

The background is a vibrant green with numerous white, diagonal brushstrokes of varying lengths and thicknesses, creating a textured, painterly effect.

# Alex Katz

## *The Venice Paintings*

15 February—12 April 2025  
Paris Pantin

Thaddaeus Ropac

London Paris Salzburg Milan Seoul

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Paris Pantin

Following Alex Katz's landmark show at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini during the 60th Venice Biennale in 2024, this exhibition at Thaddaeus Ropac Paris Pantin reunites, for the first time, the works shown together in the City of Water. Spanning three major groupings of work made between 2021 and 2022, the paintings on view represent three key facets of the artist's practice, the boundaries of which continue to expand seven decades into his career. A group of works based on outfits by mid-century American fashion designer Claire McCardell is accompanied by large-scale close-up depictions of inky-hued oceans, and of grassland in tones of greens and yellows.

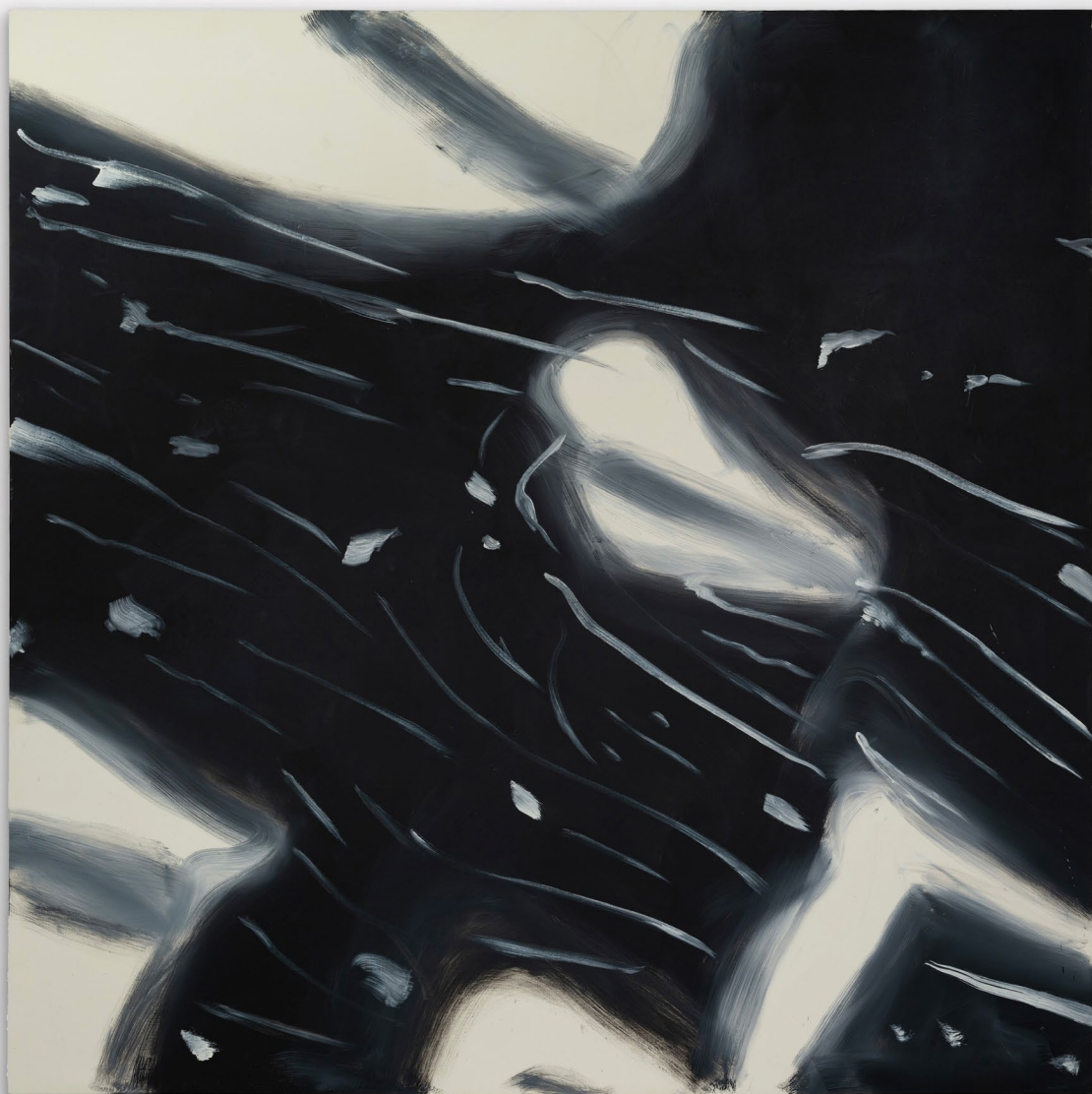
Through the late 1980s and 1990s, Katz focused much of his attention on large-scale landscape paintings, which he characterises as 'environmental', the evolution of which can be seen in the closely cropped, all-encompassing landscapes and waterscapes on view in the exhibition. As the artist says of these paintings: 'The close-up gives the painting much more power and energy. With the close-ups, I could make a realistic painting that could compete with a de Kooning or a Pollock.' It was not until the 2010s that he began painting multiple tightly cropped portraits sequenced across the canvas as if in a strip of film, combining a variety of angles to create the impression of an 'environmental' portrait. He has renewed this cinematic compositional logic by applying it to Claire McCardell's celebrated designs, which are represented in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

