

For immediate release

ALICE NEEL: Selected Works

David Zwirner

533 West 19th Street

May 14 – June 20, 2009

Opening reception: Thursday, May 14, 6-8 pm

ALICE NEEL: Nudes of the 1930s

Zwirner & Wirth

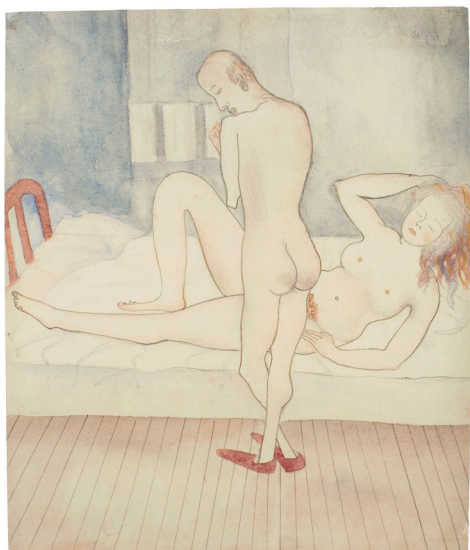
32 East 69th Street

May 6 – June 20, 2009

Opening reception: Wednesday, May 6, 6-8 pm



Hartley, 1952, Oil on canvas
32 x 20 1/4 inches (81.3 x 51.4 cm)



Alienation, 1935, Watercolor on paper
10 1/2 x 9 inches (26.7 x 22.9 cm)

David Zwirner is pleased to present two concurrent exhibitions of Alice Neel's work, the first since announcing its representation of her Estate: *Alice Neel: Selected Works* at David Zwirner (533 West 19th Street) and *Alice Neel: Nudes of the 1930s* at Zwirner & Wirth (32 East 69th Street).

Alice Neel (1900-1984) is widely regarded as one of the most important American painters of the twentieth century. As the American avant-garde of the 1940s and 50s renounced figuration, Neel reaffirmed her signature approach to the human body. Working from life and memory, Neel created daringly honest portraits of her family and friends, downtrodden neighbors and public figures, art-world colleagues and poets, lovers and strangers. Her choice of subjects was a reflection of her personal life and an expression of the political and social milieu in which she lived, rather than an intentional program. Through her choice of subjects, her work was engaged with issues related to gender and racial inequality, family dynamics, labor struggles, and violence. At the same time, her reexamination of the human body paralleled the cultural upheaval of the sexual revolution and women's movement: her work challenged the Western artistic tradition that regarded a woman's proper place in the arts as sitter or muse. Calling herself a "collector of souls," Neel is acclaimed for not only capturing the truth of the individual, but also reflecting the era in which she lived.

The exhibition at David Zwirner focuses on a selection of figurative paintings, ranging in date from the late 1940s to early 1980s. These revelatory works reflect the evolution of Neel's commitment to depicting the people around her with compassion, accuracy, and freedom, as seen in the portraits of her family members, such as her son *Hartley* (1952), whose image she continued to paint during the different stages of his life. Throughout her career Neel was attracted to unusual characters whose physical attributes and personalities were intriguing and visually appealing to her. Her strong power of observation and unique ability to empathize is reflected in her psychologically charged portraiture, which captures the individuality of her sitters in an unforgiving yet tender manner. This is especially evident in one of her most remarkable paintings, *Annie Sprinkle* (1982), in which the burlesque performance artist is shown posing in the leather outfit of a dominatrix. The unabashed quality of this image demonstrates the felicitous communion Neel had with the people she painted.

Zwirner & Wirth presents a selection of nudes from the 1930s. These early paintings, watercolors, and drawings are characterized by their overt honesty and convey the autobiographical nature of her work. *Alienation* (1935), which shows Neel lying

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Nadya and Nona, 1933, Oil on canvas
25 3/4 x 35 1/4 inches (65.4 x 89.5 cm)

voluptuously in bed while her longtime friend and lover John Rothschild stands over her, exposes the confessional intimacy inherent to her work. From an early age Neel was drawn to the visual trope of nudity, a subject that at the time was not considered appropriate for a female artist to pursue. Instead of making genteel "feminine" compositions, her nudes deconstruct, contradict, and satirize the limitations of traditional gender ideologies. One early example is *Nadya and Nona* (1933), a provocative painting of two nude women lying in bed which examines issues of sexuality while deliberately eschewing erotic and seductive overtones.

