



ALEX
KATZ
PRINTS



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KATZ

PRINTS

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E.M.S.

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Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indiana

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10. Alex, 1970

Alex Katz's ambition, he writes, is "to continue the great tradition of the New York school," which had its own myths, allegories and archetypes. For Katz, the artists of the New York school are distinguished by their break from European tradition and their strong penchant for individual style. They wanted to be tough; they wanted their work at once to be serious and reflective, personal and universal.

Katz is an extremely intellectual painter whose work looks brash, vulgar and tough; its aggressive quality, together with his sense of color and scale, connects him to the New York school. And like the Abstract Expressionists, his vocabulary is personal, although he paints people he knows, family and friends, and uses his representational subject matter to solve formal artistic problems.

Katz is a painter, and after nine years of making prints, he has not been diverted from his painterly concerns in printmaking. His main interest is not with the components that make up a print (the paper, platemark, ink) but in how they can be employed to explore basic modernist concerns. His first prints (1965) were screenprints that were based on his 1956 collage and cutout compositions. Subsequently he used other graphic mediums—lithograph and intaglio—to examine the problems encountered in painting and drawing.

Many of Katz's prints are reproductive, but they are not reproductions. They are closer to translations of his other work with modifications that transform them as they adjust to a new language. Katz is self-referential, but unlike Robert Rauschenberg or Jasper Johns who derive new images out of their established iconographies, Katz frequently transposes entire compositions from his paintings, drawings and cutouts, without changing them.

Making prints forces Katz to concentrate on specific problems and abandon others. Because he no longer has to be directly concerned with constructing a new composition, he refocuses his attention. One of his major interests is to reduce the image to a more minimal, a refined and still recognizable state. He deletes specific details of anatomy, thus synthesizing perceptual information and forcing the viewer to scrutinize it. Finally, the work requires the viewer to respond to the impact of the reduced image.

Katz's subject matter excites our expectations. He depicts landscapes, flowers and people. His paintings of people are not traditional portraits, revealing aspects of the sitter's or the painter's history. Katz does not characterize or personalize his subjects. He neither invades their privacy, nor dehumanizes them. The personality of a Katz subject is curiously absent, as if the artist found the specific and idiosyncratic to be beside the point. It is not necessary for the viewer to know who Katz's subjects are or what they do, for he subjugates

the literary and particular to the visual and conceptual. In his six-color lithograph *Bella*, a portrait of New York Congresswoman Bella Abzug, the recognition of the subject adds yet another dimension to the appreciation of the composition. The broad lines of Ms. Abzug's face and hat and her aggressive frontal pose, emphasized by Katz, make her effect an apt characterization. Still Katz uses soft color and simple shapes to generalize the figure and re-emphasize his own personal style. Katz uses specific individuals, as he uses landscapes and flowers, to explore space, color and the effect of light. The combination of physical and psychological characteristics seem secondary to Katz's formal interests.

Katz exploits the advantages of printmaking techniques to advance his concern with reduction. An inverse development results: as his command of technique becomes more sophisticated and complex, the printed images become more minimal, straightforward. The artist employs large areas of color or tone, where line was once used. In some cases line becomes suggestive rather than actual. The earliest lithographic portrait, *Skowhegan Costume Ball*, 1969, a single-color lithograph, is highly dependent on those nuances created by gestural drawing. The subtleties of *Portrait of a Poet; Kenneth Koch*, 1970, a five-color lithograph, are evident only with scrutiny. Katz has replaced areas created by drawing in *Skowhegan Costume Ball* with distinct color areas in *Kenneth Koch*. Broad masses of color are augmented with gestural drawing. Elsewhere in the print color is used both for definition and emphasis. Although background is minimal, it creates a complementary color area that emphasizes the directness of the image. The color and light in this print are hot, sharp, brash and direct. Structurally, the portrait of the poet is much the same as *Skowhegan Costume Ball*. Both images are frontal and iconic. The artist works on the pictorial plane closest to the viewer. The image, and consequently the scale, is intensified by occupying the entire paper surface. There is no border, no indulgence with the preciousness and sensuousness of the paper. Katz is relatively divorced from preoccupation with printing materials. Like some masters of Japanese prints, he arrives at images by truncating parts of a figure to exaggerate its presence; he uses the entire page and chooses subjects that are neutral.