The works on view are the subject of a catalogue, published on the occasion of the exhibition at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, which also features a conversation between Katz and Luca Massimo Barbero, curator of the Cini exhibition.

**Thaddaeus Ropac**

London Paris Salzburg Milan Seoul



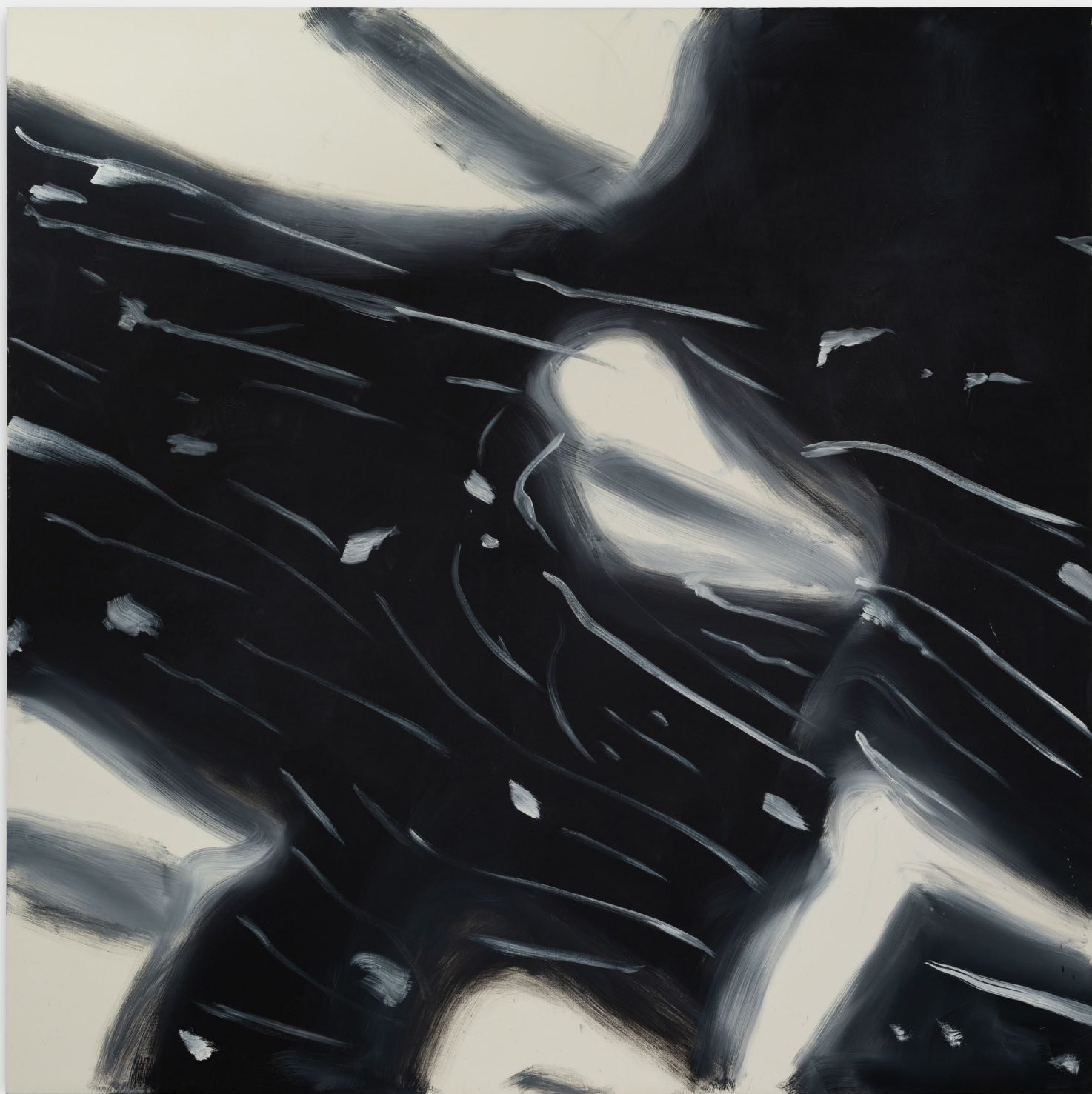


Ocean 12, 2022

Oil on linen

304.8 × 304.8 cm (120 × 120 in)

(AKZ 2235)



Ocean 12, 2022

Oil on linen

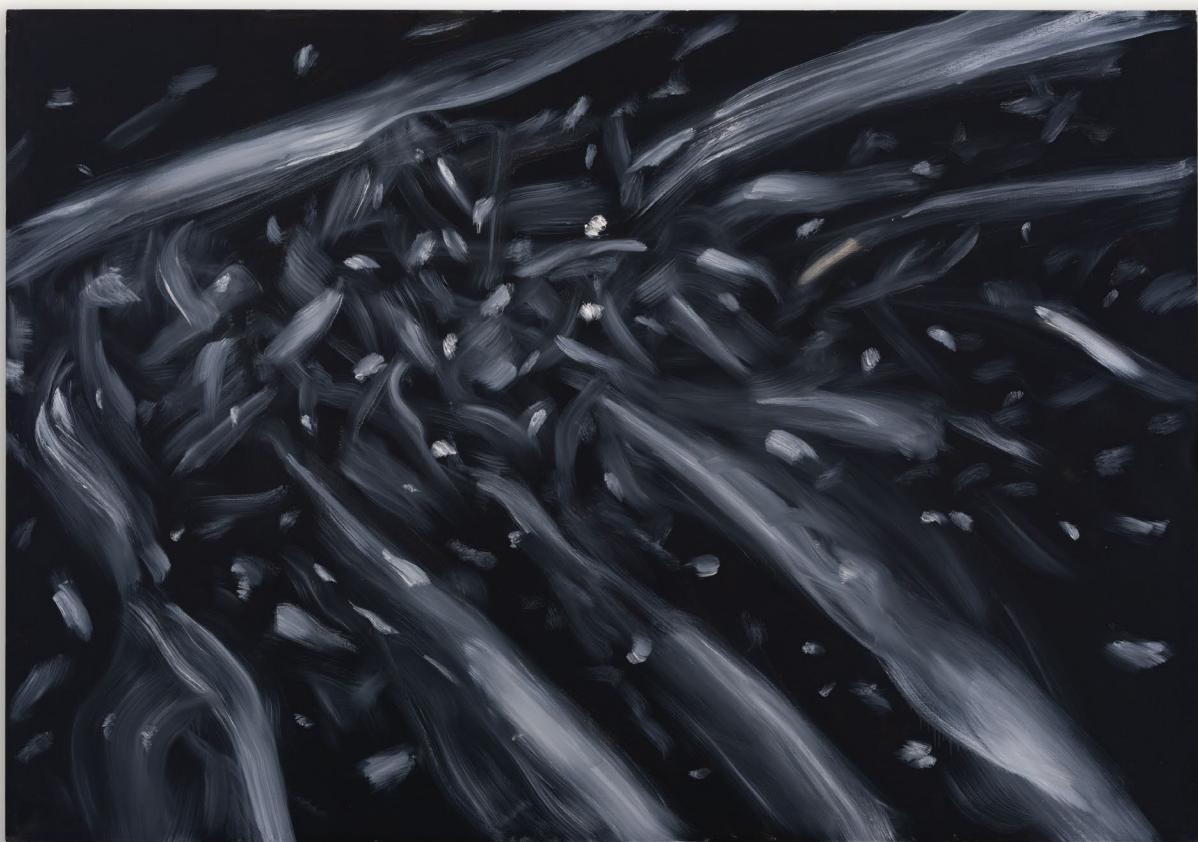
304.8 × 304.8 cm (120 × 120 in)

(AKZ 2235)