Both exhibitions are organized in association with Jeremy Lewison Limited.

Although she showed sporadically early in her career, from the 1960s onwards her work was exhibited widely in the United States. Neel was honored with her first retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York in 1974. The Whitney again mounted a solo exhibition of the artist's work in 2000 after her death. That exhibition, titled *The Art of Alice Neel*, traveled to the Addison Gallery of American Art at Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Denver Art Museum, Denver, Colorado. Additionally in 2008, the Moore College of Art & Design, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (where Neel was a student) hosted an exhibition of her works on paper, titled *Alice Neel: Drawing from Life*.

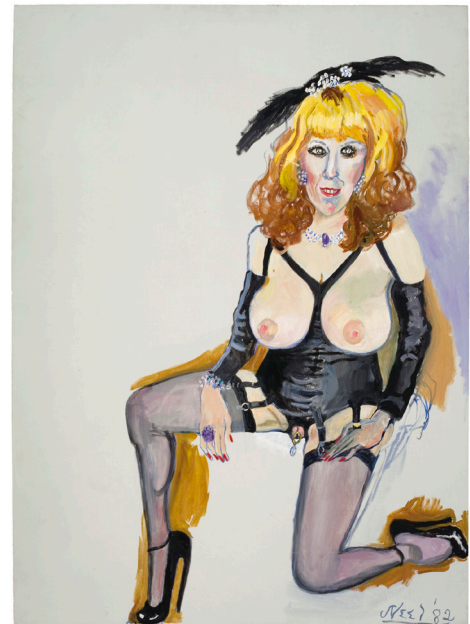
Currently, her work is included in the traveling group exhibition, *Paint Made Flesh*, at Frist Center for the Visual Arts, Nashville, Tennessee (until May 10, 2009); The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C. (June 20 - September 13, 2009); and Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester, Rochester, New York (October 24, 2009 - January 3, 2010).

Next year, the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Houston, Texas, will mount an expansive, highly anticipated survey of Neel's work (March 21 - June 13, 2010), co-curated by Jeremy Lewison and Barry Walker, which will travel to Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, England (July 9 - September 19, 2010), and Moderna Museet, Malmö, Sweden (October 10, 2010 - January 2, 2011). The exhibition catalogue will include essays by Professor Tamar Garb, Professor Robert Storr, Jeremy Lewison, and Barry Walker.

In 2002, Rizzoli published a monograph focusing solely on Neel's remarkable portraits of women with an essay by Carolyn Carr. A documentary film about the artist, directed by her grandson Andrew Neel, was released by SeeThink Productions in 2007.

Neel's work can be found in the collections of Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, California; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden, Tate Modern, London, England; among many others.

Please visit the recently launched website: www.aliceneel.com



Annie Sprinkle, 1982, Oil on canvas
60 x 44 inches (152.4 x 111.8 cm)

ALICE NEEL

Selected Works

May 14 – June 20, 2009

Gallery I



Sam, Snow (How like the winter) (1945)

Neel's unique ability to capture the individuality of her sitter in an unforgiving yet compassionate manner is reflected in this psychologically charged portrait of Sam Brody, in which he is shown seated reading a newspaper with the headline "Victory" (referring to World War II). His hunched shoulders and intense dark eyes seem to convey a complex mixture of agitation and defiance. (See entry for *Sam and Richard*, c. 1943, for biographical information on Sam Brody).



Sam and Richard (c. 1943)

Throughout her work, Neel expressed an interest in conveying the complexities and nuances of familial relationships. Here, Neel presents a charged portrait of her oldest son Richard being clutched by Sam Brody, who lived off and on with Neel between 1940 and 1958 (Brody was a photographer and filmmaker and was a founding member of the Film and Photo League. He and Neel had a son together, Hartley, in 1941). Richard's apparent apprehension at being held by Sam reveals their troubled relationship.



Hartley (1952)

Neel often painted children in her work, beginning in the 1920s with portraits such as *Mother and Child, Havana*, 1926. In this painting, Neel presents a pensive, somewhat melancholic portrait of her son Hartley, shown as a boy of ten and seated outdoors in their garden at Spring Lake, New Jersey, where Neel and her family spent their summers. Neel would paint her own children at different stages of their lives; Hartley was the subject of numerous portraits.



