landscapes depicted with defined horizon lines and an extraordinary economy of means. Over the course of the artist's career, printmaking has also served as a springboard for encountering new technical challenges and, by confronting them, achieving new results. His early experiments in silkscreening, which harnessed the medium's predisposition to a crisp articulation of forms through two-dimensional expanses of single colours, influenced Katz's use of planes of flat colour atop monochrome backgrounds in his paintings, which have become characteristic of his style.

From the mid-1960s onwards, Katz increasingly portrayed groups of from the social world that surrounded him in New York. Among the works on view is an important grouping of portfolios made across the course of the 1970s and 80s and into the 90s, which bear witness to his friendships and long-time collaborations with second-generation New York School artists, poets, choreographers and dancers. The portfolios function like vignettes, both in the graphic sense, with Katz experimenting with ways to dissimulate the hard edges of his aquatints like Francisco Goya before him, and the narrative sense, representing momentary observations of the people around him and demonstrating the artist's lifelong devotion to depicting scenes of vernacular contemporary American life.



Alex Katz, *Black Scarf*, 1996
Silkscreen. 118.1 x 78.4 cm (46.5 x 30.87 in)



Alex Katz, *Shopping Crowd 1*, 2015
 Silkscreen in one colour. 274 x 414 cm (107.87 x 163 in)



Alex Katz, *Plaid Shirt 1*, 1981
 Silkscreen in sixteen colours
 119 x 77.8 cm (46.87 x 30.62 in)



Alex Katz, *Plaid Shirt 2*, 1981
 Silkscreen in sixteen colours
 119 x 78.1 cm (46.87 x 30.75 in)

Although widely known for his use of colour, Katz began printing in black and white in the early 1970s, a practice he has continued until the present day. Several of the most recent works in the exhibition testify to the importance of monochrome in his printmaking practice. Monumental black and white silkscreens and linoleum cuts from over the course of the last decade depict figures in high contrast, several of them inspired by crowds of shoppers. Hung on end walls, these works play on the visitor's sightlines to surround them on all sides with faces as if in a bustling crowd, a sensation amplified by the stand-alone cutout figures that punctuate the exhibition. Katz first began making cutouts in 1959 as a way to restructure the relationship between figure and background. Suspended between painting and sculpture, they exist on a two-dimensional plane, epitomising the artist's characteristic flat aesthetic, but occupy the exhibition in three dimensions, lending it a sense of depth and movement, and encouraging visitors to interrogate the way they perceive works of art in space.



Alex Katz in his studio

About the artist

Coming of age as an artist in 1950s New York, Alex Katz developed his unique approach to contemporary representational painting at the height of Abstract Expressionism. Over the seven decades since his first exhibition in 1954, he has produced a celebrated body of work, including paintings, drawings, sculptures 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. His great admiration for Henri Matisse's sense of colour, composition and economy of means is evident in Katz's work, as is his interest in the American vernacular tradition.

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 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); The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2015); Serpentine Galleries, London (2016); Tate Liverpool (2018); Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris (2019); and Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid (2020), followed by a career retrospective at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York in 2022.

The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, organised a travelling exhibition of Katz's prints in 1974, and holds an important collection of his prints, spanning lithographs, screen-prints, aquatints and woodcuts. The Brooklyn Museum, New York presented a retrospective of the artist's printmaking practice in 1988, and also holds a collection of his prints. Further exhibitions dedicated to Katz's prints have been held at the Albertina, Vienna (2010); the Kunsthalle Würth, Schwäbisch Hall, Germany (2010); the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (2012); and the Ludwig Museum, Koblenz, Germany (2019).

Coinciding with the 60th Venice Biennale, an exhibition of Katz's works spanning three series is currently on view at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini until 29 September 2024, and a solo presentation of four of his monumental paintings will open at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, on 4 July 2024, on view until September.

For any enquiries:

Marcus Rothe
Thaddaeus Ropac Paris
marcus.rothe@ropac.net
Telephone +33 1 42 72 99 00
Mobile +33 6 76 77 54 15



Share your thoughts with:

@thaddaeusropac
#thaddaeusropac
#alexkatz

All images © Alex Katz / ARS NY 2024