

**Nottingham
Contemporary**

Large Print Exhibition Notes

Allison Katz: *Artery*



Image description:

The text reads: Artery, Allison Katz, 22/05 – 31/10/2021

Red background with orange clouds and black horizontal stripes. The central image is of two touching lips, creating the silhouette of a dancer. It shows a set of teeth and the inside of a mouth.

Image credit: Allison Katz, *Artery (Ssik)* (2020), poster

Logos: Arts Council England, Nottingham City Council, Camden Art Centre, Canada House, City of Caves, Nottingham Trent University and University of Nottingham.



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Allison Katz: Artery
22 May – 31 Oct 2021

For more than a decade, Allison Katz has been exploring painting's relationship to questions of identity and expression, selfhood and voice. Animated by a restless sense of humour and curiosity, her works articulate a tricky language of recurring forms – roosters, monkeys and cabbages, among other things – that are by turns familiar and enigmatic. Katz's paintings, as well as her ceramics and posters, are frequently bodily and relentlessly wordy, thick with puns and allusions. What emerges from these multilayered works is a sustained and critical pursuit of what the artist has called "genuine ambiguity".

Titled *Artery*, this exhibition is the London-based Canadian artist's first institutional solo show in the UK. For Katz, "Artery" is a resonant and loaded title. Arteries are the blood vessels that carry oxygen-rich blood, - owing from the heart to the rest of the body. They are inside us (while "art" is itself nestled inside "artery"), as well as what connects us: "arterial" describes winding river systems, branching rail networks and subterranean cabling. This exhibition considers these networks and channels, the spaces between inside and outside, you and me, experience and image.

Shifting combinations of Katz's own name are threaded throughout all of her work. This wordplay has seen her name become a slogan ("All Is On"), an alias ("AKA") and, in this exhibition, a "MASK" (Ms. Allison Sarah Katz). All of the works in *Artery* were made during the last year's series of

lockdowns. This was a time when masks lost their association with persona, becoming instead something that has to be worn, an interface between the body and the world. Katz has long been preoccupied with painting's relationship to not-touching, as both motif and subtext, and the ways in which it tries to go beyond this condition.

For a number of years, Katz has been using the motif of an open mouth, borrowed from a small woodcut by André Derain. This she has described as an attempt to paint from the position of language, hunger or the tongue. In *Artery*, mouths frame and consume questions of taste and naming. Katz recently noted that, "I want to emphasise the non-order of things, from inside to out, as much as from outside to in."

At Nottingham Contemporary, new works are installed along and behind a series of walls and passageways. This layout has been designed to echo and reproduce existing angles and doorways, creating a sequence of recursive sight-lines. Katz approaches the gallery space itself as a porous body, an organism that extends both up and down into the ground below. An access lift becomes doubled by a painting of its interior, rendered at the exact dimensions. Opposite is a small room-within-a-room, holding an aerial view of a subterranean network, burrowed into the sandstone below Nottingham. Caves are bodily spaces too, with stomachs and mouths.

Katz produces posters for every exhibition she makes. These run in parallel with her paintings, while also branching out into different graphic directions. For *Artery*, a number of new

posters are displayed by the gallery entrance, while others are installed in City of Caves, which can be accessed at the bottom of the steps by Nottingham Contemporary. Visiting these caves last year, Katz was struck by how their forms coincided with those found in her own compositions.

Another coincidence: Nottingham was the city where, in the 1940s, her grandparents met, having both fled their home countries. Creating this exhibition at Nottingham Contemporary has therefore been a homecoming of sorts, a reconnection to family roots and trees.

The questions the works in *Artery* ask – of communication and connection, of intimacy at a distance, of origins – are as much a response to this current moment as a continued exploration of themes that have persisted throughout painting's history.

Some arteries



Image description: an aerial view of freeway roads



Image description: an aerial view of interconnected river networks

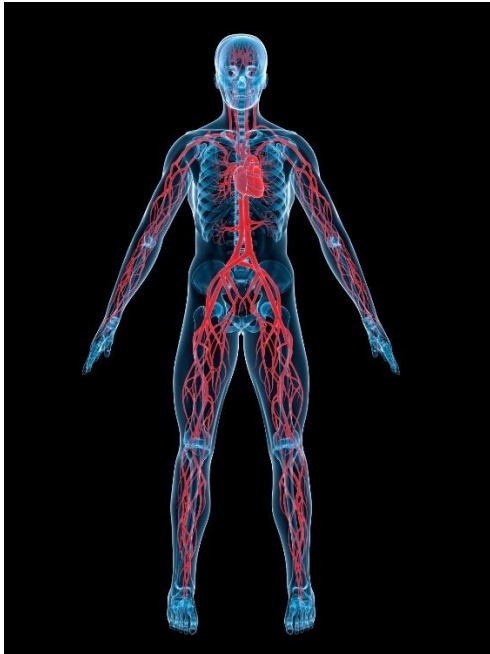


Image description: an x-ray style image showing veins and arteries in the human body.