Even more complicated are the subtleties of the nine-color lithographs *Homage to Frank O'Hara: William Dunas*, 1972, and *Anne*, 1973. The palette has become progressively more pastel, the light more diffuse. It appears as though fewer colors are used rather than more. Color areas have become broader, closer in value and chroma. The darker values of Dunas's and Anne's outer sweaters, the pupils of Anne's eyes and her bandana, anchor the otherwise ghostly images to the page.

Katz juxtaposes artificial colored areas with exquisite drawing, which in these prints is precise and commanding. Again it is used for definition and emphasis; unlike Kenneth Koch, the gesture is more integrated into the overall tone of the print. Some generalized shapes are articulated by lines in closely toned colors; for instance, the hair in both prints is given substance by the drawing of the strands. The broad flowers in Anne's bandana are densely patterned by a web of line. Her hair shines with closely valued slide of color and line. The complex registration and color choice of the drawn line in the eye and tearduct of Anne is crucial.

In these last lithographs one can intuit Katz's simultaneous involvement with etching. The colors in *Anne* and *Homage to Frank O'Hara: William Dunas*, as well as in *Vincent, 1972*, have been reduced to virtual monochrome, a monochrome found in such etchings as *Large Head of Ada, 1972-73*, *Harmony, 1972*, and *June, 1972*. The etchings demonstrate his ability to use the limited palette of black, white and gray without the sensuality of color. The images are straightforward, cool, analytic. There is no extraneous information given by the artist. The early etchings, including *June Ekman's Class*, Katz's first non-frontal portrait prints, appear purposely and self-consciously awkward, stiff. Each area of light and dark is distinct; each area on the page has its own weight. The portraits are approximate; the images are precise. Katz uses the white of the page as the lightest value. The prints are small, horizontal in format. It is not only the smallness of size and the enormity of scale that reinforce this discomfort; Katz also uses rough aquatint and straight line etching. It is necessary for the viewer to read, scan, the composition as a whole, from a distance, due to this intensity of scale in small format. As in the lithographs, the images are enormous, pushed up to the surface of the page, allowing no room for the full form of the face. Katz's preoccupation with reduction is emphasized by the fact that these prints function as a series.

What relates the etchings from his other prints is Katz's ability to use black and white as he uses chromatic color elsewhere—tonally. Katz explores such tonal color and light in terms of images not translated from his paintings; the etchings are among the few compositional representations designed intentionally for this print medium. Katz takes advantage of rough and fine aquatint to realize sharply defined areas that function in a fashion similar to the lithographs' areas of artificial or hot color. The best of these graphics, *Large Head of Ada, 1973*, on a long horizontal sheet is somewhat softer than the group of portraits of *June Ekman's Class*. The background, nearly half the sheet, reinforces the softening effect of the diffuse light. The drawing, too, is more

delicate and the shaded facial areas modulate the image's obtuseness. The mass of hair, as in *Homage to Frank O'Hara: William Dunas* and *Anne*, rearticulated by the etched line, forces the image even closer to the picture plane. Compared to the June Ekman portraits this three-quarter image shows even less of the entire face.

The landscapes and flowers are distinctive in Katz's oeuvre. These prints exist in a number of states; the same composition conceived as different color structures. As in his other work, the compositions were not made originally for the print. They are almost didactic in nature, and why Katz employs these mediums in combination with non-figurative subject matter is again a function of his varied formal interests. Like Ellsworth Kelly's prints, which are inseparable from their corresponding paintings, save in their concern with paper, Katz's are highly synthetic images. The colors too, though much more subtle in relation to one another, are also reminiscent of Kelly. Lithography allows Katz to investigate gesture in relation to a flat surface, not possible in screenprinting. In his prints, Katz achieves his characteristically flat surfaces, to even a greater extent than in his paintings.

The components of both the landscapes and flower works vary in complexity, ranging from the simple geometric forms of *Sunset: Lake Wesserunset I*, or the later *Provincetown I*, to the more refined multifarious detail of *Swamp Maple I and II* or *Day Lily II*. Consistently, color and surface create an unrelenting flatness. In *Swamp Maple*, the planar flatness is abruptly juxtaposed with the illusion of background depth, the overall effect markedly like cardboard cutouts laid on a flat page. The distance between the frontal plane and the illusion of background space is unspecified. The viewer accepts this ambiguity because Katz forces the background space to be read as frontal relief structure. Ultimately, all the parts maintain contact with the surface plane. The space in *Day Lily I and II* is typically ambiguous. The stamens appear as close to the viewer as does the lower petal. The frontality of the flower image is further emphasized by the background color which seems to project on to the surface plane, encouraging a reading of the flower and background shapes as in changeable figure-ground relationship.

