

SPOTLIGHT: Alice Neel

Title of Piece: Canary, Girl and Fire Escape – Portrait



El Presenter: Mary Alice Dwyer

Date: October 4, 2011

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Year created: 1938

Artist: Alice Neel (1900-84)

Five points of interest about this artist:

1. Alice Neel came of age at the height of the Women's Suffrage Movement. In the 1970s she was hailed as an icon for the Feminist movement. She called herself "a collector of souls". She met her first husband, Carlos Enriguez, at art camp while attending the Philadelphia School of Design for Women. After her graduation in 1925, they moved to Havana living with Carlos' wealthy parents. Neel was embraced by the young avante-garde set of artists, musicians, and writers, and it was here that she developed her life-long political consciousness and her commitment to equality.

2. After the birth of their first daughter, the family moved to NYC. Just before her first birthday the child died of diphtheria. In 1928, Isabetta was born. In the Spring of 1930, Carlos returned to Cuba, taking the child him. Neel suffered a nervous

breakdown and attempted suicide.

3. After a lengthy recovery, she settled in Spanish Harlem and was hired by the WPA to paint urban scenes. Neel painted members of the Puerto Rican community and established herself in the circle of downtown intellectuals. By the end of the 1960s, interest in Neel's work intensified. She was given a retrospective exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1974; in the 1979 President Carter presented the National Women's Caucus for Art Award to her for outstanding achievement. Alice Neel's reputation was at its height at the time of her death in 1984.

Possible questions to use when discussing this piece with museum visitors: VTS

1. What do you think is happening in this work?
2. Who is represented?
3. What do you think the artist is expressing through color and technique and/or symbols?

Tour Type: People, Portraits and Places, Learning to Look, Artful Animals, Symbols and Icons