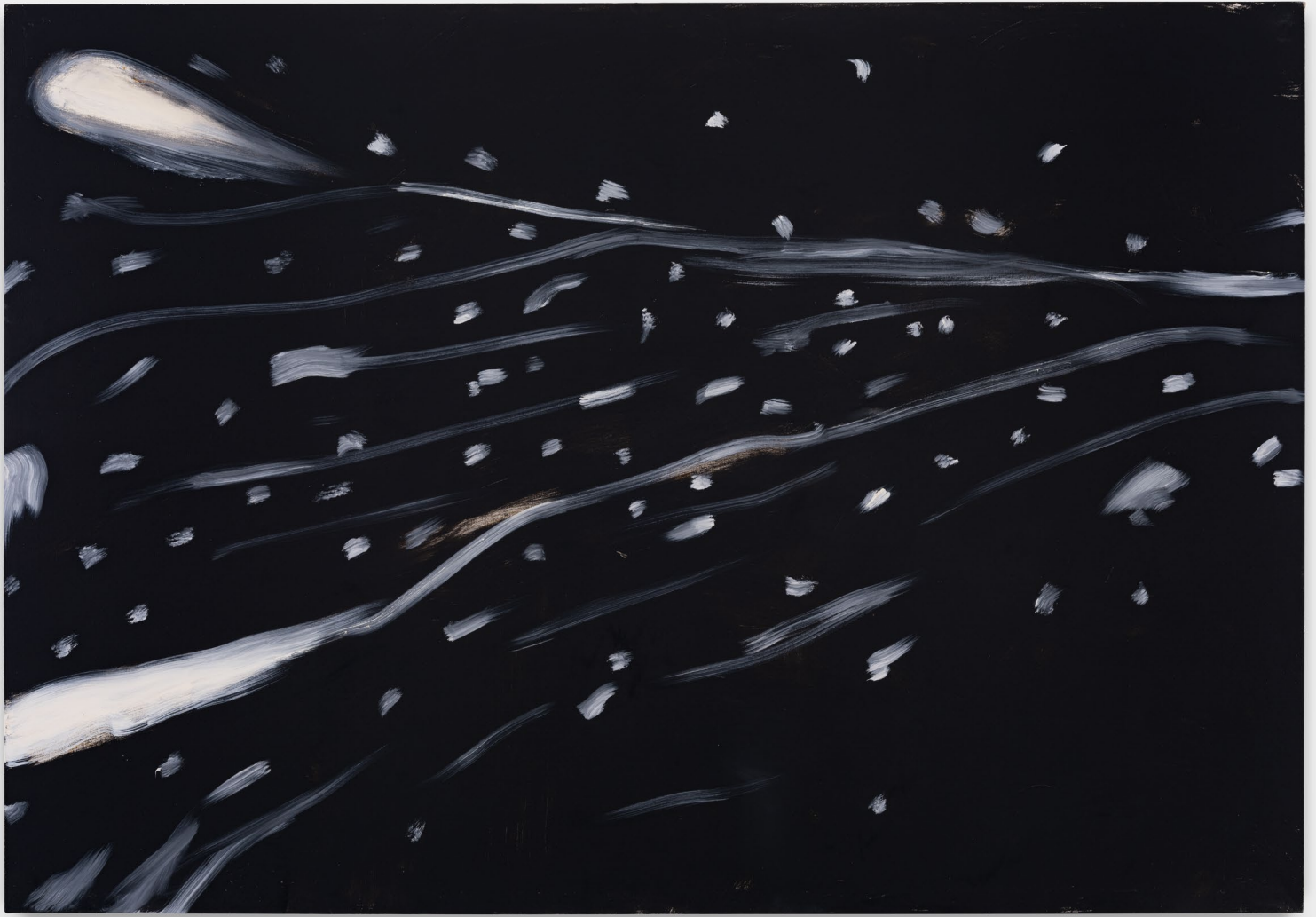




Ocean 11, 2022  
Oil on linen  
213.4 × 304.8 cm (84 × 120 in)  
(AKZ 2234)







Though water had been a recurring element in Katz's paintings during his early formative years, it wasn't until his retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York in 1986 that it became a subject in its own right. Starting in the 1980s with his ongoing *Black Brook* series, works from which are held by Tate, London, and the Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris, Katz continued exploring the effects of light and reflection on the surface of water over the course of the decades that followed with works such as *Dark Reflections* (1995; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York) or *Grey Marine* (2000; Tate, London). The exhibition highlights this aspect of Katz's practice with a group of oceanscapes, rendered in monochrome with expressive white brushstrokes landing on dark grounds to suggest waves breaking or moonlight catching on the surface of a fathomless sea. These networks of white dashes bring a depth and a sense of rippling movement to the potent dark grounds, while recalling the intricate renderings of soft, rumpling folds of draped fabric that emerged in Proto- and Early Renaissance paintings by Giotto, or indeed Piero della Francesca and Andrea Mantegna, tying the works to the Italian pictorial tradition.