Immediately before publication of this catalogue Katz finished five new aquatints and drypoints. In a provocative rejection of the two mediums' traditional peculiarities, Katz continues in his progressively reductive, increasingly restrained vein. Drypoint allows for greater articulation of the surface than Katz is interested in. He suppresses gestural details so that

information is at its most minimal, the images cool and straightforward, analytic. In *Vincent*, Katz almost burnishes the line of the nose out of existence. It is as though he barely touched the plate. The print has a strong yet tender presence. In *Sunny*, the drypoint is used more richly. A soft silky sheen on the coat of the eyeless dog is created by masses of drypoint line over a large aquatint shape. He employs line over mass in the manner established in his lithographs and on the earlier etchings. The line is more delicate in *Vincent*, staggeringly rough and precise in the hair of *The Swimmer*. In the area of the lip of *The Swimmer* a definite line does not exist; Katz's use of mass is so exact he does not need it for reiteration. He is absolutely sure of himself in his ability to handle soft and hard, light and dark.

These last prints explicitly contain the paradox that defines Katz's singular style. He challenges difficult print mediums

to produce simple and generalized images. The softer and more evanescent the print technique and local color, the more analytically rigorous the compositions are. The more risks Katz takes with his work, the more he turns back to his own earlier investigations for reference. These paradoxes keep Katz's work, for me, fresh and stimulating even as he continues to mature and refine his personal manner. His style is slowly and steadily evolving within self-imposed boundaries. It is a mature, immediately recognizable, intensely personal one which maintains its provocation by virtues of these paradoxes.

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Associate Curator
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1. *Luna Park*, 1965

The central focus of Alex Katz's work is its elusiveness. Time and again that which seems obvious becomes subtle, and that which appears simple and unified becomes complicated and changeable. Emanating a fragile peacefulness, the paintings, drawings and prints gently frustrate the viewer's expectations and interpretations. Having responded to the sensuous shapes and colors of a flower painting or lithograph, one suddenly becomes aware of an incipient formal disintegration, a subtle lapse into inorganic structure, or an unexpected shift of color into light and a consequent lessening of the expressive potentials of pure form. Similarly the elements of a landscape begin a slow oscillation. At one moment they coalesce and imply a deep pictorial space, providing structure and meaning. At the next instant the space dissolves, the forms of the landscape are sensed more individually, and their simplicity lapses into a perilous flirtation with meaninglessness. Even more perplexing is the indefiniteness of the portraits. The viewer is suspended between his response to the seeming familiarity of the sitters and their impassive refusal to yield any further insights.

Katz continually holds out and withdraws every possibility of forging a secure relationship with the work of art. Easy as it is to consider his oeuvre under the rubric of social realism, the next assessment might adopt a formalist point of view, demoting the inscrutable subjects to mere vehicles for a new synthesis of color and light, or worse to an excuse for painting. But no verbal categories define this body of work, because the focus is deftly directed to an avoidance of all clichés even while encompassing them. Katz's work will not be pinned down, and by so doing it joins much of contemporary art that leads and then suspends the viewer in his own projections. Only by accepting the coexistence of conflicting formal and psychological experience can one come to terms with Katz's position. The engaging quality of a *William Dumas* is felt only as it slips from one's grasp, resisting interpretation and becoming not more, but only different with the passage of time. Only in one's memory does the first flash of empathic response persist. The image remains on the paper but refuses to budge, that is, to come to life or to yield to interpretation.

