

ZEIT CONTEMPORARY ART

PRESS RELEASE

ALEX KATZ AND JULIAN OPIE

DISTILLATIONS OF CONTEMPORARY LIFE

February 28th – May 15th, 2022



Julian Opie. Paper Heads Series, 2019. Laser-cut archival museum board relieves presented in sprayed white frames, each 33 x 28 in (83.8 x 71.1 cm). Image courtesy of the artist and Zeit Contemporary Art, New York

Alex Katz and Julian Opie: Distillations of Contemporary Life

Online Viewing Room – February 28th – May 15th, 2022

New York, NY. February 28, 2022. Zeit Contemporary Art is pleased to present *Alex Katz & Julian Opie: Distillations of Contemporary Life*, an online viewing room on view through May 15th. While from different artistic generations, Alex Katz (b. 1927) and Julian Opie (b. 1958) both utilize individual reductive artistic languages which reflect our contemporary world in their figurative works. The juxtaposition of their portraits, landscapes, and works depicting nature results in an enriching experience.

In a review of Katz's work entitled "Cool Katz," art critic John Perrault elucidates how the traditional view of modernism as mere progress toward abstraction is flawed in light of the important modernist principle that modern life should reflect life as it is lived. Perrault cites Gustave Courbet, the forerunner of Realism, and Impressionism, Expressionism, and Cubism as examples of movements wherein artists strove to reflect their respective times, with Katz as a contemporary exemplar of this trend. This same analogy can be extended to Julian Opie. Both artists utilize a pared-down, essentialist language derivative by the technology and media of their times with a minimum of detail. The majority of the works by the artists encompass portraiture and landscape, both classic genres going back centuries in the history of art. Notably, both cite inspirations spanning ancient and modern times. Shared ones from the former include works by old masters, woodblock prints, and Egyptian art. Katz is inspired by contemporary film close-ups, advertising, and fashion while Opie cites traffic signs, billboards, and digital media as important influences.

Katz began his artistic career during the heyday of Abstract Expressionism, a time when a figurative approach was rare. Katz adapted the large scale of the New York School into the realm of representation; instead of abstract, metaphysical images, he created scenes from everyday life. When asked about his work, he said, "What's in front of me is most interesting." The truth of this statement is clear in that his friends and family are the subjects of the majority of his works. Similarly, his yearly summer trips to Maine comprise many of his landscapes and scenes of nature.

Initially part of the New British Sculpture Group, Opie created abstract sculptures influenced by his interest in representation and the way images are perceived before turning to this same interest in the figurative realm, constructing images of people and nature inspired by digital language. Similarly to Katz, he has stated how he views the importance of depicting the everyday: "I work because it feels necessary and exciting and gives me a way of dealing with and using the world I see around me. The aim is to make something that looks really good, that is exciting and pleasing to look at, that is alive and new and visible." Opie uses thick outlines and geometric shapes to render figures and views inspired by sources as diverse as landscapes by John Constable and backgrounds from video games.

As is evident in the works included in this online viewing room, both Katz and Opie abstract their images in such a way that individuals are recognizable but viewers can personally identify with who or what is portrayed. In such portraits as *Sophie* or *Diana*, while a viewer may not personally know the individual represented, being faced with a likeness brings about a subjective response. The works are not detailed or realistic in that there are no blemishes or wrinkles, but still elicit the semblance of the sitter. More abstract than Katz's portraits, in Opie's *Paper Heads* the individuals are still personalized through the inclusion of hairstyle, clothes, and accessories in such a way that one can easily find something of themselves or a friend. Katz and Opie also take their contemporary approach to nature and landscape. Katz's renderings of flowers are crisp, bright, and depicted perfectly at full bloom. Opie's renderings of birds are unnatural in color but instantly recognizable. Both types of works take mere seconds to take in, much like advertisements and signs, and as such are intrinsic to their time. In this way, their works are both personal yet simultaneously powerfully universal.

Some critics and viewers cite works alternately by Katz or Opie as evocative of psychological isolation or alienation. Katz discounts the majority of such readings, stating his work is about style and objectivity. Similarly, Opie dislikes melancholic interpretations of his work, stating it is never despondent or desolate. Both artists look at their surroundings and translate them in ways meant to be both pleasing to behold and subjectively relatable to all through their distilled style and everyday subject matter. As Opie says, "Art is a shared language and an amazing rich resource that allows us to understand the world and ourselves, in fact allows us to see and navigate the world."

