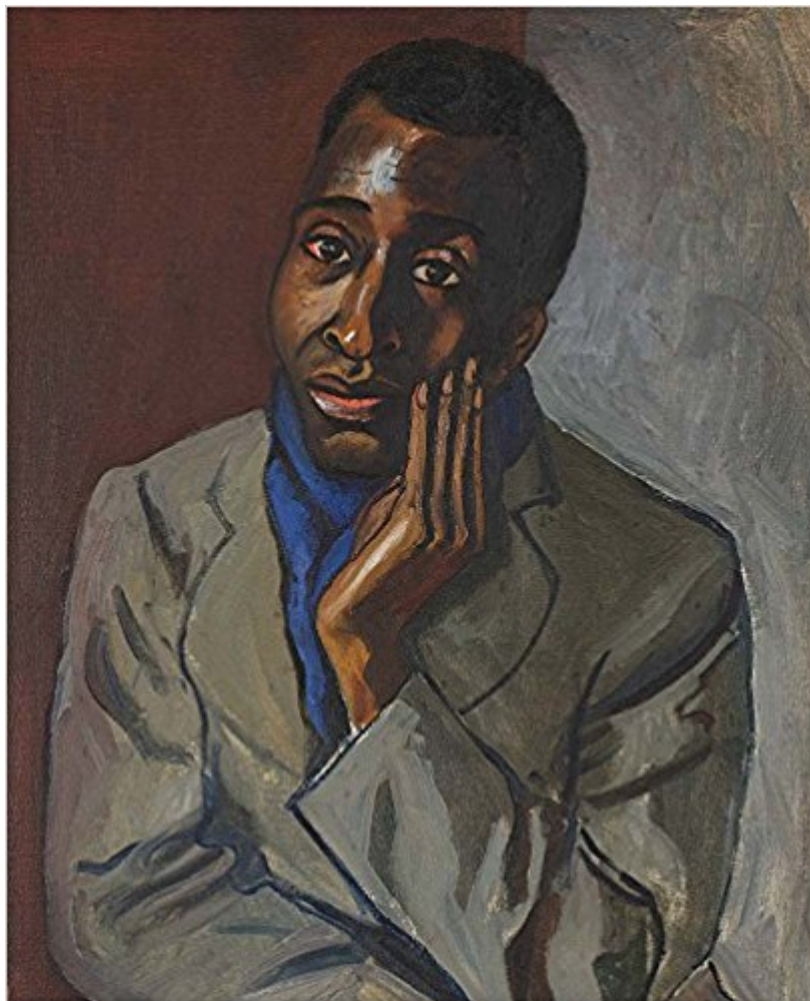


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Alice Neel: Uptown



Synopsis

Pulitzer Prize winner Hilton Als on Alice Neel—her quietly political portraits of her uptown New York neighbors. Known for her portraits of family, friends, writers, poets, artists, students, singers, salesmen, activists and more, Alice Neel (1900–1984) created forthright, intimate and, at times, humorous paintings that quietly engaged with political and social issues. In *Alice Neel, Uptown*, writer and curator Hilton Als brings together a body of paintings and works on paper of African Americans, Latinos, Asians and other people of color for the first time. Highlighting the innate diversity of Neel's approach, the selection looks at those often left out of the art-historical canon and how this extraordinary painter captured them; “what fascinated her was the breadth of humanity that she encountered,” Als writes. The publication explores Neel's interest in the diversity of uptown New York and the variety of people among whom she lived. This group of portraits includes well-known figures such as playwright, actress and author Alice Childress, the sociologist Horace R. Cayton, Jr., the community activist Mercedes Arroyo; and the widely published academic Harold Cruse, alongside more anonymous individuals of a nurse, a ballet dancer, a taxi driver, a businessman and a local boy who ran errands for Neel. In short and illuminating texts on specific works written in his characteristic narrative style, Als writes about the history of each sitter and offers insights into Neel and her work, while adding his own perspective. A contemporary and personal approach to the artist's oeuvre, *Alice Neel, Uptown* is “an attempt to honor not only what Neel saw, but the generosity of her seeing.”