In the presence of Katz's works one experiences a peacefulness closer to that elicited by Barnett Newman's sense of measured interval than by any figurative painting of the past few decades. Yet, being figure painting, this very economy threatens the paintings with collapse. It is precisely on this brink of uncertainty or even of affected noncommitment that the best of Katz exists, flirting with ascetic sparseness as in the etchings of *June Ekman's Class*, or seducing by decorative prettiness as in the color lithograph of *Anne*. In each, however, Katz does not proceed merely by eliminating detail

or by synthesizing abstract structures. Rather, he systematically sets out to create his images from the minimum number of elements which will just preserve the basic characteristics of the medium used. In his prints he openly risks the consequences of creating non-prints—images which eschew all the obvious hallmarks of the interaction of a printing surface and paper (*Large Head of Ada*, for example, goes so far as to eliminate the platemark). If there is gesture (that is, shapes or strokes which reflect the motion of the artist's hand) or graphic texture, it is subsumed by the very simplicity of the forms and is divorced from optics and illusionism. If there is expressive line, it is swallowed by the activation of negative spaces. If there is an engaging color, it is used for peripheral flatness and not central articulation. If there are accents of light, they are subverted by color or bland, non-plastic shapes. And if one finds an intriguing face or a hint of action, its interest is usurped by an intransigent immobility. The dynamic stasis of classical painting is alluded to but never completely adopted. One thinks of Matisse's early (and latest) works in which exacting pains were taken to avoid slipping into the easier formulations of late 19th-century, romantic classicism of Gustave Moreau, Puvis de Chavannes or even Gauguin, all the while maintaining the cohesive monumentality and structure of their compositions. Thus the unity, control and economy which inform all of Katz's work are ever being tempered by diffidence, denial and attenuation. His is not easy painting because it is never over-determined by our expectations. In the same way, the prints manifest an openness of form which is the virtual antithesis of everything one expects from a reproductive means of image making.

Katz holds a position (cultivated to be sure) of considerable ambiguity in the present art scene. His resistance to classification—he has obviously avoided the radical realist or expressionist labels—has not prevented his art from gaining wide-spread admiration, a phenomenon that strongly recalls the position enjoyed by Puvis de Chavannes during the last two or three decades of the 19th-century. Puvis was not linked to any of the avant-garde movements, but was honored by virtually all. He was respected as an embodiment of past traditions, and yet was regarded as a harbinger of Synthetism, Symbolism, as well as the Classicism of the 1890s and our own century. He exploited allegorical figure painting much as Katz exploits it—by a new sense of scale, a subdued palette, a wall-like flatness, and a series of subtly restrained gestures. Katz scrupulously avoids the fashionable expressionistic brushiness of Larry Rivers and the mannered poses of a continental like Balthus. Like Puvis, Katz joins the significant painters of our times—from Pollock through Johns, Lichtenstein, and Louis—in his concern for limiting the illusionistic

qualities of paint, canvas and frame.

Typically American is Katz's holding out for his own vision, his resistance to easier, literary solutions, to seductive brushwork or lyrical color. Informing his best work is a consistency that feels direct, large-scaled and single-purposed, even when the content is tinged by caution and withdrawal. It has been claimed that the large figures and faces which comprise so much of his imagery reflect American billboard conventions, an opinion which bases itself on an incomplete reading of scale and sentiment, both of which are attenuated rather than exaggerated. Nowhere does Katz paraphrase reproductive or formal conventions as do Warhol, Rosenquist, Lichtenstein and Wesselman. There are no professional sleights-of-hand or mechanical interventions which inform the billboard whose obvious purpose is communication. A Marlboro smile sweeps across the countryside embracing all viewers; a Katz smile remains a fixed form, a moment of expression that has no extension in space and time. The artist himself prefers to liken his images to those of a frozen moment from a movie that persists in one's memory. This mode is comparable to Gauguin's Brittany figures frozen in acts that are both meaning-laden and emotionless, or Hopper's men and women that people the lonely urban spaces. In Katz these empty spaces are more formalized and even invade the structure of the figures; they are diffident and lethargic shapes, lines and textures, which through their very lethargy partake of the same attenuation of meaning that informs the overall image.

American painters do not simply wear styles, they become their styles. Yet many artists reacted to the highly personal idioms of the 1950s, and sought a kind of stylelessness. This was especially true of Pop Art which began by quoting the obvious and ended by shunting the viewer's attention away from the outer world of reproduction, photography and television to the inner world that connects ways of seeing with the materials of art itself. Katz's art may also be seen as a reformation of the art of the fifties; one that seizes upon its gestural content, fuses it to figure painting and then attenuates and slows its content.