*Ocean 10, 2022*

Oil on linen

213.4 × 304.8 cm (84 × 120 in)

(AKZ 2233)









It is these fleeting patterns of glinting light on dark, rather than colour, that are most important to Katz. 'Colours are irrelevant,' he stated in a recent interview. 'I can change the colours as long as I've got the light.' The artist works fast, adopting a wet-on-wet technique, whereby the entire composition must be finished before the first layer has time to dry. This has led him to develop a quick, syncopated brushwork, which encapsulates his fleeting impression of the scene. The result is, as the director of Paris's Institut national d'histoire de l'art, Éric de Chassey, describes it, 'a kind of precipitate (in the chemical sense) of perception and sensation,' where the artist does not so much seek to describe what he sees as to capture the power and feeling of water.

*Ocean 7, 2022*

Oil on linen

213.4 × 304.8 cm (84 × 120 in)

(AKZ 2230)









*Claire McCardell 5*, 2022

Oil on linen

182.9 × 91.4 cm (72.01 × 35.98 in)

(AKZ 1967)









***I am trying to make paintings that have  
some real energy – the here and now.  
It's like fashion, really.***

— Alex Katz

**Claire McCardell 11, 2022**  
Oil on linen  
213.4 × 152.4 cm (84.02 × 60 in)  
(AKZ 1973)





Claire McCardell 12, 2022  
Oil on linen  
182.9 × 213.4 cm (72 × 84 in)  
(AKZ 1974)





Katz has long been interested in fashion design, particularly as it relates to the American vernacular tradition: as early as 1960, he paid homage to the iconic 'little black dress' that marked 20th-century fashion in his renowned *The Black Dress* (Museum Brandhorst, Munich). In the 1980s, his admiration for the work of American designer Norma Kamali, who was herself influenced by McCardell, resulted in the well-known paintings *Pas De Deux* (1983; Colby College Museum of Art, Maine) and *Eleuthera* (1984). In a recent interview, Katz described Claire McCardell's designs as 'unaffected': a quality that harmonises with his pared-back painterly style.

*Claire McCardell 12*, 2022

Oil on linen

182.9 × 213.4 cm (72 × 84 in)

(AKZ 1974)





Claire McCardell 13, 2022  
Oil on linen  
182.9 × 121.9 cm (72.01 × 47.99 in)  
(AKZ 1975)





Several of the works on view feature bipartite or even tripartite compositions, with fragments of different outfits and models recalling the visual strategies of Cubism, while also emulating cinematic montage techniques. Katz has stated: 'People see my paintings with eyes trained by seeing movies and photographs in magazines. I try to use the way these things alter the way people see as a key to the way I construct my paintings.' As a visual device, the splits and crops also resonate with today's digital framework, demonstrating Katz's continued awareness of how society looks at images. 'The temporal and stylistic permanence of Katz's paintings confront and empathize with the fundamental and structural impermanence of fashion,' writes curator Éric Troncy. In Katz's words: 'Fashion is ephemeral. Any symbol of that thing that is really new in fashion instantly becomes mortal.'

*Claire McCardell 3*, 2022

Oil on linen

121.9 × 182.9 cm (47.99 × 72.01 in)

(AKZ 1965)









Katz's great admiration for Henri Matisse's sense of colour, composition and economy of means is evident across his oeuvre, and this influence is visible in his reimaginings of Claire McCardell's designs, both in the serene poses of the models and the intricate yet uninhibited brushwork with which he renders the patterns and textures of their dresses. These areas of pattern contrast with the pared-back outlines of the models' bodies rendered in refined grey linework, situating the bold compositions within an incongruous framework that recalls architectural technical drawings. The statuesque forms of the poised figures, combined with the vertical bearing of the canvases accorded by their top-to-bottom splits into columnar segments, give the paintings an almost-architectural presence.

