

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Anna Katherine Brodbeck, "The Distinguished Landscape of an American Painter," *Patron Magazine*, October, 2019

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**ALEX KATZ
TWO x TWO'S TWENTY-FIRST
ARTIST HONOREE**

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THE DISTINGUISHED LANDSCAPE OF AN AMERICAN PAINTER

TWO X TWO FOR AIDS AND ART HONORS
ALEX KATZ AND HIS STORIED CAREER.

BY ANNA KATHERINE BRODBECK



Alex Katz, *South Light 2*, 2005, oil on linen, 96 x 120 in. Courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York/Rome. © Alex Katz, 2019/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

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Alex Katz in his Soho studio. Photograph by Chris Luttrell.



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Alex Katz, *One Flight Up*, 1968, oil on aluminum. 70 x 46 x 180 in. Collection of Marguerite Steed Hoffman. Courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York/Rome. Photograph by Mark Woods. © Alex Katz, 2019/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



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Alex Katz, *Emma 3*, 2017, oil on linen, 96 x 96 in. The Rachofsky Collection. Courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York/Rome. Photograph by Paul Takeuchi. © Alex Katz, 2019/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Alex Katz, the honored artist for this year's TWO x TWO for AIDS and Art, needs little introduction. The 92-year-old veteran artist is best known for his punchy portraits that anticipated Pop Art, but he has been long engaged in depicting the natural world, and landscapes have been a major preoccupation for him in recent years.

A new painting on view at the Dallas Museum of Art, *Crosslight* (2019), is characteristic of his recent work: monumentally scaled and gestural, showing the confident mastery of a long career. *Crosslight*, along with another landscape, *4pm* (2014), and two portrait paintings from the past few years join 1968's *One Flight Up* in a focused installation at the museum. It is a special treat to see *One Flight Up*, borrowed from the collection of Marguerite Steed Hoffman. The masterwork brings together 38 cut-out aluminum portrait busts arranged on a metal table, resembling a cocktail party where no one is talking. In August, Katz spoke by phone with Anna Katherine Brodbeck, the Hoffman Family Senior Curator at the Dallas Museum of Art, to discuss his upcoming show and his work in the TWO x TWO auction.

Anna Katherine Brodbeck (AKA): *We are so excited to have your work on view this fall at the DMA in conjunction with our TWO x TWO fundraiser, in which we celebrate you as this year's honored artist. The DMA installation will bring together the classic masterpiece One Flight Up with work as recent as your past show at Gavin Brown's enterprise. Let's start with the most recent, Crosslight, from that show. Can you talk about your painting practice now, in terms of your studio practice?*

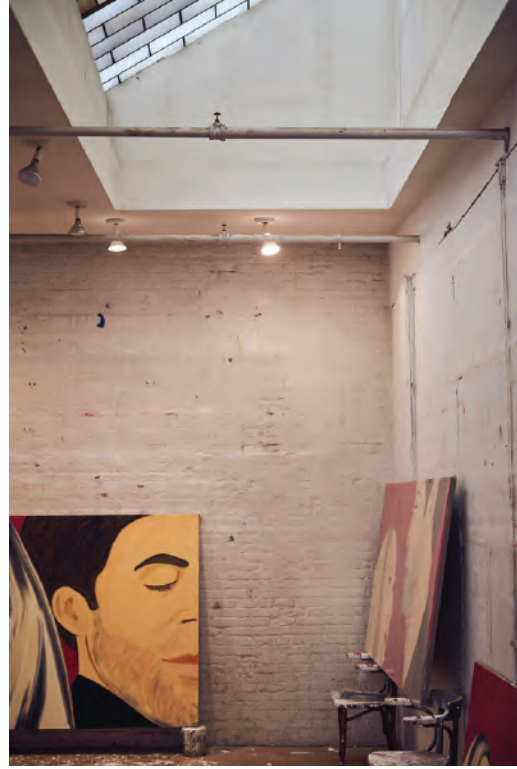


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This page and opposite: All studio views with works from Katz's series *Dancers*, 2019. Photographs by Chris Luttrell.



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Alex Katz (AK): *Crosslight* is in the bright sun. The sun is only hitting pieces and then almost recedes into a shadow. The sketches for the painting are empirical. I just sketched it and then painted wet on wet. I don't know if I did any studies for it, but I think I must have done two or three. The canvas is painted one color, the dark color, and then the lights are put in. When you load the brush you get a white light, and then as you proceed across the canvas there is less and less paint on the brush, and you get these softer lights, where the trees fall right into the green. The process is very quick, and you have to be close to perfect with the painting. The brush has to be loaded right, the paint underneath has to be right, and you have to pay attention to what you're doing and hope for the best.

AKA: *I know we find you in Maine, where you've long spent your summers. Is this from around your place in Maine?*

AK: Yes, it's based on a nine-by-twelve sketch done on-site in the landscape.

