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Sunset 1, 2008, oil on linen, 9' x 7'



Sunset 3, 2008, oil on linen, 9' x 7'

Alex Katz explores the quality of light at dusk in a recent series of paintings at PaceWildenstein

NEW YORK, April 3, 2009—PaceWildenstein is pleased to present a new series of large-scale paintings on linen and canvas from 2004-2008 by Alex Katz. The exhibition features twelve landscape paintings captured at twilight and sunset. Katz's painting was central to the development of a new realism in the early 60s and today he remains one of the leading artists of his generation. Although primarily known for his large-scale flat portraiture, the artist has been painting from nature since the early 1950s. *Alex Katz* will be on view at 545 West 22nd Street from April 24 through June 13, 2009. The artist will be present at an opening reception on Thursday, April 23rd from 6-8 p.m.

This show is about perception. With sunsets, there is a 15 minute interval to make a sketch. If the lights are left on, the painting can be seen properly but the scene is distorted. If the lights are turned off you can't see what you are doing. I did most of the paintings in the dark and tried to correct them with sketches from the original sketches. The direct perception becomes altered by memory.

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Then, I started to enlarge the paintings 4 x 6 feet, then 5 x 7 feet. The openness of the sketches becomes replaced with more concrete forms. The reality of the painting merges with the reality of the scene. With the large paintings, the sensation of environment is added and perhaps, it's back to the original perception.—Alex Katz, 2008

Alex Katz once described his subjects as “quick things passing”—an idea that he embraced early in his career while studying *plein air* painting at the Skowhegan School for Painting and Sculpture in Maine the summer following his graduation from The Cooper Union in 1949. The northern New England environment captivated Katz and he has returned every summer to the Maine coast. In 1954 he began living and working in a 19th-century yellow clapboard farmhouse. The house and its surroundings have been the subject of numerous paintings over the years. In his new paintings at PaceWildenstein, Katz captures the soft, diffused Maine light when the sun is below the horizon—that terminal period of uncertainty as day fades into night. It was the Maine light, “which is richer and darker than the light in Impressionist paintings,” Katz once explained, that “helped me separate myself from European painting and find my own eyes.”

Katz has painted the Maine light falling beyond tree branches throughout the 1990s and into the new millennium, capturing the ever-changing light in the cycles of the day and seasons in a succession of instant moments. “For some of the twilight paintings,” Katz recalls, “I remember sitting all day waiting for that interval around 8:45 pm. I’d put down the coffee and paint for just those fifteen minutes. Later I’d try to figure out what I’d done, and on that basis do another, and a third, and a fourth.”

The technique of painting directly from life that Katz learned at Skowhegan has remained central to his practice today. From his summers in Maine, his studio in New York, and the friends, family and culture that surround him, Katz paints what he sees. His first night painting, *Wet Evening* (1986), portrayed the ever-glowing city lights of Manhattan’s skyline. Other urban night scenes, including such seminal works as *Varick* (1988) and his more recent variations from 2008, *Varick 1* and *Varick 2*, have reappeared throughout his career. “From photography I can’t get any colours and I can’t get the light I’m interested in,” the artist once remarked; “I want to go into areas where no one’s been in terms of time: at twilight, you get ten or fifteen minutes.”

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Katz's exhibition at PaceWildenstein coincides with *Alex Katz: Reflections* at the Museo delle Arti di Catanzaro, Calabria, Italy (on view through September 27, 2009) and with *Alex Katz: An American Way of Seeing* at the Sara Hildén Art Museum in Tampere, Finland, on view through May 30, 2009, which will travel to the Musée de Grenoble, France and the Museum Kurhaus Kleve, Germany through 2010. In addition, *Alex Katz: Seeing, Drawing, Making*, previously on view at The Gallery at Windsor in Vero Beach, Florida, will open at the Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, New York, in February 2010.

Later this month, Katz will be honored with The Medal Award from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and will also be among the first 150 members inducted into The Cooper Union Alumni Hall of Fame.

Alex Katz (b. Brooklyn, New York, 1927) studied painting under Morris Kantor at The Cooper Union Art School in Manhattan. Upon graduating in 1949, he was awarded a scholarship for summer study at the Skowhegan School for Painting and Sculpture in Maine. Katz had his first one-person exhibition at the Roko Gallery, New York in 1954. In the late 1950s he moved towards greater realism as he became increasingly interested in portraiture. Katz's outsized canvases embraced the ambitious scale and energy associated with Abstract Expressionism while anticipating the contemporary subjects and vernacular of Pop art, radically separating him from the gestural figure painters and New Perceptual Realism. Since the early 1960s, film, television, and billboard advertising have remained central to the flat language of his work. In 1959, Katz began making cut-out paintings—freestanding or relief portraits that existed in actual space. His body of work also includes printmaking and set and costume design. Katz's subjects have ranged from landscapes to individual and complex group portraits of dancers, fashion models in designer clothing, and the social world of painters, poets, critics, and colleagues surrounding him. Throughout his career, Katz has portrayed his friends and family, including his life-long muse, Ada, who was recently the subject of a major exhibition, *Alex Katz Paints Ada*, at The Jewish Museum, New York (2006-2007).

Katz's work has been included in hundreds of group and solo exhibitions internationally since 1951. Museum exhibitions featuring his night paintings include *Alex Katz in Maine* at The Farnsworth Art Museum and Wyeth Center, Maine (2005), which travelled to the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in 2006; *Alex Katz: Nocturnal Paintings*, The Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio (1988); and *Alex Katz: Under the Stars: Landscapes 1951–1995*, Baltimore Museum of Art, Maryland (1996). Several major exhibitions of Katz's landscape and portrait painting in America and Europe followed his 1986 Whitney Museum of American Art

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retrospective and his 1988 print retrospective at the Brooklyn Museum of Art. The Paul J. Schupf Wing for the Works of Alex Katz at the Colby College Museum of Art, Maine, presents ongoing exhibitions of Katz's paintings, cut-outs, drawings, and prints. It is one of the few wings of a museum in the United States devoted solely to the work of a single living artist.

Katz has received numerous accolades throughout his career, including, amongst others, Honorary Doctorate degrees from Colgate University, New York (2005) and Colby College, Maine (1984) and Lifetime Achievement Awards from the National Academy Museum, New York (2007) and the Queens Museum of Art Award (1987). He was inducted by the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters in 1988.

Works by Alex Katz can be found in nearly 100 public collections worldwide, including The Art Institute of Chicago; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Musée National d'Art Moderne Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C.; Philadelphia Museum of Art; The Tate Gallery, London; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Alex Katz joined PaceWildenstein in 2001.

Additional information on the artist and exhibition is available upon request by contacting Jennifer Benz Joy at jjoy@pacewildenstein.com or Lauren Staub at lstaub@pacewildenstien.com or call 212.421.8987.

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