**Claire McCardell 14, 2022**

Oil on linen

213.4 × 274.3 cm (84 × 108 in)

(AKZ 1976)









***To make a contemporary landscape, I decided to make a picture that is not like a hole in the wall, which the early landscapes are, and to make a wraparound landscape. So you need a certain size to make it physical, to make painting wrap around you. When you look at the landscapes, you're in it.***

— Alex Katz

**Grass 3, 2022**

Oil on linen

304.8 × 609.6 cm (120 × 240 in)

(AKZ 2240)









Katz has always defined himself as a painter of ‘the immediate present’, in his landscapes and waterscapes as much as in his portraits. It was with landscapes that Katz found his voice as a young painter, exploring the lakes and forests of Maine while a student at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. There, he discovered the freedom that comes with working *en plein air*, like the Impressionists, painting quick oil sketches in nature which he then turned into large-scale environmental works in his studio. Cropped and painted larger than life, the paintings of grass on view in the exhibition lend the windswept blades a quiet but powerful beauty. Therein lies the power of Katz’s paintings: neither abstract nor realistic, they focus on a small, unmoored slice of life, allowing poetry and abstract thinking to arise from pure perception rather than narrative.

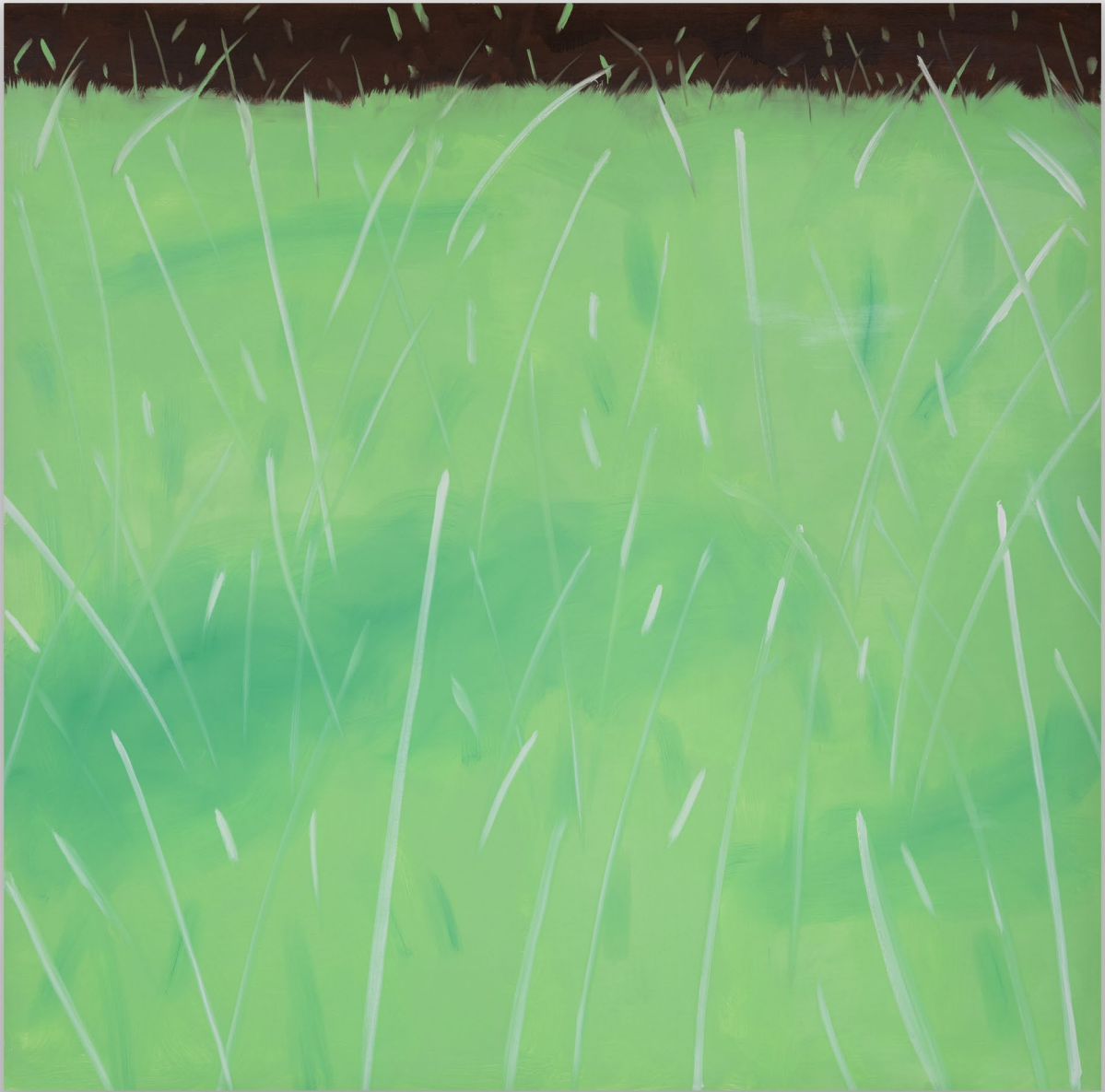
**Grass 4, 2022**

Oil on linen

304.8 × 609.6 cm (120 × 240 in)