The Prints

Few have regarded Alex Katz as a major printmaker until quite recently. His production numbers a modest twenty-eight editions and one portfolio of twelve small etchings. All but three of these have been executed since 1969. The artist's attitude toward printmaking is not without reservations—at times it feels like an unending struggle with medium and printer to arrive at a statement admittedly less weighty than a

painting. Yet Katz has gradually been seduced by the mediums, by the compression of form exacted by the flatness of paper and printing surface, and by the limitations imposed by an additive process. Katz's increased interest in printmaking is not just a matter of economics (or of Brooke Alexander's gentle encouragement), nor was it strictly determined by the exponential rise of interest in the printed image. It is rather a natural outgrowth of the development of his paintings and drawings. Katz was never seduced by the complexities or fussy textures of prints; he was not drawn to prints while his paintings possessed a freedom of brushwork akin to that of de Kooning, Rivers or Diebenkorn. Printmaking only became attractive to him as his paintings increased in flatness and scale, as their larger forms were conditioned by an increasing laconic rhythm of paint application, and as entire works became virtual symbols of gesture rather than direct emotional acts. These passages were just what could be transcribed into the delayed and cumulative steps of printmaking.

Katz takes pains with his prints not in the registration of color, intricacies of hatching, transparencies of wash, cleanness of line or evenness of bite, but in the precision of color, value, touch and shape. The prints truly represent the sensibilities of a painter who has turned to paper, an insistence on adjustment and an avoidance of accident. The works begin with subjects already rendered in paint (*Luna Park*, *White Petunia*, *Swamp Maple*, *Lake Wesserunset* or *Anne*), in collage (*Gray Interior*) or in a drawing (*Skowhegan Costume Ball* or *Vincent*) *William Dunas* began somewhat unusually as a small oil sketch and gained presence and synthesis on paper. Usually Katz arrives at the printer with a photograph, a reproduction or a color slide (this is the only time he uses photography in his work—the paintings begin with a series of sketches, finished drawings and cartoons in charcoal). Although the goal is to render the prototype, it is of necessity redrawn and compressed into the discrete, additive stages of silkscreen, lithography or etching, and quite frankly "forced" into conformity with the medium at hand. The reductive tendencies of the paintings are thus pushed to greater extremes in the prints. The earliest works in silkscreen unexpectedly imitate certain collage techniques by using crayon directly on the mesh of the fabric (a crayon and glue washout procedure). These works of 1965-68 lack the subtleties of scale, color and plane of the later pieces, and they affect a naïveté in the treatment of space rather than a studied reduction of meanings. The flower studies experiment with an opposite concern for blatant sensuousity; some miss the element of control achieved in *Day Lily* and *White Petunia*. Especially in the latter, color and shape are perceived by turns as light, organic forms, sensuous shape and ink on paper.

No one element is allowed to dominate our response any more than any one step of the creative process was permitted to integrate too subtly or completely with any other.

It is this avoidance of total unity, so hesitatingly probed in the early flowers and landscapes, that most informs Katz's prints. Close scrutiny of the later images reveals countless bits of drawing that do not "work," colors that do not blend but are slightly separated or allowed to overlap, aquatints whose grain is coarse and uneven, etched lines which are heavy handed ("I always allow for a 20% dropout"), accents that disturbingly jump off the paper (the line between Vincent's lips) and so on. Katz differs considerably from those printmakers who count on the total technical perfection derived from craftsmen or commercial process (here he also departs from most Pop artists). It is essential the viewer realize that Katz's conscious denial of perfection and his preference for certain kinds of awkwardness operates simultaneously on several levels: the technical, the formal and the psychological. It accounts for both the fragile unity and the quiet uncertainty that, for this spectator at least, are the main content of the prints.

The prints are pervaded by a contrast between hard and soft, a distinction that also arises in the paintings. In *Day Lily*, vibrant, hard-edged shapes play against an ever-intruding background. Much of the white is simply the paper on which another stone has printed most gentle strokes of the litho crayon. In these shadings the artist has invested a maximum of sensibility, for they at once strengthen the illusion and insist on the flatness of the paper on which they are drawn. This second role deadens the illusion of light, space and volume, and momentarily levels all the other colors. That so much is accomplished in the least perceptible passage typifies Katz's ironic approach to the materials of printing. *Skowhegan*, *Costume Ball* and *Vincent* are fabricated of drawn lines rather than flat tonal areas. The differences between them demonstrate Katz's growing penchant for withholding both formal and psychological commitment. The earlier work is bold, simple, understated and controlled. But *Vincent* is a masterpiece of reticence and recalls Jasper Johns's fascination with phenomena of disappearance. *Vincent's* two stones echo each other, one printing a lighter tone, a sort of shadow of a shadow. In the lightest impressions the structure of the face is so underplayed that the viewer is forced to struggle, even to shift his glance, in order to detect the modeling that conveys meaning. The same laconic denial is sensed in the lack of affect in the boy's expression. The search for physical structure coincides with the search for communicative expression. Meaning seems just beyond one's grasp, and so one is drawn in only to be frustrated. It is our reactions that have now become the content of the work.

