

# GLADSTONE GALLERY

William Corbett, "Golden Eyes: Alex Katz at Ninety," *The Brooklyn Rail*, December, 2017



## Golden Eyes: *Alex Katz at Ninety*

GAVIN BROWN'S ENTERPRISE | NOVEMBER 5 – DECEMBER 17, 2017  
GRAND STREET

GAVIN BROWN'S ENTERPRISE | NOVEMBER 5 – DECEMBER 22, 2017  
HARLEM

PETER BLUM GALLERY | NOVEMBER 16, 2017 – JANUARY 13, 2018

In a recent *New York Times* interview, Alex Katz said about Matisse, "I like his thin paint and the effortless way he paints and gets so much out of it." The same goes double for Katz's ninetieth birthday show, one of three in Manhattan, at Gavin Brown's enterprise in Harlem.

Five or six years ago I passed Katz jogging in his SoHo neighborhood. I hope he's out there today, staying in shape for another twenty years of painting, each picture bolder and more radical than the last.

The show at Gavin Brown, especially on the enormous two upper floors of the former brewery, is astonishing. It will get its due after I cover the other two Katz birthday shows.



Alex Katz, *Light Landscape I*, 2016, 120 x 96 in.  
Courtesy of Gavin Brown's Enterprise.

The reason to visit Peter Blum's Gallery is to see the great Ada in the billboard scale painting *Blue Umbrella II* (1972). It first appeared in Katz's 1973 Marlborough Gallery show dominated by the huge portraits of the gorgeous poet Anne Waldman. How Katz loves women!

At Peter Blum's, *Blue Umbrella II* has a room of its own. Viewers may think of Caillebotte's picture of the couple in the rain in Paris—I did—and wonder at how rarely rain is painted. This rain is not gloomy but sparkling. Ada is wholeheartedly beautiful, smart in the fashionable sense presenting the pleasure of a memorable glance in the street and the sustained serene beauty of pure looking. It's one of the standout paintings of the 1970s.

At Gavin Brown on Grand Street, in a loft streaming light, a perfect site for the Katz "Cut Outs," you enter a party. The gallery attendant rightly described the show as a "time capsule" of, I'd say, the 1960s. Allen Ginsberg is here in six pieces, the photographer, painter and Katz champion Rudy Burckhardt stands on one foot, J.J. Mitchell, Clarice Rivers and Joe LeSueur pose together, and Kenward Elmslie and Joe Brainard are on the wall gabbing at a party. This show is so right that it

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effortlessly hits the note of happiness and celebration, the major key Katz means to reach every time out. He hasn't done any "Cut Outs" since the 1980s when he stepped away from them at the top.



Alex Katz, *Bill 2*, 2017, 60 × 144 in. Courtesy of Gavin Brown's Enterprise.

The Harlem show would be major for any artist of any age. On the first floor, somewhat lost between the gallery desk and library is the first of three "Light Landscapes" in which a winter sunrise disperses grey/mauve fog above mint bluish hills and gleams softly off bare tree branches. The day is reborn in memory. You inhale crisp air and smell the snow on its way. The other two paintings in the series are upstairs and more available to the eye where the show astonishes.

The portraits of the dancer Bill T. Jones and of Susanne and Emma, seven in all, aggressively cropped on lemon backgrounds command rooms whose scale and rough brick and steel interiors ought to crush them. They alone are worth hustling up to Gavin Brown before the show closes.

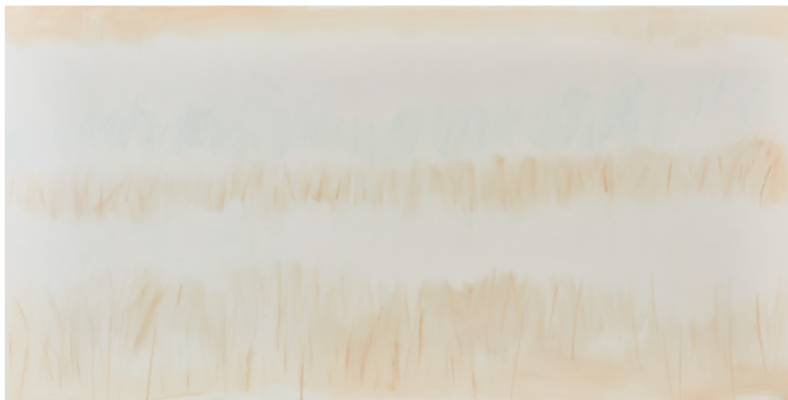
But there is so much more: the sunburst *Golden Image* (2017) painted by a painter who sees "the world with golden eyes" as he believes the Impressionists did. This painting takes time for the eye to separate image and background but the first "Wow!" led, for me, to other jolts of assent.

In the *Times* interview Katz declared "no sad songs" for him, but there is one in this show. *Ada* (2016) depicts six Adas seen from behind exiting a field that is not grass but the verdant, painted world she will inhabit, muse and goddess, as long as Katz's art is where it belongs in the first rank of American painting. No tears because she and her husband have given us their all, but a tug of sadness nevertheless.



Alex Katz, *Emma 3*, 2017, 96 × 96 in. Courtesy of Gavin Brown's Enterprise.

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Alex Katz, *Field I*, 2017, 84 × 168 in. Courtesy of Gavin Brown's Enterprise.

*Field I* (2017), an 84 × 168 inch rectangle, of tan and sere light, an as yet unnamed color of sunlight in fall grass, colors Katz must have breathed on canvas takes the risk of disappearing into inconsequence. It triumphs because it is a forever painting, a space that will always be open and inviting, a dream you can renter at will. John Ashbery has words for it: “What was left was like a field / Shut your eyes, and you can feel it for miles around.” Like the *Light Landscapes* it’s a Paul Desmond melody.

Alex Katz deserves all the superlatives in this review. I regret not coming up with more candles for the splendid cake he has served us all these years. May we have a few more slices.