(AKZ 2241)





*Maine Field 3*, 2022  
Oil on linen  
304.8 × 304.8 cm (120 × 120 in)  
(AKZ 2242)



# Alex Katz

## About the artist



Portrait of Alex Katz

Courtesy Alex Katz Studio. Photo: Madeline Mancini for Brand x Editions

Over the seven decades since his first exhibition in 1954, Alex Katz has produced a celebrated body of work, including paintings, drawings, sculpture and prints. A pre-eminent painter of modern life, he draws inspiration from films, billboard advertising, music, poetry and his close circle of friends and family. Primarily working from life, he produces images in which line and form are expressed through carefully composed strokes and planes of flat colour.

Born in Brooklyn, Katz lives and works in New York. He studied at the Cooper Union School of Art in New York and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine. He has created numerous public art projects throughout his career, including a Times Square billboard (1977), an aluminium mural for Harlem Station (1984), and a more recent installation of 19 large-scale works on glass for the New York subway. His work has been the subject of over 200 solo exhibitions internationally, including at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1974, 1986, 2002); Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (1990); Baltimore Museum of Art (1996); Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (2007); Sara Hildén Art Museum, Tampere, Finland (2009); National Portrait Gallery, London (2010); Albertina, Vienna (2014, 2023); The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2015); Serpentine Galleries, London (2016); Tate Liverpool (2018); Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris (2019); Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid (2022); Museum Voorlinden, Wassenaar, Netherlands (2023); and Museum Brandhorst, Munich (2024). A major career retrospective was held for the artist at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York in 2022, followed in 2024 by an exhibition at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini during the 60th Venice Biennale.