The unmoving silence of Katz's landscape prints offers an unsuspected parallel to the heads. Both are quiescent much as a movie still, stripped of sound, is timeless and frozen. Rendered in terms of restraint, the landscapes just barely move: the leaves in *Swamp Maple* almost become a slow flight of birds in *Late July*; the sunlight on the water of *Lake Wesserunset* just barely flickers across space. The lithographs and screenprints do not repeat the subtle brushwork of the originals. Their articulation springs from the subtle contrasting of the foreground shapes with the slightly scumbled, but limp forms of the water and hills, another instance of the pairing of hard and soft features.

The close-up heads are certainly the most sympathetic of the prints. By printing to the edge of the sheet, Katz contrives to limit space. This decision grew out of the artist's experiments on paper as may be noted by comparison with the earlier *Alex*, in which depth is restricted to a seepage around the main form. This presents an interesting parallel with Jules Olitski's habit of heightening pictorial activity at the edges of a canvas. For with both Katz and Olitski the purpose of such compressed perimeters is to maintain the flatness of the inner surface. Cutting off the head identifies the image with the sheet of paper and controls the undeniable illusionistic qualities of depicted human features. (Katz's works are excellent arguments that "modernist," non-objective painting is all too often less interesting than that other stream of recent work, from Rauschenberg to Hamilton, which seeks to involve the spectator.) The large scale, however, pressures the viewer to interpret work whose meaning he cannot fathom. The same conflict exists on a color level—in the head of *Bill Dunas*, and more obviously in *Anne*. Both lithographs surround the meaning-laden core with the brightest and most decorative facets of color, while the faces themselves are articulated with subtle shadows and minimal drawing. In *Anne* only the eyes, eyebrows, nostrils and lips are rendered with line, while the remainder is composed of planes of pale color. These flesh tones consist, as previously observed in *Vincent*, of almost imperceptible differences (an ambient shadow outside the work or a manifestation of the artist's intention?). The viewer, thrust up close, seduced by the scale, the peripheral color and the beauty of the subject herself, is unprepared for so subtle a confrontation. He can no more retreat into formalistic appreciation than he can venture into characterological interpretation. This increasing tendency to suspend the viewer's reactions is evidenced by a growing decrease in formal activity from the *Kenneth Koch* of 1970, through *Bella* of 1972, to *Anne* of 1973.

Turning from the soft color lithographs to the harsh language of the etchings is, at first, an unsettling experience.

Katz feels very close to these works, however, and for him they are a purer distillation of his paintings than the lithos. Not only has he abandoned color, but he has reduced etching to the simplest lines and planes. In the small heads of June Ekman's *Class* this sparse repertoire serves to unify even further a group of very similar persons. Whether their beguiling familiarity is a function of a New York urban type or of the artist's formal restrictions—or both—becomes an ongoing issue. In any event, the series resembles an experiment in recognition, one that determines how little information one needs to differentiate human faces. The idea is a distant cousin to Roy Lichtenstein's Monet series or to Richard Hamilton's beach scenes, all of which are concerned with sparse visual data. On the other hand, Andy Warhol's multiple images of *Liz* or *Marilyn* throw the problem of recognition into stronger relief, and ironically question the significance of the kind of individuation Katz is practicing. Whereas Warhol's *repetition* raises the familiar to the hieratic, Katz achieves the same effect through a subtle attenuation of expression and form.

Katz has been able to squeeze together the articulation of facial differentiation with that of formal gesture. Nowhere does he make a clearer statement than in June Ekman's *Class*. The artist and viewer are united in feeling each percentage to be expressed in the very rhythms and directions of the lines and planes that make up the faces. That these elements become light and shadow, that they also have illusionistic functions, only maintains the suspense of preventing any role from dominating our perceptions. For this reason, too, the aquatint grounds are either impersonally bland or uneven; their levels of gray are never more than six (as in *Ada*) and usually less. Close observation turns up innumerable passages where registration falls short of professional standards—little gaps and overlaps—or where the etched lines do not quite coincide with the tone they articulate. The etching itself is terribly coarse for so gentle an artist. The line frequently appears to have been gouged right into the plate or carelessly over-bitten, while other groups of hatching seem almost tentative and under-bitten. Here and there little specks of ink

act as further reminders of this crucial technical nonchalance which is absolutely essential to the control of the illusionistic and pictorial potentials of all forms.

