Artist Resources – Alex Katz (American, b. 1927)

Alex Katz Artist Website | Katz at Timothy Taylor Gallery | Katz at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac



Katz, 2016

Katz reflected on his life, education, and becoming an artist in New York in a 1969 oral history with the Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

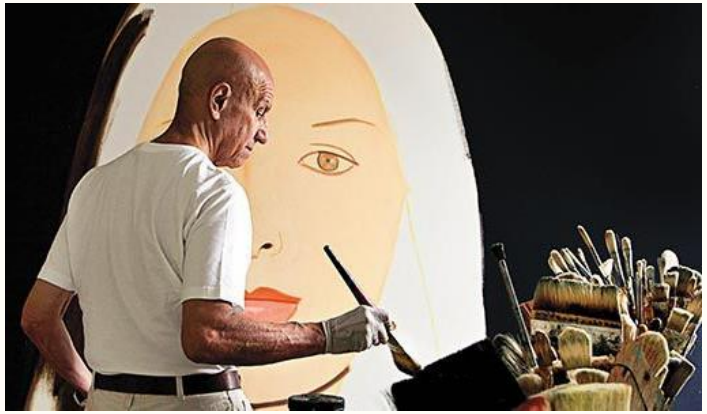
The Brooklyn Museum organized an exhibition of Katz's often overlooked printmaking oeuvre in 1988. The show included screen prints, lithographs, etchings, and woodcuts from the 1950s to the present, with a focus on his black and white works and second wave of printmaking beginning in 1965.

"I think they're all images of common experiences people have had…I try to eliminate narrative from the painting. I think narrative goes in past tense, and I was trying to get the paintings into the immediate present." Katz remarked in a 2014 video interview at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Salzburg, in association with his exhibition, *45 Years of Portraits 1969-2014*.

Katz discussed his life and work in a conversation in Maine in 2015, filmed in conjunction with an exhibition at the Colby Museum of Art showcasing his earliest work from the 1950s. The program includes a film of Katz completing a painting, captured by his son and daughter-in-law in 1992.

Phaidon spoke with Katz in 2016 about his process and inspiration. "Sometimes it comes from other paintings, sometimes comes from real life. But it's immediate," Katz explained. "If I'm not thinking about it, it just comes. I'll be doing sit-ups, look at the window, and there's a big pop."

In 2016 the New York City Transit Authority commissioned Katz to paint the interior of the F train's Fifty-seventh Street Station. He transformed the concrete tunnel with nineteen five-foot tall paintings, transferred to glass and embedded into the walls.



Katz in his SoHo studio, 2009
Photograph: Stephanie Sinclair

In a comprehensive 2018 profile, *The New Yorker* talked with Katz about his prolific career, art history, his legacy, and recognition. About his first experience painting outdoors, directly in front of his subject with no preliminary sketches, Katz remarked: "It was like feeling lust for the first time…you're working from the inside of your head. Not thinking, just doing."

Watch Katz talk with senior curator of modern art about his life and work at the National Gallery of Art in 2019.

The Guggenheim mounted a major career retrospective for Katz in 2023, a first in his home state of New York, and a follow up the Guggenheim Bilbao's critically acclaimed 2015 exhibition of Katz's landscapes.

Katz published a memoir in 2012, *Invented Symbols*, in which he shares previously unpublished notes about his life.



Alex Katz (American, b. 1927)
Ada and Flowers, 1980
Oil on canvas
Private Collection; L2026:82.1

Born and raised in New York, Alex Katz studied painting at Cooper Union in the 1940s. Unlike his contemporaries interested in Abstract Expressionism, he began to pursue a new approach to representation with flat, stylized compositions and colorful backgrounds. **Ada and Flowers** is a rare portrait that combines two of Katz's favorite subjects: his wife, Ada, and a lush bouquet of flowers. The artist has painted over 250 portraits of Ada across six decades of work, saying: "Ada for me is like Dora Maar to Picasso. But Ada has better shoulders, and could easily be Miss America."

On view November 17, 2026 – February 28, 2027



Alex Katz (American, b. 1927)
The Red Band, 1978
Oil on linen

Private Collection; L2020:126.1

Shaded by an unseen table umbrella and a wide brimmed hat with a decorative red band, the poised figure of Ada Katz rests her chin gently on her hand and gazes pensively into the distance, composed by her husband's artistic vision into a mirror image of perspectives. Ada is a central subject in Alex Katz's prolific, seventy-year career, which began in 1950s New York with vivid, figurative canvases that delivered a naturalistic, albeit highly stylized, vision of everyday life utilizing flat planes of color and clean lines. Ada was born to Italian immigrant parents in the Bronx in 1928 and became a distinguished biologist one of the only women with laboratory credentials at Memorial Sloan–Kettering Cancer Center in New York. The couple met in late fall, 1957, and married three months after their first date at a Billie Holiday concert. Ada was instrumental in the management of Katz' early career in New York through the 1960s. She also founded an Off Broadway theater company in 1979, creating an artistic haven for playwrights, poets, and visual artists.

On view May 5 – August 8, 2021

Alex Katz (American, b. 1927)
Vincent in the Afternoon, 1973
Oil on canvas
Private Collection; L2020:30.4



Raised by artistic Russian émigré parents in Depression-era Queens, Alex Katz studied painting at the Cooper Union Art School in Manhattan and rose to prominence in the 1950s amongst the second generation of Abstract Expressionists and fellow figurative painters such as Fairfield Porter (also on display). Though known for his vivid close-up portraits and enigmatic landscapes, Katz is also a prolific printmaker and was a long-time collaborator with modern dance choreographer Paul Taylor, for whom he designed costumes and sets. Simplified forms, clean lines, flat surfaces, and bright, matte palettes constitute the essential elements of Katz's paintings, which frequently feature intimate depictions of family and friends. He captures visual truth without dependence on realistic detail, creating an aesthetic experience of the fleeting moment, which he refers to as "the quick things passing." **Vincent in the Afternoon** depicts Katz thirteen-year-old son, a frequent subject for the artist and now, as an adult and successful poet and art critic, a collaborative partner.

On view May 13 – August 16, 2020