

ALEX KATZ *Red Hat*

This exhibition by the renowned American artist Alex Katz (b. Brooklyn, 1927) is focused on the genre that has made him internationally famous: the portrait. Throughout a career spanning more than half a century, the painter has at various times chosen to express himself through the form of a series, an approach that takes us back to the origins of modernity, as it developed with the Impressionists and the movements preceding the European avant-garde. Viewing a series together as a whole, we can see how the painter studies a theme and develops an idea until it is finished and a new project begins. Katz has always been fascinated by fashion and the style of the moment, and in these recent works the unifying element that Katz has selected is a red hat, through which to explore the artistic possibilities of the human face foregrounded against a neutral backdrop. The paintings recall the group of portraits from the nineties *Man in White Shirt*, a selection of which was shown at Galería Javier López in 2005.

This exhibition gave the first chance at this space of contemplating the working processes of a master of the craft of painting such as Alex Katz. It can be viewed as a complement to the paintings shown the previous year in *Summer in Maine*, which reflected Katz's summers at his house in the country, with women's faces bathed in sunlight and dominated by blues and whites that evoke a day at the beach and landscapes of flowers, tending towards abstraction by framing and simplification of forms. Here, we see the studio painter, immersed in the everyday life of the big city. Katz has always avowed his interest in capturing the beauty that surrounds him, whether in his family and closest friends or in the intellectual circles and art world of Manhattan, elegantly conveying the relaxed atmosphere that he shares with his models, as if in snapshots from a personal album.

In *Red Hat* we were able to see the distinct stages through which he creates his paintings, as he allowed us to view the steps that lead up to the final forms from the preliminary sketches. These start as studies in oil on board, where he works from life selecting detail and patterns of colour and light, then charcoal drawings where clear and subtle lines trace the main features of his model—spontaneous phases marked by their naturalism and lightness of touch. His method of making these lines and descriptive elements into his large-scale compositions follows the traditional cartoon method, transferring the images to enormous canvases by means of stencils with perforated outlines and powdered pigment. Use of the cartoon entails a simplicity of form that underlies his unmistakable style, a distinctive idiom that marked him out from his contemporaries at a time when painting in the United States reached the crisis of Abstract Expressionism and the reply offered in the concepts of Pop Art.

Since the beginning of the 1950s, Alex Katz's work has been included in around five hundred group exhibitions worldwide and he has had some two hundred solo shows. He has works in the permanent collections of more than a hundred prestigious international institutions, ranging from MoMA and the Metropolitan in New York, and the Art Institute of Chicago to the Tate Gallery in London, the Pompidou in Paris, MNCARS in Madrid, and the Nationalgalerie of Berlin. In 2014 he presented the projects *Drawings, Cartoons, Paintings* at the Albertina in Vienna and an exhibition with a selection of large-scale landscapes at Tate Modern in London.

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