Young Woman (c. 1946)

This painting presents an elegantly-attired anonymous young woman seated with her hands and legs crossed; the slight smile of her lips conveys a sense of compassion and warmth. By emphasizing her jewelry and fur shawl, Neel intentionally draws awareness to the woman's social status. In this compelling portrait, Neel conveys her attraction to individuals whose outward appearance provides an indication of their milieu and whose physical demeanors reflect aspects of their personality.



Cindy (c. 1960)

Neel had an ongoing fascination with children; their innocence and acceptance of the world intrigued her. She was also attracted to their dress and the way in which their behavioral gestures and poses anticipated their adulthood. In this painting, Neel presents Cindy Wheelwright, the daughter of Farley Wheelwright. Farley Wheelwright was a Unitarian minister who would become involved in social activism; he and his wife were close friends of Neel's in the early 1950s. The abstract expressionistic field of color in the background of the painting reflects Neel's interest in the work of such artists as Clyfford Still.



George Arce (1959)

In this painting, Neel portrays George Arce, a young Puerto Rican boy from Neel's neighborhood (Spanish Harlem) who would often run errands for her. Neel enjoyed Arce's intelligence, and she painted him on numerous occasions. Arce would remain in touch with Neel throughout her life, even after he was imprisoned in the 1970s. The painting's abstract expressionistic background anticipates her well-known portrait of Robert Smithson from 1962, which is equally rich and intensely evocative.



Ballet Dancer (1950)

In this painting, Neel presents a portrait of a young unnamed dancer, posing lithely and rather suggestively with a dream-like gaze as he reclines on a sofa. Here, Neel has subverted the gendered conventions of figurative painting, while referencing countless historic depictions of reclining (female) figures, such as Ingres' *Grande Odalisque* (1814) and Manet's *Olympia* (1863). The unusual format of this painting is unique to Neel's work; it was chosen by the artist to suit the horizontal composition of the image.

Gallery II



Ruth Nude (1964)

Neel often explored the visual trope of nudity in her work. Her nudes, however, are utterly unconventional, in that they deconstruct, contradict, and satirize the limitations of traditional gender ideologies, especially with regard to the historical depiction of the female in painting. Here, Neel presents a nude portrait of her friend Ruth Alsher, portrayed in a brazen and defiant pose. The matter-of-fact way in which Neel exposes the female body anticipates certain feminist approaches found, for instance, in the work of such artists as Carolee Schneemann and Hannah Wilke.



The Druid (1968)

In this painting, Neel presents an unnamed seated man. While he poses confidently, his gaze, directed towards the viewer, remains inscrutable. Here, as in many of Neel's paintings, she reveals aspects of her subject's personality through his expression and gestures. For Neel, the identity of her sitters was not always of consequence; she was interested in painting people who seemed to reflect the *Zeitgeist*, and for her *The Druid* typified the late 1960s.



Mrs. Paul Gardner and Sam (1967)

Here, Mrs. Paul Gardner (the wife of a school friend of Neel's sons Richard and Hartley) is shown seated with her legs crossed, displaying a frank and apparently exhausted expression, as her young son awkwardly dangles off the side of the chair. This painting, similarly to *Sam and Richard* (c. 1943), exemplifies Neel's ongoing interest in conveying the intricacies of familial relationships.



Dana Gordon (1972)

This painting presents a seated Dana Gordon, a young artist and friend of the Neel family. At the time, Gordon was the boyfriend of Nancy Selvage, who also sat for Neel. Selvage had been a roommate of Ginny Taylor's at Wellesley College (Taylor would later marry Neel's son Hartley).



Annie Sprinkle (1982)

Neel's attraction to unusual individuals is especially evident in this painting of Annie Sprinkle posing in the leather outfit of a dominatrix. The unabashed quality of this image demonstrates the felicitous communion Neel had with the people she painted. Sprinkle was a burlesque porn star who later became a performance artist and self-proclaimed 'sex guru' and feminist activist.



Ron Kajiwara (1971)

In this painting, Neel portrays Ron Kajiwara (a graphic designer for *Vogue* who also worked as a set designer on a number of dance productions), seated cross-legged on a chair. While he is painted frontally, his gaze eludes the viewer's. Neel may have been attracted to his androgynous attire and long hair, demonstrating her ongoing preoccupation with portraying individuals whose expressions and appearances reflected their milieu and era.



