

Press Release

Allison Katz. Westward Ho!

4 November 2023 – 5 January 2024
Hauser & Wirth West Hollywood



Los Angeles... On 4 November, Hauser & Wirth will open 'Westward Ho!,' its first solo exhibition with Allison Katz, whose critically admired work addresses the ways in which aesthetic practices link and absorb autobiography, art history, information systems and commodity culture. On view at Hauser & Wirth's West Hollywood location in Los Angeles, this presentation will debut new paintings, some of which were completed during her recent residency at Hauser & Wirth Somerset, alongside site-specific responses to the architecture of the gallery's 1930s Spanish Colonial Revival building. Katz's paintings are informed – and united – by her relentless curiosity about the ways in which images perform and construct meaning. The artist skillfully combines surface materiality, word play and humor with literary and cultural references, imagining paintings as interconnected sites of metaphysical transformation.

'Westward Ho!' is Allison Katz's first Los Angeles solo exhibition and follows her participation in 'The Milk of Dreams,' the 59th International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale curated by Cecilia Alemani.

About the exhibition

In 'Westward Ho!' Katz creates a cosmos by overlapping disparate images and narratives from visual culture, her own past, and the coincidences that gather around her. The title firmly locates us, with tongue-in-cheek undertones, inside the gallery in West Hollywood (WeHo), California. It was Katz's specific request to exhibit here, in a desire to engage with its associated cultural mythologies: 'Hollywood is a big picture and I should like to know what it means to walk the walk, or drive the drive, of the Pacific coast, with its last-resort, up to the edge, atomized light...if this is the birthplace of the silver screen, then it's a chance to test out painting's irrefutable material and

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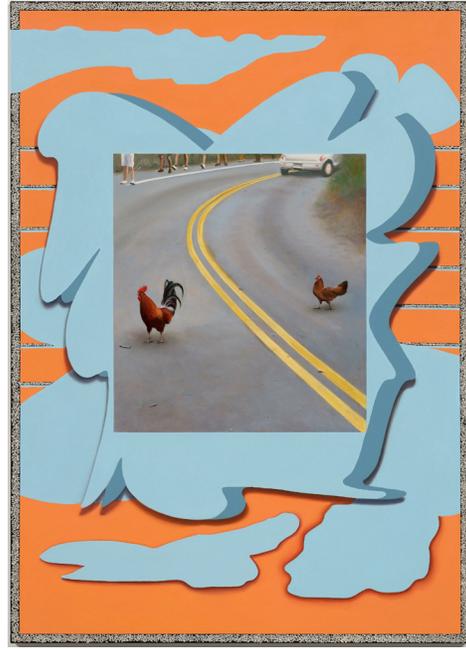
impure surface, its porous consciousness...’ The title blends historical and literary allusions, tracing back originally to the calls made by Elizabethan ferryman as they navigated the River Thames in search of passengers. As Katz writes: ‘I’m using Westward Ho! as a call out, a whoop of exuberance, a question hollered across time and tradition to see who and what answers, as if to test the idea that painting is a conversation.’

Throughout the exhibition Katz deploys a constantly evolving set of techniques and source materials. Echoes, rhymes and serendipities erupt; meaning is reordered and unexpected genealogies converge. ‘West’ is the neighborhood in which the gallery is located, the direction Katz’s apartment faces in London, a catch-all term for a geopolitical system in the midst of being challenged, and an alias for the pastoral patch of English countryside where she worked in residence (the West Country). While preparing for the exhibition she also visited the ruins of Pompeii (in the context of the institutional program Pompeii Commitment), where the discovery of wall paintings buried under ash continues to play a central role in the origin story of Western figuration.



Within her own poetic logic, real or imagined elements from these different sites converge, along with motifs from past works, tied together by what Katz identifies as the ‘invisible threads between places and images.’ In the painting ‘Sheepish’ (2023), California and Somerset dramatically collide as a hole in a wall takes the shape of Somerset’s borders. A lamb steps through the opening and offers the visitor an obscured view of the famous Hollywood sign which appears from that angle to spell out WOOL.

As part of an ongoing practice of altering exhibition architecture, Katz has made a number of interventions in the gallery. Depictions of frames, such as skylights, balconies and windows, quote features of the building, and hang on constructed walls which open up or obscure existing lines of sight. Katz sees such frames as inevitably referring back to the act of looking, and to painting itself. ‘The Balcony’ (2023) is a painted version of the now-defunct appendage above the entrance to the West Hollywood gallery. Katz writes: ‘Neither entirely interior nor exterior, a balcony is a dynamic threshold in which one can both observe and be observed, which is why it has always been a motif for painters.’ Blocked up, it becomes a screen or a blank canvas upon which to project an image. In ‘Eternity’ (2023), two men look down into a room through an open skylight, their heads framed by a zone of brilliant blue. ‘Eternity’ plays upon painting’s role as a portal, suggesting timeless passage out of the here and now, and reinforces the sites of entrance and exit so crucial to Katz’s painterly imagination.



