






Art

## Alex Katz on 10 Artists Who Inspire Him

● Alex Katz Nov 1, 2018 2:30 pm   



Portrait of Alex Katz. Photo by Ander Gillenea/AFP/Getty Images.

“A lot of art books are very tiresome to most people,” admitted Alex Katz who, at 91 years young, is one of our most prominent living painters. There’s nothing tiresome about *Looking At Art With Alex Katz*, a new volume in which the artist shares relatable, off-the-cuff impressions of dozens of his favorite artists, poets, and creatives, from Fra Angelico to Frank Lloyd Wright.

*Artsy*. “If you don’t know a lot about art history and you look at a picture, you’re not seeing the same picture that someone who knows something about art history sees. But that doesn’t mean you receive less from the picture. Art is very multifaceted that way.”

Below, we share excerpts from the book that highlight nine eclectic artists who have amazed and inspired Katz over the years.

## Louise Bourgeois [+ Follow](#)



Louise Bourgeois *Spider, 1997*  
"..."



Louise Bourgeois *Fée Couturière*  
Sotheby's: Contemporary Art Day Auction

“I first heard Louise Bourgeois and Louise Nevelson on a Sunday

irresponsible, as they kept talking about the fifth, sixth and seventh dimensions. However, when one looks at the body of work by Louise Bourgeois, one cannot help but admire the energy to go out and at the same time to reveal what is inside of her. The sculptures of mixed techniques, like 3-D collages, on which she later embarked, are as problematic and exciting as those of anyone alive.”

## El Greco [⊕ Follow](#)



El Greco C...  
"..."



El Greco *The Vision of Saint John*, 1608-1614  
"El Greco in New York" at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2014-2015)

“El Greco was very fashionable when I was in art school. Since I did not have a background in art history, I decided to read a lot in the summer. The books on El Greco from before 1900 recorded him as a minor painter. One said he had astigmatism. El Greco paintings should be



imagine a dark room with flickering candles, they make more sense. He followed his instinct, and it led him to visions. I remember his painting of the Cardinal as much for the painting around the figure as for the figure itself.”

## Edward Hopper [⊕ Follow](#)



Edward Hopper *Early Sunday Morning*, 1930  
"America is Hard to See," at Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2015)

“I saw the Hopper exhibition at the Whitney Museum in the summer of 1995, and I was amazed at the number of people there and how they