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Customer Reviews

Neel has the power to make us all feel less lonely in whatever roles we are male and female, black and white, the powerful and the afflicted we are nature and society have given us (or have tried to, at least). (Hilton Als *Tank Magazine*) They are paintings you can't help but love, paintings that capture a strange beauty, a feral honesty, they have a rugged simplicity, an enveloping humanity. (Felix Petty *i-D*) Alice Neel's recent two-gallery David Zwirner exhibition showed her painting the faces of her neighbors in Harlem as insightfully as anyone ever rendered the royal kings and queens of yore. (Jerry Saltz *Vulture*) Neel casts her subjects as great icons of art history be it the reclining nude or the Madonna and child she always taking care to present them with honor and dignity. (Miss Rosen *Crave*) Above all, though, what emerges is Neel's connection and love for her subjects. For her, Harlem was never defined by poverty, it seems, but by life. Als says, "The fact that it was filled with people, meant it was always filled with hope. (Tim Adams *The Guardian*) [An] impressive view of Al Taylor's earliest visual ideas, and hints at how he began to transition to some of his later work, illuminating a compelling segment of a searching, innovative artist's progress. (Two Coats of Paint) A fascinating exploration of the painter's symbiotic relationship with Harlem. The potent yet personable paintings, mostly done in oil, are enduring proof of Neel's curious, compassionate eye, on and off the canvas. (Lola Adesioya *The Atlantic*) With their distinctive painterly style, Neel's portraits explore personalities, rather than physical types; they also memorialize figures historically excluded from the art world, which has long devalued depictions of people of colour, advancing a more capacious vision of community. (Andrianna Campbell *Frieze*) It's a fully human depiction, and it doesn't use the black or brown body to advance what Als calls an "ideological cause." Benjamin as rendered by Neel is simply a black child, being. How powerful is that? Like Als on the page today, Neel's paintings then captured all that she loved about the city, which is to say she imaged figures she knew had to be seen to be remembered. (Antwaun Sargent *Interview*) What distinguishes the current [Alice Neel] show are the eyes through which we see Neel's work. The exhibition is curated by Hilton Als, himself an artist of color whose writings earned him acclaim at a much earlier age than Neel. Though Als's stature adds an element of star power to the show, the experience is more of a dialogue than a monograph one in which Neel is as much Als's subject as Neel's sitters were hers. (Mary Wang *The Village Voice*) The work in "Alice Neel, Uptown" exists in twofold: There is the exhibition of Neel's paintings, and then there is the accompanying publication in which her portraits are presented alongside Als's essays and writings that bring Als, Neel, and her sitters on the same page. (Mary Wang *The Village Voice*) She too is a kind of essayist, a figure of inclusion. To Als, Neel and her portraits of her East Harlem

neighbors are a prime example of the “unsentimental wonder” with which the artist must meet the world. (Josephine Livingstone And Lovia Gyarkye The New Republic) Their stories...are showcased alongside their portraits in vitrines containing family photos and other artifacts, and further expanded upon in Alice Neel, Uptown, Als’s forthcoming book. It’s the portraits, after all, that Als has always found the most touching...Neel was simply painting the people she cared about, without fuss. (Stephanie Eckardt W Magazine) The works [Als] selected represent the great diversity of individuals Neel captured with her careful, inquisitive eye and fluid hand...the presence of Neel’s figures is so strong that the space around them seems almost to dissolve, the live energy of the artist’s brushwork inflected with her subjects’ psychology. (Tess Thackara Artsy) This is an exhibition rich in character, even literary, and all the more so for Als’s close attention to Neel’s life and work and his accompanying writing, for which he has gone in pursuit of the human stories embedded within Neel’s canvases. Als, like Neel, is interested in the textures of personalities, the language of one’s body and sexuality, the quality of a person’s voice. (Tess Thackara Artsy) These pictures and others are not only unmarred by agendas of any kind, they appear instead to have been created out of a profound need to understand what lies beyond their sitters’ social standing and self-presentations. This, among other leaps of sympathetic intelligence, makes Neel’s portraits resemble collaborations—they render difference recognizable and uniqueness special. (Christian Viveros-Faune ArtnetNews) On the evidence of this unmissable exhibition and compelling book, it’s clear that few American artists answered the call to celebrate difference as early or as uncompromisingly as Alice Neel. (Christian Viveros-Faune Artnet News) An exhibition and an upcoming book...that brings together Neel’s portraits of people of color for the first time, Als’s choices and commentary celebrate both Neel’s paintings and what the author calls “the generosity behind her seeing.” (Christian Viveros-Faune Artnet News) Neel’s intellectual and emotional life was mostly with people of color. It would be like looking at Picassos and realizing no one had ever done [a show about] the Blue Period. (Hilton Als Vogue Online) Her increasingly free-form style did not entail an escape from the people she lived among. Her portraits of black, Latino or Asian New Yorkers, quite unlike those of other midcentury leftist painters, were never exercises in social realism. They were something else: efforts to afford the same status and consideration to her neighbors that earlier portraitists reserved for popes and princes. (Jason Farago The New York Times) “Alice Neel, Uptown,” [is] an affectionate, rooted, and at times achingly nostalgic exhibition at David Zwirner gallery that concentrates on her relationships with fellow Harlemites, most of them black, Latin American or

Asian. (Jason Farago The New York Times)When you look at one of [Neel's] canvases, you're not just seeing that one person – you're seeing a whole world, condensed down to lines and colour. Her paintings are portraits of a city, portraits of life, portraits of time; they're full landscapes, visual essays. (Eddy Frankel Time Out)

fabulous collection of Neel's artful portraits of friends and neighbors in Harlem....

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