The triptych 'Responding' (2023) embodies Katz's interest in perspectives and drives, and the potential boundlessness of painting. Three panels that make up a single painting are mounted on separate walls in the center of the gallery. 'Responding' depicts the 'primordial pond' outside the studio in Somerset, where the artist observed hundreds of tadpoles evolving, literally growing legs in order to walk out of the water. Katz's connection with the pond, witnessing 'all the myriad forms of life teeming with change' provoked the painting's all-over surface and the idea of the mutating frame. Mud is conflated with cloud, water with reflection, the amorphous with the animal.

Roads and walking are active metaphors in Katz's oeuvre, providing pathways to a particular viewpoint, representing the perpetual transit of process and thought, and operating as sites of connection. Literally drawing perspective into space, the artist's road paintings illustrate 'the confluence of being rooted in one place while thinking of another (and another).' The constraints of painting, and its limitations in representing movement, also motivate Katz. In 'Truth' (2023), the artist's grandmother Ruth gazes at Giacometti's sculpture 'Walking Man' (1960). Like the road, the pond, and the skylight, 'Walking Man' evokes an existential need for motion. The presence of sculpture in the painting is not just simulated. Acrylic modelling paste is used to literally sculpt the textured surface of the Giacometti work, disrupting the photorealism of the rest of the painting.

Another walking figure appears in 'Catwalk' (2023), this one of a woman traversing the canvas with the initials 'AK' emblazoned on the background. Katz uses her own initials and signature as recurring themes, a way of exploring language as image and the surrogate role of lettering. In these works, she teases the many competing forces within a single frame, presenting painting as a conglomerate of realism, existentialism, ornamentation, psychoanalysis and portraiture. Throughout this exhibition, and Katz's wider practice, uncovering these multiple meanings and truths is intrinsic to aesthetic pleasure. Likenesses of her image also appear in various guises, signs of the self used to complicate the biographical or confessional narratives typically associated with the feminine. As Katz writes, 'I would like to speak of the fictional selves comprising my autobiography.'

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In 'Ho!' (2023), Katz pays tribute to Georges Seurat's 'Bathers at Asnières' (1884), which includes what she has described as 'surely the most famous 'ho!' (hollering) in all of art history.' Her version of the well-known 19th-century painting zooms in on the boy positioned bottom right of the original painting's frame, standing in the pond calling outwards, beyond the artwork's boundaries. Katz describes how she 'sketched him across small marble rocks stuck to the canvas, for a ready-made Impressionism.' The addition of the rocks is part of a practice of adding indivisible textures such as rice and sand to surfaces, to interrupt painterly illusion with material realism. Connecting the work to the exhibition's larger impetus, Katz states, 'To loosely gather all into this title, 'Westward Ho!' speaks of yearning, of a call – for a response, for a lift... an invitation to ride somewhere, to be held for a moment in a frame gliding along the surface, evidence of life, as above so below...'

About the Artist

Allison Katz was born in Montreal, Canada in 1980 and currently lives and works in London, England. She studied fine arts at Concordia University in Montreal and received her MFA from Columbia University in New York in 2008. Katz received widespread critical recognition for her first traveling UK solo exhibition 'Artery' at Nottingham Contemporary in 2021 and Camden Art Centre in 2022, with the accompanying exhibition catalogue released in 2023. Her work was included in the 59th International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale curated by Cecilia Alemani. In 2022, Katz was an inaugural Fellow of Pompeii Commitment, the first contemporary art program of the Archaeological Park of Pompeii. Additional significant institutional solo exhibitions of her work have been organized by the MIT List Center for the Arts, Cambridge, MA; Oakville Galleries, Oakville, Canada; and Kunstverein Freiburg, Freiburg, Germany. Katz has a forthcoming exhibition at Aspen Art Museum, CO in 2024.

Press contacts:

Ben Thornborough
benthornborough@hauserwirth.com
+1 914 456 9302

Andrea Schwan
andrea@andreaschwan.com
+1 917 371 5023

Hauser & Wirth West Hollywood

8980 Santa Monica Boulevard
West Hollywood CA 90069

Gallery hours:
Tuesday – Saturday, 11 am – 6 pm

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Carbon savings: Part of this exhibition was shipped by sea from the UK. Transporting by sea versus air resulted in a carbon savings of **22.4tCO₂e** (tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent).

Caption and courtesy information:

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Eternity
2023
Oil on canvas
220 x 200 x 3.6 cm / 86 5/8 x 78 3/4 x
1 3/8 in
Photo: Damian Griffiths

Rear
2023
Acrylic on linen
220 x 160 x 3.6 cm / 86 5/8 x 63 x
1/3 in
Photo: Keith Lubow

Contre-jour (Westward)
2023
Oil on linen
170 x 210 x 3.6 cm / 67 7/8 x 82 5/8 x
1 3/8 in
Photo: Damian Griffiths

Catwalk
2023
Oil and sand on linen
220 x 190 x 3.6 cm / 86 5/8 x 74 3/4 x
1 3/8 in
Photo: Damian Griffiths

Don't A.S.K.
2023
Oil and rice on linen
175 x 125 x 3.6 cm / 68 7/8 x 49 1/4 x
1 3/8 in
Photo: Keith Lubow