At a wedding in 2009, a guest is struck by lightning in the shape of lightning



Image description: a red mark on a person's back.

The year “2020” contains within itself two voids, or portals.
Noughts for Notts.



Image description: the word 2020 turned into novelty glasses.

This exhibition writhes with lips and tentacular limbs.



Image description: a painting of a woman pouring water from a jug.

This Neolithic stone mask dates to 7,000 BCE. It is probably the oldest surviving mask in the world.

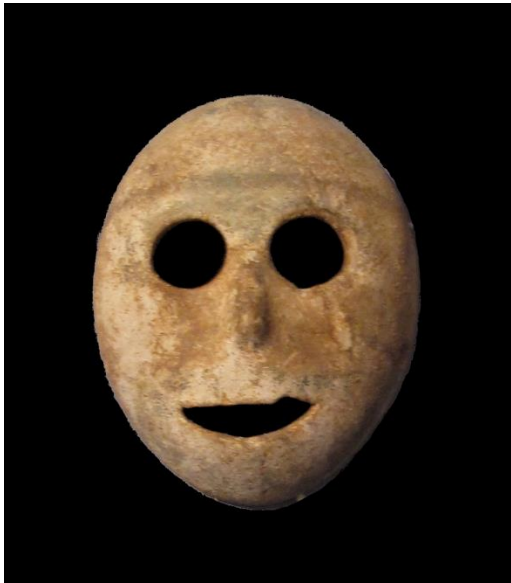


Image description: a plain mask with eye holes and mouth holes.

Noli Me Tangere (Do Not Touch Me) is the Latin translation of what Jesus said to Mary Magdalene after his resurrection. This moment has been depicted by artists for centuries. Here is a version by Hans Holbein, painted in 1526 while he was in England.



Image description: Jesus gesturing his hands as if keeping Mary Magdalene away from him. Mary Magdalene holds a vessel.

Woodcut by André Derain, from his 1943 illustrated edition of *Pantagruel* (1532), by Rabelais. Originally 21cm, I enlarged it to my height, 160cm.

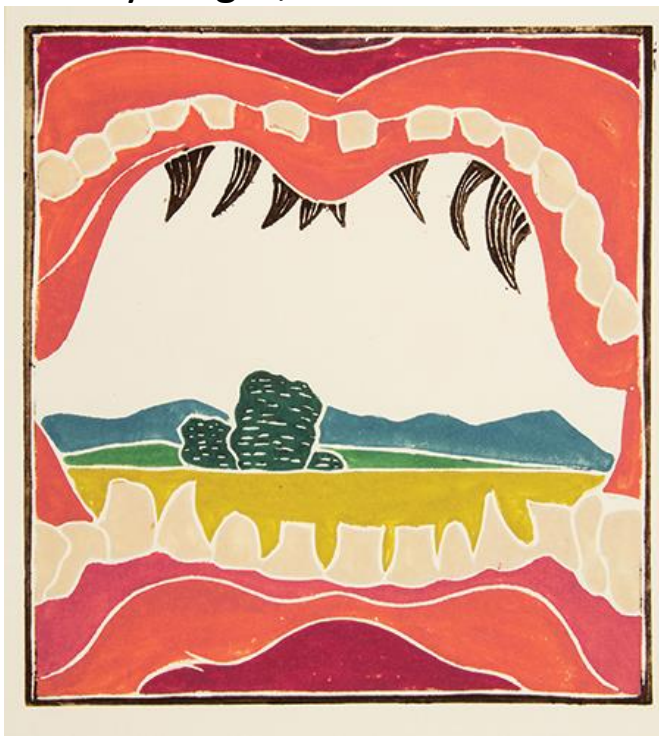


Image description: a view of a landscape (sand, grass mountains and some foliage), seen through someone's mouth.

Max Ernst, *Surrealism and Painting* (1942). Described as “a huge new Freudian nightmare” when it was first exhibited, the work takes its title from a 1928 essay by André Breton.