The *Large Head of Ada* is perhaps the most successful of all Katz's prints. It is a most perfect union of image, line, plane, space and paper; nothing seems out of place, and no level of meaning asserts itself above any other. It is the very embodiment of the critic's dilemma as to Katz's place in the stylistic spectrum of our day. It is proof that he is an artist for everyman. Even the imperfections are a species of intent, both warding off any fixation on technical perfection (and superficial beauty) and expressing Katz's laconic will-to-non-committal. The slight gaucheries such as those composing *Ada's* nose are superb illustrations of the multiple functions of which only rather inarticulate shapes are capable (like the mobility of an otherwise unattractive actor's face). The darker shadow is the more crude, more spatial and less drawn, while the lighter is one of the most interesting shapes, relatively speaking, in Katz's later works. On the left it abuts a very fine etched edge; on the right it dissolves into the paper (this edge was established, it will be remembered, by a negative process, by stopping out with acid resist, not by direct drawing). It functions almost sculpturally at the upper left, while it becomes tonal and painterly at the right, a neutralizing duality which ultimately renders the gray wash, as it tails off with lessened charge, very ordinary indeed. It is a leitmotif for the action of the entire image which never allows more illusion of its subject than it does an awareness of its component parts. As the artist commented, it is far closer to the reluctance of Duchamp's etchings than to the plastic sophistication of Picasso's. Katz prefers to maintain his dialogue between hard and soft (etching vs. aquatint / form vs. image / denial vs. meaning) so that even the pensive, haunting, human beauty of *Ada* does not become the subject. By suspending the viewer and his judgments, Katz turns his attention to the experience of art, and becomes a thoroughly contemporary artist.

Richard S. Field
Curator, Davison Art Center



3. *Gray Interior*, 1967-68

4. *Day Lily II*, 1969





7. *Portrait of a Poet*: Kenneth Koch, 1970



15. *Homage to Frank O'Hara*: William Dunas, 1972



30. *Large Head of Ada*, 1972-73



13. *Late July II, 1971*

31. Anne, 1973



19. Naomi, 1972



16. June, 1972



18. Judy, 1972



Alex Katz

- 1927 Born, Brooklyn, New York
1945-49 Studied, Cooper Union School of Art, New York
1949-50 Studied, Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Skowhegan, Maine, with which he is still associated
1961-63 Taught, Yale University School of Art, New Haven
1971-72 Taught, University of Pennsylvania School of Art, Philadelphia
1972 Awarded Guggenheim Fellowship in Painting
Lives and works in New York City.

Catalogue

All prints have been lent by Brooke Alexander, Inc., and Marlborough Graphics, Inc., New York.

All measurements are given in inches, height preceding width.