Jerry Sokol (1964)

This painting portrays Jerry Sokol, a young mathematician, in a guarded, seated pose: his hands are shown resting awkwardly upon his crossed legs while his gaze, directed towards the viewer, seems to convey a complex mixture of reluctance and defiance. The rhythmic outline of the chair in the background mimics his curved posture. It was rare for the artist to paint such a descriptive background. Moreover, in the mid-1960s Neel began leaving extensive areas of the canvas unpainted, a characteristic she admired in Cézanne's late work.



The Family (Algis, Julie and Bailey) (1968)

Here, Neel depicts a young couple with their child: the father dominates the canvas, clutching his infant with one hand, while his wife is shown behind him almost as if in his shadow. The individual sitters of this portrait, friends who would pose for Neel on different occasions, can be identified as Algis Alkaitis (who was a chemist in Berkeley, California, at the time and is now a neurologist; he studied with Neel's son Hartley) and Julie Alkaitis (who would become a psychotherapist) with their child Bailey.



Rita and Hubert (1958)

Neel's interest in conveying the dynamics of relationships is explicitly reflected in this portrait of a young couple posing in an expressionless and unaffectionate manner; they both look distracted as they fail to touch each other while reclining on a sofa. Hubert Satterfield was a communist writer; Neel also did a single portrait of him. Neel met him through his brother, a boxer who was active in left-wing causes.

ALICE NEEL: NUDES OF THE 1930s

May 6 – June 20, 2009



Rhoda Myers Nude (1930)

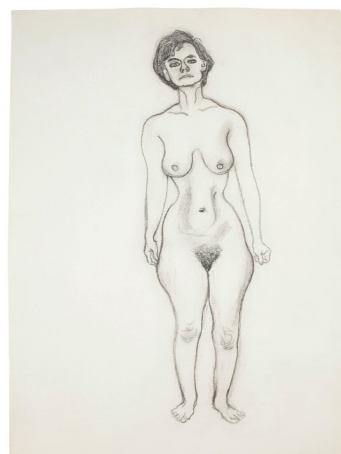
Neel's ability to capture the individuality of her sitter in an unforgiving yet compassionate manner is reflected in this psychologically compelling portrait of Rhoda Myers. Here, Myers poses naked on a bed with a weary expression of exhaustion; her eyes seem hollow and her bones are accentuated, revealing the fragility of her body. Neel went to art school with Myers, who was also a painter, and briefly shared a studio in Philadelphia with her and Ethel Ashton during the summer of 1930. Both Myers and Ashton served as models for Neel during the early 1930s; she portrayed them in several paintings, including *Rhoda Myers with Blue Hat*, 1930 (see entry below).



Rhoda Myers with Blue Hat (1930)

In this curious painting, Neel presents Rhoda Myers seated and nude, dressed only in pearls and a large blue hat. Neel's stylistic portrayal of Myers, reflected in the dark outlines and flat form of her body, is indicative of Neel's unconventional resistance to depicting the female nude as sexually enticing. As Carolyn Carr has written, "The bored, distracted visage, the roughness of the flesh, and the flatness of the breasts are rendered so that nothing invites the viewer to touch, gaze, or be aroused. Moreover, the manner in which the form occupies the foreground and fills the frame of the canvas metaphorically forbids the viewer to enter the space of the observed."¹ (See *Rhoda Myers Nude*, 1930, for further information on Myers).

[1] Carolyn Carr, "Alice Neel: Women. Mirror of Identity," in *Alice Neel: Women* (New York: Rizzoli, 2002), p. 8.



Standing Nude (1932)

Neel's early nude compositions deconstruct, contradict, and satirize the limitations of traditional gender ideologies. Her strong powers of observation and unique ability to empathize are reflected in her daring and intimate figurative works from the 1930s. Here, Neel displays an intentional naïveté, which is expressed in the bold anatomical contours and the unbalanced proportions of the body.



Nadya and Nona (1933)

This compelling painting of two nude women lying on a bed examines issues of sexuality while deliberately eschewing erotic and seductive overtones. Both women display contrasting characteristics; Nadya appears somber yet open and confidently faces the viewer, whereas Nona projects apprehension by hiding her nakedness. As a subject, Nadya Olyanova, a close friend of Neel's and a graphologist by profession, personified the bohemian woman, and Neel was drawn to her casual willingness to immodestly flaunt her sexuality.