Image description: surreal painting. Two figures – one is painting.

First visit, City of Caves, Nottingham, September 2020.



A plan of the Mansfield Road caves from 1940, when they were used as shelters in the event of air raids. My grandmother's family resided at 492 Mansfield Road during this time.

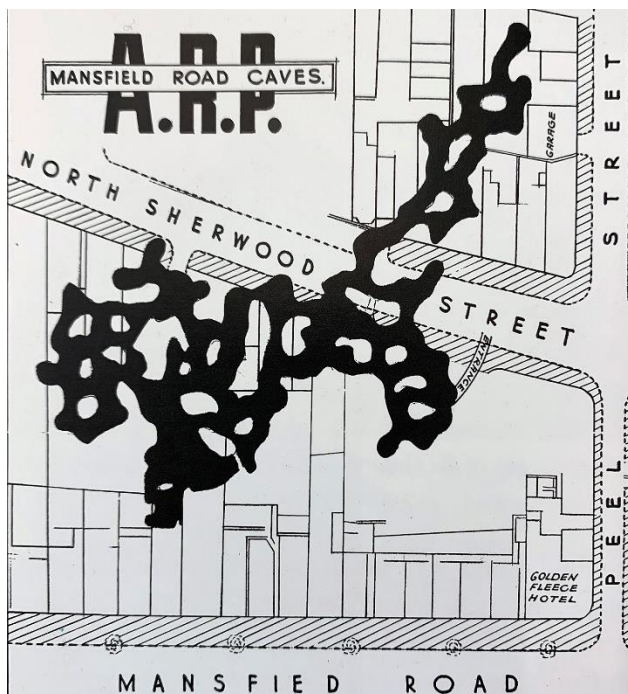


Image description: text says Mansfield Road Caves, A.R.P, and the map shows a cave network between North Sherwood Street and Peel Street.

My grandparents (middle and second from left), pictured here with friends at their local social club in Nottingham, where they met in 1947. They married two years later.



Image description: an old fashioned image showing five hugging figures.

Site visit to Nottingham, a week before the first lockdown.



Image description: view of a canal below a bridge.

Hélène Cixous, in *Veils* (1998):
'Eyes are miraculous hands...
The world is given to her in the
hand of her eyes...
Eyes are lips on the lips of God.



Image description: a painting of two people's bodies – one wearing a dress, one wearing a suit – with their arms around each other. You cannot see their faces, as it is obscured by an open mouth that frames the picture.

List of works

First space, clockwise from left:

Ssik (2020), oil on silkscreened canvas

2020 (Femoral) (2021), oil, acrylic and sand on canvas

Elevator II (Nottingham Contemporary) (2021), acrylic on canvas

Second space, clockwise from left:

The Cockfather (2021), oil, acrylic and rice on linen

Stage Cock (2020), acrylic and rice on linen

M.A.S.K. (2021), oil and acrylic on linen

Nottingham Canal, 11 March 2020 (2021), oil on linen

Alley Cat (2020), oil on silkscreened canvas

Interior View II, "William N. Copley", Milan, 2016–17 (2021), oil on linen

2020 (Ephemeral) (2021), acrylic and sand on canvas

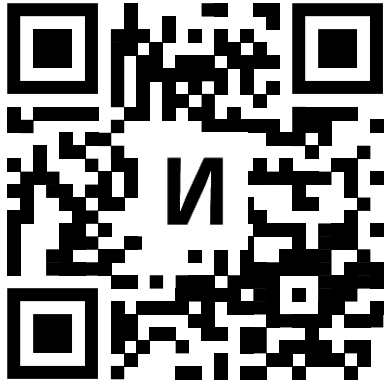
Corridor space:

Channelling (2021), acrylic on linen

Katzenhöhle (2021), oil and acrylic on canvas

All works courtesy of: The Approach, London, and Luhring Augustine, New York. Except: *Ssik*, courtesy the artist and Gió Marconi, Milan; and *Stage Cock*, Private Collection.

To find out more about this exhibition visit nottinghamcontemporary.org or scan here



Credits:

Artery is generously supported by the High Commission of Canada in the United Kingdom and our Exhibition Circle – Alexander V. Petalas, Michael & Ellen Ringier – and is a collaboration with Camden Art Centre, where it will open in January 2022. The exhibition will be accompanied by a publication, designed by Studio Mathias Clottu, due to be published in early 2022. The exhibition layout has been produced in collaboration with architect Caitlin Tobias-Kennessy.