Sunset 1, from Sunrise Sunset Portfolio

Alex Katz



Date : 2020
Archival Pigment inks on Innova etching cotton rag 315 gsm paper
55 x 42
Edition of 35
Pencil signed and numbered

Artist bio

Alex Katz is an American painter of portraits and landscapes. He started working on these themes during years dominated by non-figurative art, which he always strongly avoided. Living in New York City, since the 1950s Katz spends his summers in Maine, which has been his source of inspiration for many of his famous landscapes. As for his portraits, the people he depicts are colleagues that surrounded him during his career, members of his family, friends or neighbors.
Alex Katz's portraits are always very recognizable. They are all characterized by an unmistakable flatness and lack of detail. To represent a shadow or light, he uses slight variations of colors. Many times, monochrome backgrounds represent another defining characteristic of his style.
These portraits do not own a clear narrative – it is not important for the viewer to know the person or the story behind the artwork. What Katz tries to emphasize is actually the beauty of the subjects. The use of gentle colors and the emphasis of fashion details in his paintings turn the coldness of the sharp lines, lack of detail and flatness into an artwork warm for the viewer to enjoy.
Having achieved widespread critical acclaim and commercial success, he serves as an influence to younger figurative artists such as Elizabeth Peyton and Julian Opie. While his work precedes the Pop Art movement, his engagement with the mid-century culture of television and advertising warrants the association.
The genius of Alex Katz's style is derived directly from one of Katz's biggest influences, the Master Japanese woodblock artist Kitagawa Utamaro (1753 – 1806), the master of Japanese woodblock color printing. Utamaro's woodcuts are in the Ukiyo-e tradition, which means "pictures of the floating world" and represent everyday life scenes, capturing a specific person or a particular moment. Utamaro is one of the most highly regarded practitioners of genre of woodblock prints, especially for his portraits of beautiful women. His Japanese aesthetic is typically flat and bi-dimensional. He influenced Katz particularly with his use of partial views and his emphasis on light and shade.
Alex Katz's works can be found in over 100 public collections worldwide. Major exhibitions of Katz's landscape and portrait painting in America and Europe followed his 1986 Whitney Museum of American Art retrospective and 1988 print retrospective at the Brooklyn Museum of Art. He continues to spend his summers in Lincolnville, Maine.