1. *Luna Park*, 1965
Screenprint in six colors; Edition 30
40 x 29 3/4; on Beckett Cover stock
Printed at Chiron Press, New York, by Steve Poleskie
2. *Paris Review Poster*, 1965-66
Screenprint in two colors, with one photoscreen; Edition 150
35 9/16 x 24 1/16; on Beckett paper
Printed at Chiron Press, New York, by Steve Poleskie
3. *Gray Interior*, 1967-68
Screenprint in eleven colors; Edition 50
16 3/4 x 21 5/8; on Beckett paper
Printed at Masta Displays, New York
4. *Day Lily II*, 1969
Lithograph in six colors; Edition 90
20 11/16 x 27 15/16; on Arches paper
Printed at Mourlot Press, New York
5. *Skowhegan Costume Ball*, 1969
Lithograph in purple-black; Editions 75 signed and 600 unsigned
31 1/16 x 21 1/2; on Arches paper
Printed at Bank Street Atelier, New York, by Frank Akers
6. *White Petunia*, 1969
Lithograph in four colors; Edition 100
29 7/8 x 22 3/16; on Arches paper
Printed at Mourlot Press, New York
7. *Portrait of a Poet: Kenneth Koch*, 1970
Lithograph in five colors; Editions 200 signed and 500 with lettering unsigned (the unsigned edition was used as a poster for an exhibition at Galerie Brusberg, Hannover, Germany)
27 11/16 x 22 7/8; on Arches and poster papers
Printed at Mourlot Press, New York
8. *Swamp Maple I*, 1970
Lithograph in seven colors; Edition 84
41 1/16 x 27 1/2; on Arches paper
Printed at Mourlot Press, New York
9. *Swamp Maple II*, 1970
Lithograph in seven colors; Edition 90
41 1/16 x 27 1/2; on Arches paper
Printed at Mourlot Press, New York
10. *Alex*, 1970
Lithograph in eight colors; Edition 100
29 3/4 x 21 5/16; on Arches paper
Printed at Mourlot Press, New York
11. *Joan*, 1971
Etching and aquatint; Edition 18
8 15/16 x 11 15/16 (composition), 15 1/6 x 22 1/8 (sheet); on Buff Arches paper
Printed by Virginia Piersol
12. *Late July I*, 1971
Lithograph in seven colors; Edition 120
22 1/4 x 28 1/2; on Arches paper
Printed at Bank Street Atelier, New York
13. *Late July II*, 1971
Lithograph in seven colors; Edition 120
22 1/8 x 28 7/16; on Arches paper
Printed at Bank Street Atelier, New York
14. *Bella*, 1972
Lithograph in six colors; Edition 200
33 15/16 x 24; on Arches paper
Printed at Bank Street Atelier, New York
15. *Homage to Frank O'Hara: William Dunas*, 1972
Lithograph in nine colors; Editions 50 with a passage from a poem by Frank O'Hara and 90 without
33 5/16 x 25 7/16; on Arches paper
Printed at Bank Street Atelier, New York
- 16- *June Ekman's Class*, 1972
27. Portfolio of twelve etching and aquatints; Edition 50
Each 11 x 15 (sheet); on Arches paper
 16. *June*, 6 3/16 x 8 13/16 (composition)
 17. *Harmony*, 5 x 9 (composition)
 18. *Judy*, 5 9/16 x 8 13/16 (composition)
 19. *Naomi*, 5 1/8 x 8 15/16 (composition)
 20. *Nancy*, 5 7/8 x 8 13/16 (composition)
 21. *Yvonne*, 5 x 8 13/16 (composition)
 22. *Timmie*, 5 1/16 x 8 7/8 (composition)
 23. *Kasha*, 4 x 8 13/16 (composition)
 24. *Fran*, 5 1/8 x 8 13/16 (composition)
 25. *Mary*, 5 1/8 x 8 13/16 (composition)
 26. *Roxanne*, 5 x 8 15/16 (composition)
 27. *Thalia*, 5 3/8 x 8 13/16 (composition)Printed by Hitoshi Nakazato
28. *Sunset: Lake Wesserunset I*, 1972
Screenprint in five colors; Edition 60
30 x 36; on Arches paper
Printed at Chiron Press, New York, by Larry Rosen

29. *Vincent*, 1972
Lithograph in two colors, from *Prints for Phoenix House*;
Edition 120
14 7/8 x 20 7/8; on Arches paper
Printed by Paul Narkiewicz
30. *Large Head of Ada*, 1972-73
Etching and aquatint; Edition 44
15 x 39 3/4 (trimmed to platemark); on Italia paper
Printed by Hitoshi Nakazato
31. *Anne*, 1973
Lithograph in nine colors; Edition 83
27 x 36 1/8; on Arches paper
Printed by Paul Narkiewicz
32. *Profile of Vincent*, 1974
Drypoint; Trial Proof
15 x 22; on Special German Etching paper
Printed by Prawat Laucharoen
33. *Provincetown I*, 1974
Screenprint in three colors; Edition 60
18 x 24; on Dutch Etching paper
Printed at Chiron Press, New York, by Larry Rosen
34. *Sunny*, 1974
Aquatint and drypoint; Trial Proof
15 x 22 5/16; on Special German Etching paper
Printed by Jennifer Melby
35. *Still Life*, 1974
Aquatint and drypoint; Trial Proof
22 3/16 x 30 3/4; on German Etching paper
Printed by Prawat Laucharoen
36. *The Swimmer*, 1974
Aquatint and drypoint; Trial Proof
28 x 36; on German Etching paper
Printed by Prawat Laucharoen