AKA: *The work that we are honored to have for TWO x TWO, South Light 2, a 2005 painting, is also a landscape, with shadows on the beautiful pink foreground.*

AK: I believe that's a winter image. And it's a very aggressive image. It's black and grey, yes, with shadows on the foreground. That's

from Pennsylvania, also based on a sketch.

AKA: *Talk about your landscape paintings throughout the years and how they've changed.*

AK: Well the first paintings, in the '50s, I was doing a lot of landscapes to get away from Picasso and Matisse, who were painting descriptive volumes. I wanted to depict things that spread. The references were Pollock and Bonnard. And at the end of the '50s, I started to make the forms more concrete. I was making a lot of abstract painting, concrete painting, like Mondrian. In 1954, I hardened the edges, then I went into collages to form a landscape too, then I experimented with scale. At the end of the '50s, I started to do more figures, figure and ground, and big compositions. The big compositions led to the flower paintings of the late 1960s. They were more concrete and hard edge and big. I did not do a lot of landscapes in the 1970s, although there were some, and I was increasing the size a great deal on those. *Swamp Maple*, which is in the National Gallery, and *Twilight*, which is in the Colby College Museum of Art, are two notable landscapes from that period. After I had the retrospective at the Whitney in 1986, and in the 1990s, I started to fool around with the idea of environmental landscapes, and

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Alex Katz, *4 pm*, 2014, oil on linen, 144 x 108 in. Courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York / Rome. © Alex Katz, 2019/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

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so the size really got big. They are supposed to be not pictures that you see, but environments that you walk into.

AKA: *It's really quite incredible to see the scale of these works in person. Do you work on a ladder?*

AK: Yes, I get on a ladder.

AKA: *And I hear you do a lot of physical exercise to gear up for the day. Do you still have your routine?*

AK: Yeah, I do a lot of exercise, regularly, seven days a week. But I don't think it has too much to do with the painting ... maybe it does.

AKA: *It's an impressive physical feat regardless.*

AK: Yeah (laughs).

AKA: *At the DMA, we have the opportunity to show One Flight Up, from 1968, which is a great example of your portraiture. This work is really a snapshot of a historic moment, capturing painters, poets, critics, and members of the intelligentsia in New York, who were friends. What do you want viewers today to know about that moment and its importance to your development?*

AK: In the '50s it was a very small group—and I'll use the word avant-garde—downtown world. We had the opportunity to work with poets and dancers and musicians, and everyone was sort of in the same boat. And it changed a bit in the '60s, this was a new crowd. Anyway, I was in the poetry scene, and a lot of people in *One Flight Up* were writers and poets, and there were some painters and a couple of critics—they were all in the same social world. It was a different world. I was kind of lucky because I met so many bright people.

AKA: *Is poetry important to your formal development?*

AK: My aesthetics mostly come from jazz music and poetry. I met the poets, and we were all on the same wavelength; we are using ordinary things in a sophisticated way. I'm speaking of Frank O'Hara, Jimmy Schuyler, John Ashbery, and Kenneth Koch.

AKA: *That's a really wonderful description. It reminds me that you published your own book last year, Looking at Art with Alex Katz, where you go through a whole host of famous paintings in art history and give your candid views on them. For me, one of the joys of having your work on view at the DMA is that we are an encyclopedic museum with a rich and varied context of painting traditions through the ages. Your treatment of light is so beautiful, it brought to mind one of the masterworks in the collection, Frederic Edwin Church's The Icebergs, which presents such a mesmerizing depiction of light hitting the mammoth ice. What works do you gravitate to for inspiration when you visit your favorite museums?*

AK: Well, each museum has a different flavor and its own masterpieces. There is the full-length Goya duchess in the Louvre [*The Countess del Carpio, Marquesa de La Solana*], I thought that was kind of fantastic; Vermeer's depiction of the side of a house with bricks [*The Little Street*] at the Rijksmuseum; and, of course, Velázquez. Whatever I like, I am not part of the militant avant garde, where you have to work from the previous modern phase. For me it's all open. Whatever I see I can use. And the old paintings for me are just as relevant as the new ones.

AKA: *Reflecting back on a very long and storied career, what still surprises you when you make paintings?*

AK: Well, you never know (laughs). You see something and off you go. **P**



Top: Alex Katz, *Edwin and Rudy*, 1968, oil on aluminum. 48 x 43.25 in. (details), Ada Katz is seated at the table next to *Linden*, 1995, oil on linen. 119 x 96 in. Photograph by Chris Luttrell. © Alex Katz, 2019/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Bottom: Alex Katz, *Crosslight*, 2019, oil on linen, 126 x 96 in. Courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York/Rome. Photograph by Thomas Müller. © Alex Katz, 2019/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.