Florence Lasser (1933)

In this drawing of Florence Lasser (a friend of Neel's who was a public relations specialist for the international Ladies' Garment Workers' Union and whose husband at the time was David Lasser, the founder of the Workers Alliance of America), Neel demonstrates her unique ability to express the individuality of her subject using minimal detail and a seemingly simplistic technique.



Katherine Hogle (1935)

This provocative watercolor presents an elegantly attired woman whose outfit exposes her bare body. Katherine Hogle was an attractive figure that Neel met in Greenwich Village; they remained life-long friends. This portrait exemplifies Neel's bold and innovative compositions from this period.



Untitled (Alice Neel and John Rothschild in the Bathroom) (1935)

This watercolor depicts Neel and her longtime friend and lover John Rothschild in a bathroom urinating in an unglamorous yet jovial manner, with the implication that intercourse has just taken place or is about to. Both have their eyes closed and seem to be preoccupied with their private activities while comfortably relaxing in intimate circumstances. Neel met Rothschild, who owned a travel agency that specialized in sending students to Moscow, in the spring of 1932 and would eventually turn to him for emotional and financial support after her passionately destructive relationship with Kenneth Doolittle. This particular work has the potential to shock by virtue of its confessional intimacy and sexual imagery, while it also conveys the affectionate qualities of Neel's relationship with Rothschild.



Alienation (1935)

This watercolor, which shows Neel lying voluptuously in bed while John Rothschild stands over her, exposes the confessional intimacy inherent to her work. Here, the conflicted, affectionate aspects of her relationship with Rothschild are pronounced. Neel later reflected: "I did *Alienation* down in Spring Lake, in that little house we rented in the summer of 1935. I didn't realize what it was when I painted it. I didn't realize...until 1978, when I had a show of my watercolors at Graham Gallery, what the title should be. It had nothing to do with sex. It was alienation. He had just left his wife and a couple of children." (See *Untitled [Alice Neel and John Rothschild in the Bathroom]*, 1935, for further information on John Rothschild).



Untitled (Alice and José) (c. 1935)

Although she rarely appears in her own work, this intimate watercolor shows Neel naked with José Santiago Negrón, a Puerto Rican musician she met at a downtown nightclub. Neel and Negrón lived together (first in Greenwich Village, later in Spanish Harlem) between 1935 and 1939, and he was the father of her first son Richard. In this watercolor, both Neel and Negrón stare out sullenly at the viewer; he remains remote and impassive, while she seems to express a tone of apprehension. In 1936, Neel produced a series of paintings, watercolors, pastels, and pencil drawings of José Santiago Negrón, many of which seem to divulge his impenetrable nature.



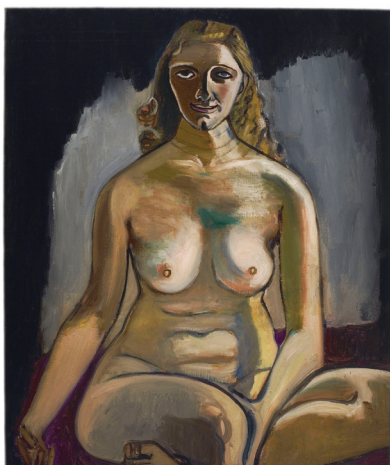
Katherine Nude (1935)

In this watercolor Neel depicts a young nude woman (Katherine Hogle, a lifelong friend she met in Greenwich Village) wistfully staring out at the viewer. Neel's extraordinary ability to convey the psychological state of her subject is reflected in the gesture of the subject's immodest body and in the expressionistic field of color in the background of this work on paper.



Nude (1936)

Here, Neel presents a straightforward and unadorned nude portrait of an unknown woman. The melancholic tone of the image is conveyed by the woman's closed eyes and limp arms. Neel's deliberately uncomplicated approach to depicting the subject's body is typical of her early drawings, as seen in *Standing Nude*, 1932, and *Florence Lasser*, 1933.



Winifred Mesmer (1940)

Neel's ability to depict the people around her with compassion, accuracy, and freedom is seen in this portrait of Winifred Mesmer, a woman that both of Neel's boyfriends José Santiago Negron and Sam Brody were romantically involved with. Here, Mesmer is shown posing nude against a somber background, her face bathed dramatically in suggestive shadows.