About Zeit Contemporary Art

Founded in 2016, Zeit Contemporary Art is a firm specializing in modern, post-war and contemporary art, located at 590 Madison Avenue, 21st Floor, New York, NY 10022. Its mission is deeply committed to the understanding of art as a complex cultural object that defines the time and space where it is created. Zeit Contemporary Art organizes four carefully curated exhibitions a year both on contemporary artists and historically focused projects and participates in key art fairs devoted to art of the 20th and 21st centuries. Additionally, the firm represents the work of pioneering artists and provide a unique service of private sales of museum quality works.

For press inquiries and additional information: contact@zeitcontemporaryart.com

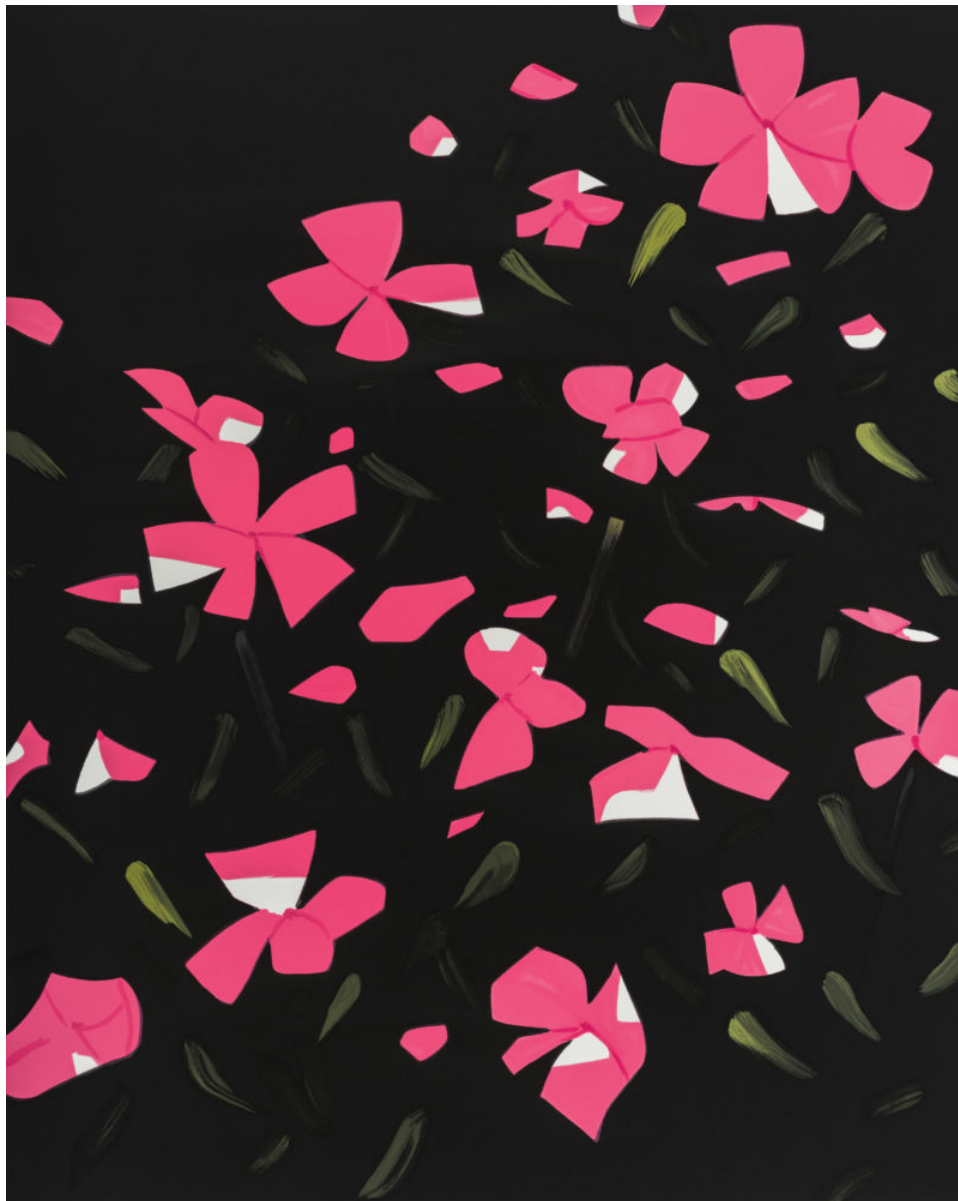
Viewing Room: <https://www.zeitcontemporaryart.com/viewing-room/11>