## Current & upcoming exhibitions

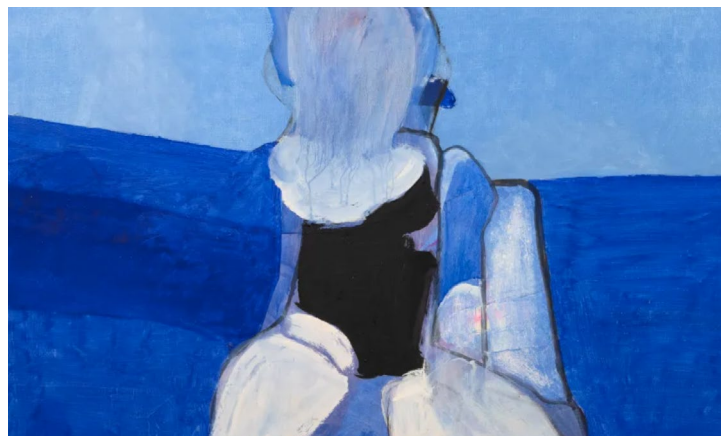


**London Ely House**

**Ron Mueck**

*En Garde*

Until 2 April 2025



**Teresa Pągowska**

*Shadow Self*

Until 2 April 2025

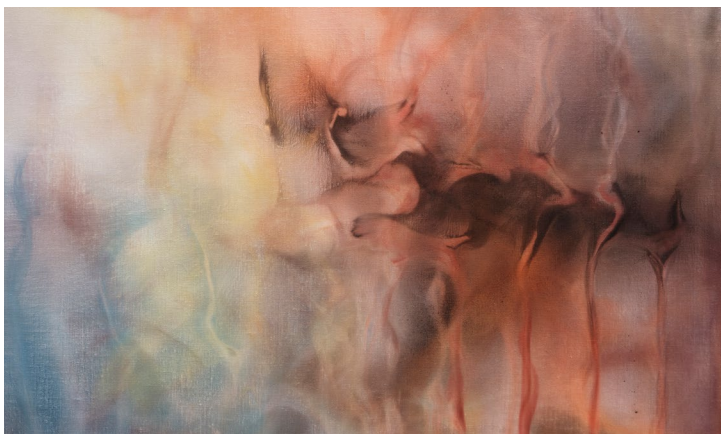


**Paris Marais**

**Sylvie Fleury**

*Sculpture Nails*

Until 22 February 2025

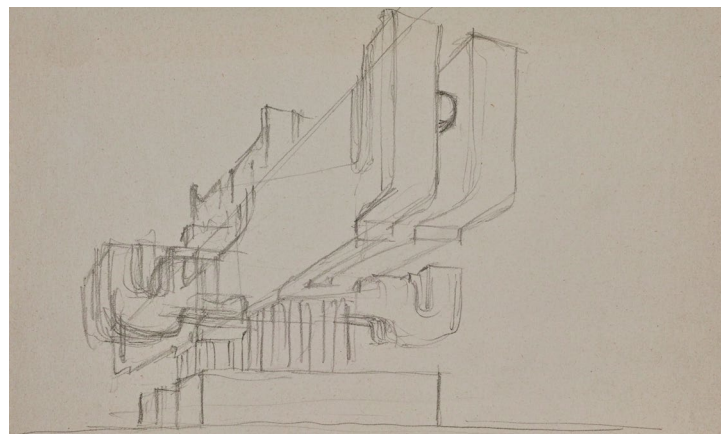


**Paris Marais**

**Oliver Beer**

*Resonance Paintings: The Cave*

1 March—19 April 2025

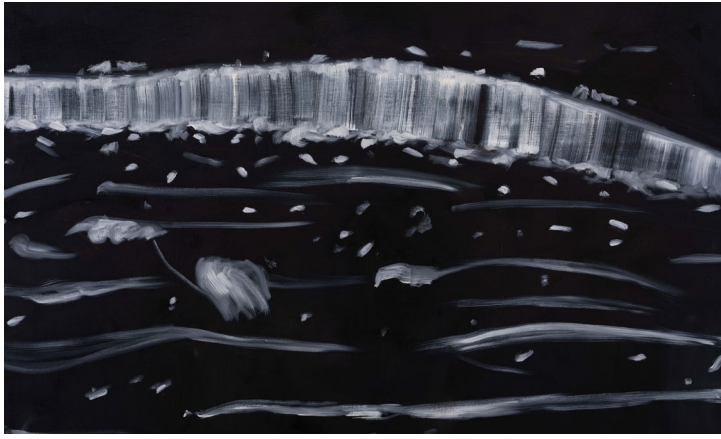


**Hans Hollein**

*Works from the 1960s*

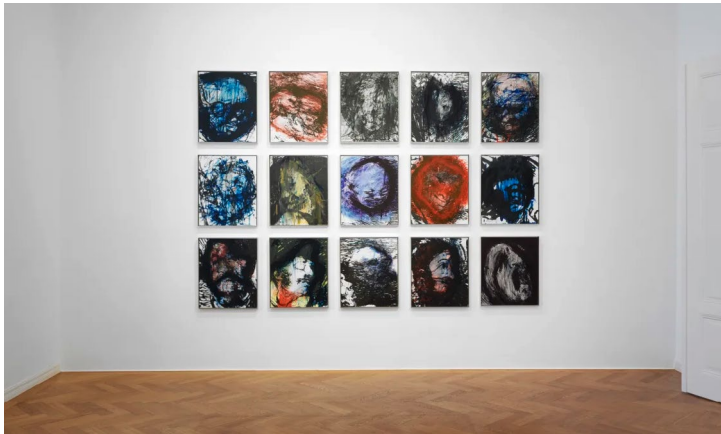
1 March—31 May 2025

## Current & upcoming exhibitions



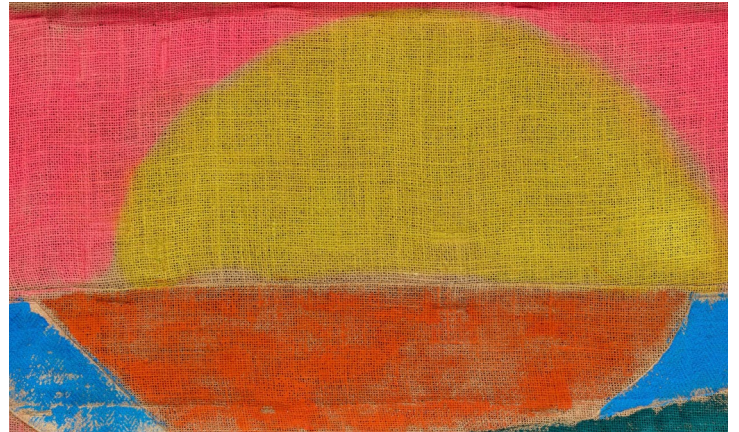
**Paris Pantin**

**Alex Katz**  
*The Venice Paintings*  
Until 12 April 2025



**Salzburg Villa Kast**

**Arnulf Rainer**  
*Landschaften—Goya*  
1983—1992  
Until 5 April 2025



**Seoul Fort Hill**

**Alvaro Barrington**  
*Soul to Seoul*  
Until 12 April 2025