Artist Resources – Alice Neel (American, 1900-1984)

Alice Neel Estate Neel at Victoria-Munro Gallery Neel at David Zwirner Gallery

Listen to excerpts from interviews with Neel in 1971 and 1975 on Getty Podcasts *Radical Women* series

"The road that I pursued, and the road that I think keeps you an artist, was that no matter what happened to me, you still keep on painting," explains Neel in a 1979 televised interview conducted through the *Inside New York's Art World* series. "You should just keep on painting no matter how difficult it is, because this is all part of experience."

Explaining her aversion to the wave of abstraction in New York in the 1950s, Neel tells critic and fellow artist Don Gray in a televised interview, "I wanted to do as I pleased. I think art is history. I like to paint what was around me…I'd rather do some other kind of work than make my art conform to make some kind of money."

"I try to capture the person, 100% the person, and then also the spirit of the age, the zeitgeist," reveals Neel in a 1983 video interview at the Maryland Institute College of Art.



Neel, 1980
Photograph: Frank Leonardo/New York Post/Getty Images



Neel, 1944
Photograph: Sam Brody

In 2017, art critic Hilton Als curated a show at David Zwirner showcasing the portraits Neel painted while living in Spanish Harlem and the Upper Westside in New York, in which, according to Als, Neel was at her height of powers for representing the "drama of being."

In 2021, the Metropolitan Museum of Art launched *Alice Neel: People Come First*. The exhibition was the first museum retrospective of Neel's work in New York in twenty years. Watch a Virtual Opening video and tour the exhibition online.

The Centre Pompidou in Paris exhibited a comprehensive retrospective of Neel's paintings in 2022, entitled *Un Regard Engagé*. Read a review in The Art Newspaper by Matthew Holman.

Alice Neel (American, 1900-1984)
Red Grooms and Mimi Gross, 1967
Oil on canvas

Private Collection; L2026:82.2

Alice Neel knew she wanted to be an artist from a young age, but her lower-middle-class upbringing in rural Pennsylvania offered little opportunity. She took night classes at the Philadelphia School of Design for Women in the 1920s and developed her unique approach, emphasizing the emotion and psychology of her subjects in an expressionistic style. **Red Grooms and Mimi Gross (no. 2)** is a double portrait of the couple, who were friends and fellow artists. Though they hold hands, Neel emphasizes their tension and disconnect – perhaps foreshadowing their divorce in 1976. She later said: "Don't they look like a vaudeville team? They show it's not enough to be an artist today, you also have to be a performer, because they look as though in a few minutes they're going to get up and dance."

On view November 17, 2026 – February 28, 2027





Alice Neel (American, 1900-1984)
Richard, 1959
Oil on canvas

Private Collection; L2022:10.1

Now recognized as one of the most prolific American painters of the 20th century, Alice Neel's six-decade career went largely unrecognized until the 1960s. Neel fiercely challenged the popularity of abstraction in the United States by becoming a figure painter, emphasizing emotion and psychology of her subjects in an expressionistic style. The artist is best known for her memory-based and live-painted portraits of lovers, family members, friends, artists, and strangers living in New York City. **Richard** depicts Neel's oldest son as a teenager. Throughout the 1950s, she painted many portraits of her sons, Richard (b. 1939) and Hartley (b. 1941), as they matured into adults. The artist once said: "I paint to try to reveal the struggle, tragedy and joy of life."

On view April 27 – July 31, 2022

Alice Neel (American, 1900-1984)
Nancy with Flowers, 1981
Oil on canvas

Private Loan; L2019:151.1

Over the course of more than six decades, Alice Neel built a body of work that remains distinctive and relevant. The fiercely independent painter worked in near obscurity for forty years before attracting critical attention in the 1960s. While she also painted landscapes and still lifes, her uncompromising commitment to emotionally nuanced and astute portraits has cemented Neel's posthumous reputation as one of the most important American painters of the twentieth century. Her subjects included friends and family, artists, writers, celebrities, and those on the margins of society, such as immigrants and the homeless – each treated with the same degree of scrutiny, curiosity, and intuitive empathy. **Nancy with Flowers** depicts Neel's daughter-in-law and studio assistant with the artist's characteristic use of subtle figurative distortion and a remarkable attention to color. Blue outlines add a dynamic, unexpected energy. Identifying herself as a "collector of souls," Neel believed portraiture could do more than capture the likeness of a person; it could be an honest, intimate study of humanity.

On view February 8 – May 13, 2020