Video: <https://vimeo.com/681978860>

Zeit Contemporary Art: <https://www.zeitcontemporaryart.com/>



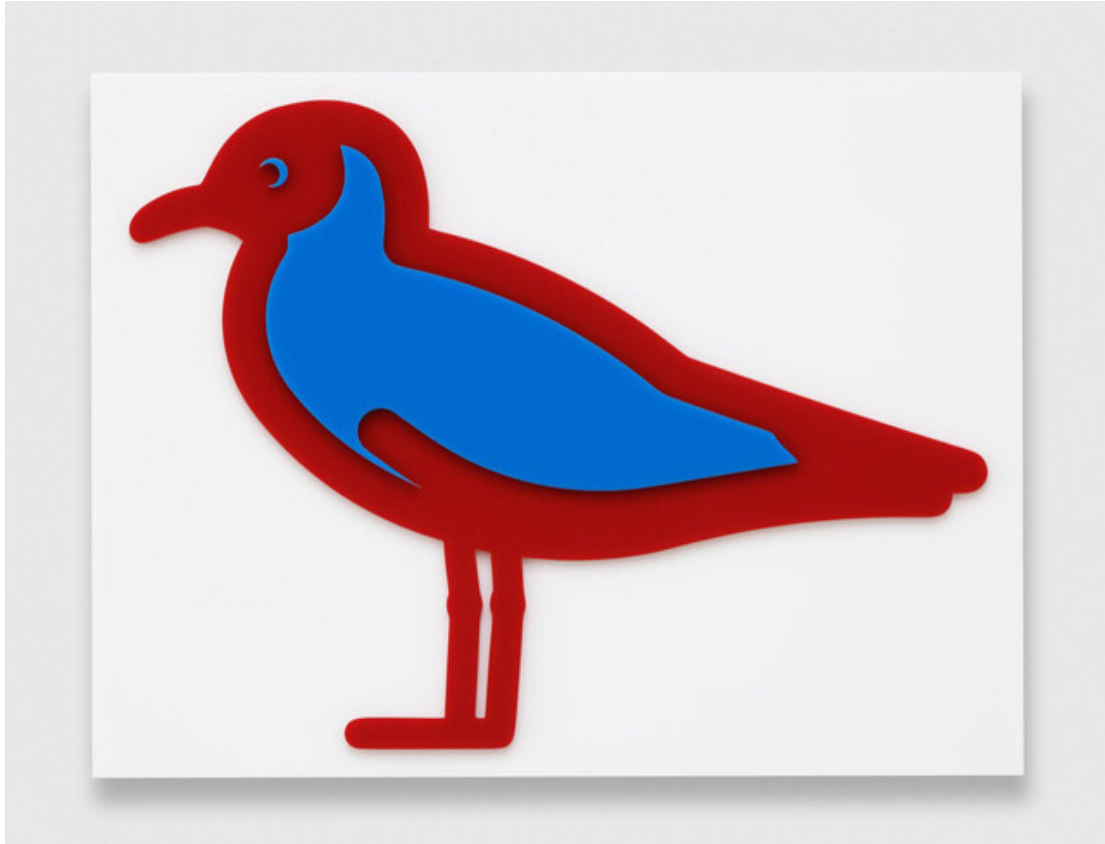
Alex Katz. Sophie, 2012. 41-color silkscreen on 2-ply museum board. 39 x 41 in (99.1 x 104.1 cm)
Image courtesy of the artist and Zeit Contemporary Art, New York



Alex Katz. White Impatiens, 2016. 26-color silkscreen on Saunders 425 gsm paper. 70 x 56 in (177.8 x 142.2 cm)
Image courtesy of the artist and Zeit Contemporary Art, New York



Julian Opie. Paper Head 3, 2019. Laser-cut archival museum board relief presented in sprayed white frame. 33 x 28 in (83.8 x 71.1 cm). Image courtesy of the artist and Zeit Contemporary Art, New York



Julian Opie. Black Headed Gull, from Small Birds, 2020. Wall mounted acrylic relief. 12 x 16 x 1 1/2 in (30.7 x 40.6 x 4 cm). Image courtesy of the artist and Zeit Contemporary Art, New York