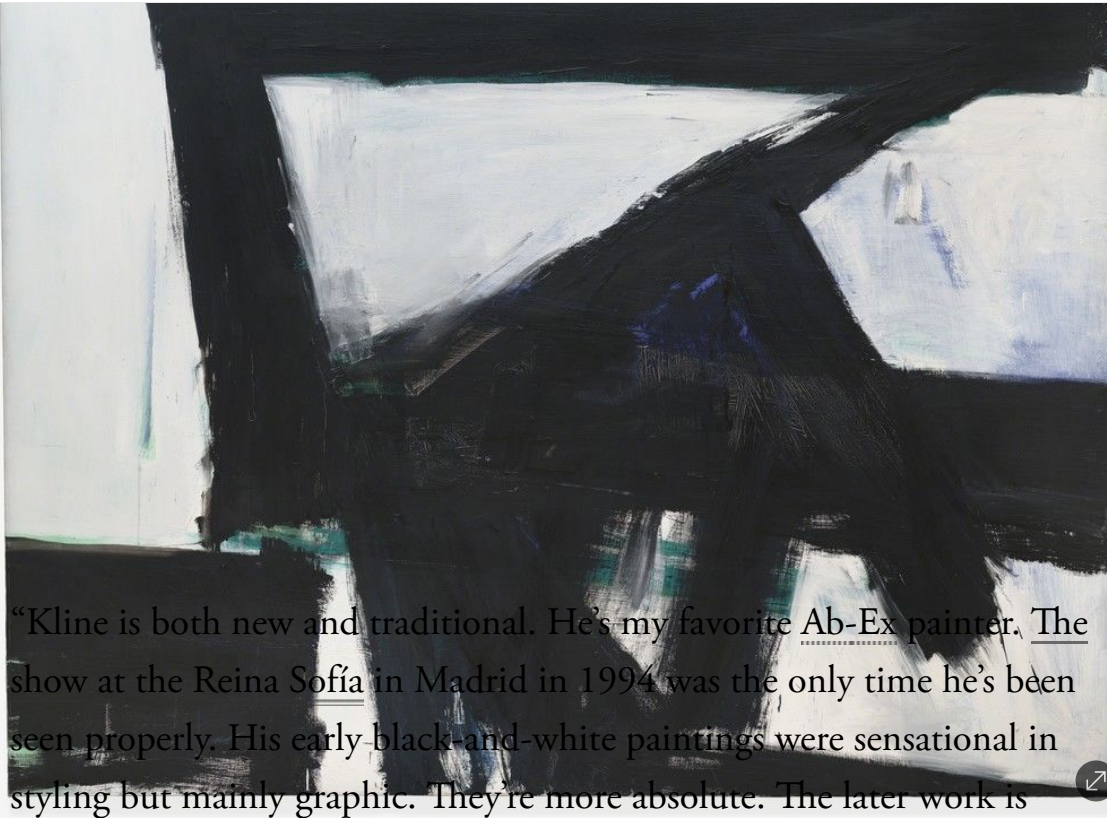


most people could relate to their lives, despite the fact that the time of many of the paintings was 60 or 70 years earlier.

“The styles, as John Updike noticed in his article in the *New York Review of Books* (10 August 1995), were misinterpreted by some of the writers in the catalogue, who thought the people were down and out, poor people. However, they were mostly our classless middle class. The viewers had no trouble relating to the paintings’ subjects. Hopper seems to reach more people than any other American artist.

“The paintings themselves have strong images in a pedestrian technique. The colors all seem made up and applied. They don’t come from perception and are far from realistic. He has a nice sense of a long line and a big shadow, but the paintings often collapse around faces and breasts. Some of Hopper’s compositions seem forced, like a cartoon or illustrated advertisement. They seem a distant cousin to Theodore Dreiser, whose writing is often awkward and labored but who has created some novels that seem real or convincing.”

**Franz Kline**  Follow



“Kline is both new and traditional. He’s my favorite Ab-Ex painter. The show at the Reina Sofía in Madrid in 1994 was the only time he’s been seen properly. His early black-and-white paintings were sensational in styling but mainly graphic. They’re more absolute. The later work is more painterly. The larger cathedral painting, on view in Madrid in 1994, was to me in a league with the great paintings at the Prado.”

“As he grew, the paintings became more about weights and depth, and they left the rigid flat space for a more romantic energy. It’s emotionally extended, not contained or calculated. In *Black, White and Gray* (1959) at the Metropolitan Museum, the edges open up, and the painting becomes romantic. The emotional extension separates him from the other painters of his time. He’s closer to Frank O’Hara than to Clyfford Still.”

**Henri Matisse** [⊕ Follow](#)





“Another reason for me was Matisse. Matisse has an ability to create an overall light and a local color in enough parts of the painting to make the whole thing quite realistic. He can paint a thin wash of brown, and you have a table. A thin wash of blue, and you have silk, a thin wash of orange, and you have flesh. Then he can use a neutral color like red, a transposed color, and it will give the whole painting a light that seems the equivalent of a perceived light, and also the objects in the painting seem accurate in that light.”

“Impressionist painting rarely has that accuracy of surface. Matisse does it in an economical fashion. His colors are contained, so they don’t expand into a more Impressionist type of color. They’re more like Rothko, held in more. There is a great deal of push and pull on the surface—things going in opposite directions—and you have a great deal of implied space. The color works with and against the spaces. There is a beautiful, fluid surface of line that works both decoratively and volumetrically in space.”



