

GLADSTONE

Tena Saw, "Alex Katz's Seas of Orange," *Two Coats of Paint*, December 13, 2025

Two Coats of Paint

Alex Katz's Seas of Orange

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Gladstone Gallery: Alex Katz, 2025, installation view

Contributed by Tena Saw / Ninety-eight-year-old **Alex Katz's current gem of an exhibition at Gladstone** consists of eleven orange and white canvases, each ten and a half feet high, that wrap around the main gallery. All reference a road in Maine where Katz spends summers. Unlike most of his work, they lean heavily towards abstraction, treating the road like an

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opportunity to explore perspective or the light on the leaves. Particularly if you're lucky enough be alone in the gallery – a single room of high white walls, industrial scaffold ceiling, and enormous skylights – it becomes a kind of meditation tank, containing a sea of optical orange. Natural light settles on the paintings like a mist. The effect is more akin to that of an installation than that of a traditional painting show.



Alex Katz, Road 25, 2024, oil on linen, 120 x 96 inches (304.8 x 243.8 cm)

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Alex Katz, Road 24, 2024, oil on linen, 120 x 96 inches (304.8 x 243.8 cm)

According to the press release, the paintings were inspired by **Matisse's "The Red Studio."** Although Katz's pieces are orange instead of red, landscapes instead of interiors, there is very little formal distance between them and the Red Studio works. They have the same optical-retinal hum, strong perspectival lines, and blasts of color. Matisse's red is interspersed with white or lightly colored objects, as is Katz's orange. It's interesting to

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pull up the Matisse work on your phone to explore how Katz sees it. There's some yellow peeking out from behind the orange, imparting a retinal aftereffect like the one experienced after staring at the sun.

In contrast to the tranquil paintings, **Matthew Barney's** impressive video work, *Drawing Restraint*, is loud, rasping, and harsh. Three screens of Katz painting are hung high near the ceiling in the entry room. Visitors sitting on a small line of benches look up like passengers on a New York City subway, and may even exchange looks of disbelief like the ones that mutual strangers cast when something out of the ordinary is happening. Katz, tall and lanky, is at work on one of the huge paintings. The soundtrack amplifies studio sounds to extreme levels. His brush slowly dragging across the canvas produces an abrasive roar. The movement of his ladder sounds like a garbage truck clattering down the block at 3 AM, metal on metal. In capturing Katz carefully climbing the ladder and reaching out, sometimes with very small brushes, to conjure these paintings amid the cacophony, Barney isolates a moment of grace.

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“Alex Katz,” Gladstone Gallery, 530 West 21st Street, New York, NY.
Through December 20, 2025.