

Sant'Andrea de Scaphis

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ALEX KATZ

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There's nothing as extraordinary as when you really look at things. When you look not at what you think they are or what they mean, just what they appear. I don't think I see things all the time, or I just see things in blinks and flashes. There's a confrontation and you really start to look, trying to see something. It's best to get everything else out of the way.

The Winter light in New York is unmistakable, especially to anyone who has looked at it and through it. Crisp, silvery and clear, the thin blue of the afternoon sky has a clarity that feels as cold as it appears. The citizens of the city do still inhabit the streets, but mostly to go from one interior to another - from one contained protective warmth to another. Outside, the city's trees are always there, only now in naked silhouette.

These three paintings of trees by Alex Katz are monumental pictures. Elegiac portraits of unique individuals who stand with a remoteness at the edges of our time. Not truly withdrawn, but abiding apart from the churn that surrounds them, these sentinels embody an elegance and brutal lucidity. The hallucinatory cropping of each work suggests a screen through which we encounter our reflected selves in infinite space.

Katz arrests our gaze with the stark beauty of that New York light and the rendering of a talisman so ubiquitous it is invisible. Walking from one warm human zone to another, Katz apprehends in the instant and, retaining that sensation, then paints on the outer edge of the moment, conveying the impermanence of the light and the present.

We cannot kick our yearning for transcendent absolutes, but these trees do not exist outside of the cold fact of that light that surrounds, embraces and defines them. Katz confronts our eye with an imagery that is nothing but itself. He paints cold and impersonal - absent of any feeling for the inner lives of his subjects. He renders with the pragmatism of an urgent muralist with time breathing down his neck. Humanism is absent, sentiment is stripped away, as bare as the winter trees themselves.