# Fairfield Porter [⊕ Follow](#)

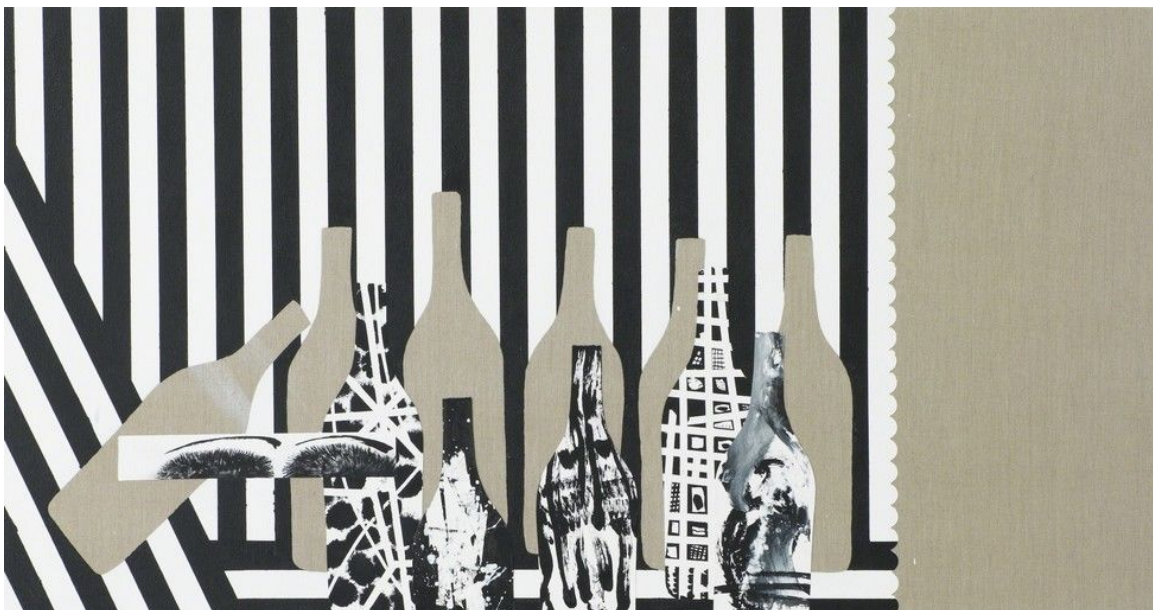




“Fairfield Porter is a painter of great refinement and subtlety. He has a strong technique and a wonderful sense of place, and is skillful in combining local surfaces with an all-over light, particularly in some of his still lifes. He has a tendency to go for all-over painting, and the images, which are interesting and intelligent, suffer. I find the painting more interesting than the images. The realistic world he painted always had a great deal of style.

“Fairfield made me feel I was okay. He called up and visited. We disagreed on almost every painter, but he wrote about me and was very supportive. It made me feel that my paintings were okay; it gave me confidence. In a Whitney Biennial I had a large face of Edwin I was surprised that Fairfield liked. He said it was the best painting in the show.”

## Charline von Heyl [⊕ Follow](#)





Charline von Heyl *Daydrinking*, 2016  
Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens

“Charline von Heyl paints every painting differently. Her project is against an idea of an art product. In this, she is similar to Chris Martin and Nabil Nahas, but more extreme. Her paintings should be exhibited one at a time, like the Donatello show at the Museum of Biblical Art in New York, where they separated all the pieces with white nylon. Product painting, where an artist makes identifiable products, makes it easier for collectors and museum curators. Von Heyl’s painting is not product painting—her paintings are contemporary in thought, and very well done.”

# Henri Rousseau

⊕ Follow



“Henri Rousseau is a terrific image-maker. His was the only art book I had for 20 years. I liked Rousseau because he was like a French classicist in space. His spatial development in the paintings seemed as well worked-out as Poussin’s, Picasso’s, Léger’s or Fragonard’s. They were all good at spatial mechanics. One of the things about French art is what is referred to as plastic. They were all good at working out and depicting the space in their paintings. French plastic painting can be decorative.

In American art, we think of plastic painting as being non-decorative, because it goes into a more physical space. I like that of Hubert Robert



get him around the canvas. It isn't any great shakes....

“He doesn't give you much in terms of local surfaces. There are signs of the surface, rather than paintings of the surface. He's more like Poussin than Renoir. He works with his colors and grays beautifully. He never makes any mistakes in colors, and he can work into higher-chroma colors very smoothly. He goes gracefully from dull grays and greens to reds within a painting....

“Rousseau's images have the flatness and directness of a photograph, but they also seem to come from his unconscious and, somehow, this makes them more real than a photograph.

I admire his range of subject matter and form enormously—to be able to go into the grand poetic paintings of the lady on the couch, of the tigers running into the rain, and do them well; to paint prosaic things—still lifes, and little street scenes; and then do people, too. He's a painter who really extended himself in terms of forms. Rousseau has images that are so inventive and so strange, and they communicate so well. I think his technique was unextended, however. The actual painting technique is mechanical.”

## Kitagawa Utamaro [+](#) Follow





Kitagawa Utamaro, *Moatside Prostitute*, 1794–95. © William S. and John T. Spaulding Collection. Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts Boston.

Kitagawa Utamaro    *Courtesan...*  
Ronin Gallery

“Japan has visual art forms that produce great art: architecture, interior design, cloth, lacquered boxes, sculpture, screens, kimonos, swords, ceramics, calligraphy. The woodblock prints are at the lower end of the list. However, Utamaro elevates them to the level of the other great arts. His woman with a toothpick (*Moatside Prostitute*, 1794–95) is very clear without being overly explicit. The gesture in the eyes and mouth is completely original as subject matter and as depiction. His close-ups have a big swinging line that functions both for surface and for three-dimensionality. The color weights and patterns go together very well. The transition from the tight forms, hair and features, to the generalized line and background colors is smooth. Finally, I like Utamaro because he presents the same bohemian world that I live in—which was and is considered unsuitable for high art.” ●

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## Wes Anderson and Juman Malouf Go Wild as Curators in Vienna