



CHARLES KATZ
A RETROSPECTIVE



This retrospective of the work of Charles Katz includes paintings, drawings and lithographs from all periods of his adult painting life to his final unfinished musings. Many of these works are very different in style and technique.

The art of Charles Katz is intensely personal and mystical, and possesses a spiritual kinship with primary as well as archaic art. Some of these paintings are startling in their concentration of feeling. The mystic tone in some of his works is pronounced and very moving. There are

mythological themes in his paintings, as in his painting *Tartarus* (1992) (which in Greek Mythology is the deepest and most secured place in hell). With or without its title the painting is moving piece of art. The bars running vertically look like Greek columns but we can tell there is something less pastoral than ruins before us. Yellow, the medieval symbolic colour for radiance is over represented to an almost schizophrenic glare in an intense middle horizon. Reds of dark blood intensity occupy the place above our line of sight where there is



pen & ink, circa 2006

Tartarus | 40 x 56 inches
oil on canvas, 1992

a patch of blue which reminds us that this is not open sky. The proportions of colour are not harmonious but expressive of emotional weight. With the title we feel the mythological hangover of our collective cultural memory which makes this piece that much more powerful. This well known myth has inspired artists in Europe and North Africa for over two thousand years. This is a painting of the place, where among other ancient celebrities, Tantalus, the Titans, and Sisyphus were placed for their various sins,

wars, or less forgivably for asking the wrong questions. It comes on recommendation of Rilke, in his famous advice to young artists, to not attempt great themes that have been tried many times before; Charles true to himself, ignored convention and the famous advice, leaving us with a very fine painting.

In the autumn of 1992 Charles was diagnosed with leukemia. After enduring a partial treatment of conventional chemotherapy, he embarked on a path of self-healing. Charles tried to cure himself from his illness



untitled #93 |
17 x 23 inches
oil on board, 1993



Awakening Spiral |
30 x 30 inches
oil on board, 1993

with unorthodox and experimental treatments. He painted about some of these treatments in *MonoAtomic Gold* and *Coral Bacteria*. He took monoatomic gold, which is the non-metallic, non-toxic, zero-valence form of gold. It acts upon the pituitary gland often increasing the production of red blood cells in bone marrow. Its other side effect (appropriate to the reputation of some artists) is that it increases the production of semen. This is originally a non-Western treatment referred to in

ancient Ayurvedic texts¹. It appears to be first introduced to the West when it was used by the medieval Gnostic Cathars² in alchemical³ elixirs. It has been pointed out by Maria von Franz among others that alchemical-like myths are part of many other world traditions: and the alchemical myth, an almost yoga of the West in spiritual terms, is what is psychologically missing from our accepted mythic tradition. Charles, very aware of this imbalance, addressed this in his painting *MonoAtomic Gold*. This is an intensely mystical painting, almost assaulting the senses



untitled grid #3 | 14 x 11 inches
acrylic, wax, mixed media on board, 1998



MonoAtomic Gold | 39 x 27 inches
| acrylic, wax, mixed media on board, 1998

untitled #98 | 14 x 11 inches
| acrylic, wax, on board, 1998





untitled grid #1 | 30 x 24 inches
acrylic, wax, mixed media on board, 1998



untitled #16 | 20 x 16 inches
acrylic, wax, mixed media on board, 1997

with its vision. It is balanced in its proportions of blue and orange-yellow just shaded enough that the colours are a chromatic complement of each other as well as the proportions of other darker colours surrounding the central combination. It has surface layers built up in places with crushed marble and sand. Parts of the picture seem to be reaching out of the painting itself. As a whole, it seems otherworldly, an inspired transformation frozen at its most fertile moment.



Light & Dark Field

19.5 x 16.5 inches
acrylic, wax, mixed media on board, 1995

Coral Bacteria is another painting inspired by a substance he was taking to cure his illness. It is a painting of powerful blues with bursts of flowering yellows in a host of variations on the same two colours with clumped blotches that really look like bacteria in the shape of a lopsided **x** toward the middle lower left of the painting. Its balance of complementary contrast is stimulating and soothing at once. This makes sense, as it is exactly the proportions of colour that together would mix to a neutral chromatic grey.

There is a considerable variety of work in different styles that will be on display, including a series of his grid paintings and topographical abstracts from the air some of which are like early aerial photographs of the English inter-war countryside. There are large format abstract paintings as well as a series of figurative pen and ink drawings he was working on in his final months. These are skillfully executed, tightly framed yet still playful. These final pieces and his unfinished musings are some



pen & ink on paper, 2007

of his finest work, which like some of his best paintings extend from a personal expression to reach toward a universal expression.

Charles' paintings are non-representational but they were always about things. It is fortunate we have some of the titles of his later pieces. It is also fortunate that we have a few of his very large early works represented in this show as they underscore the development of his expression and experiments with materials.

In the months before he passed away, Charles, in a



untitled #13 | 16 x 20 inches
acrylic, wax, mixed media on board, 1997

playful spirit, conceived of making an installation piece tilted *The Bar Mitzvah Machine*. He had dyslexia and was unable to have a Bar Mitzvah during his youth, as he could not complete the language requirements in Hebrew. It was a considerable disappointment to him at the time. Charles' *Bar Mitzvah Machine* would be very similar in size and appearance to the photo booths that were once common in train stations and shopping malls. It would be about twenty square feet and five feet high and would welcome the viewer into its space. A person who wishes to have a Bar/Bat Mitzvah would place a coin in the machine that would prompt him or her to recite the sounds of a Hebrew prayer. A camera would record the incantation and add stock footage of a generic ceremony to the blue screen background. The data would be transferred to a computer and a certificate, a DVD copy of the ritual, and a photograph would be dispensed by the machine. Charles' brother Daniel expressed that Charles intended this piece to be for fun and in no way did he intend to offend anyone by it. This installation piece will be completed by *The Friends of Charles Katz* to Charles' specifications. It will be shown at Toronto's all night art festival *Nuit Blanche* in October 2008.

- Ewan Whyte





untitled #31

48 x 37 inches
acrylic on canvas, 1992



untitled #17 | 24 x 24 inches
acrylic on board, 1997



Ariel Freed

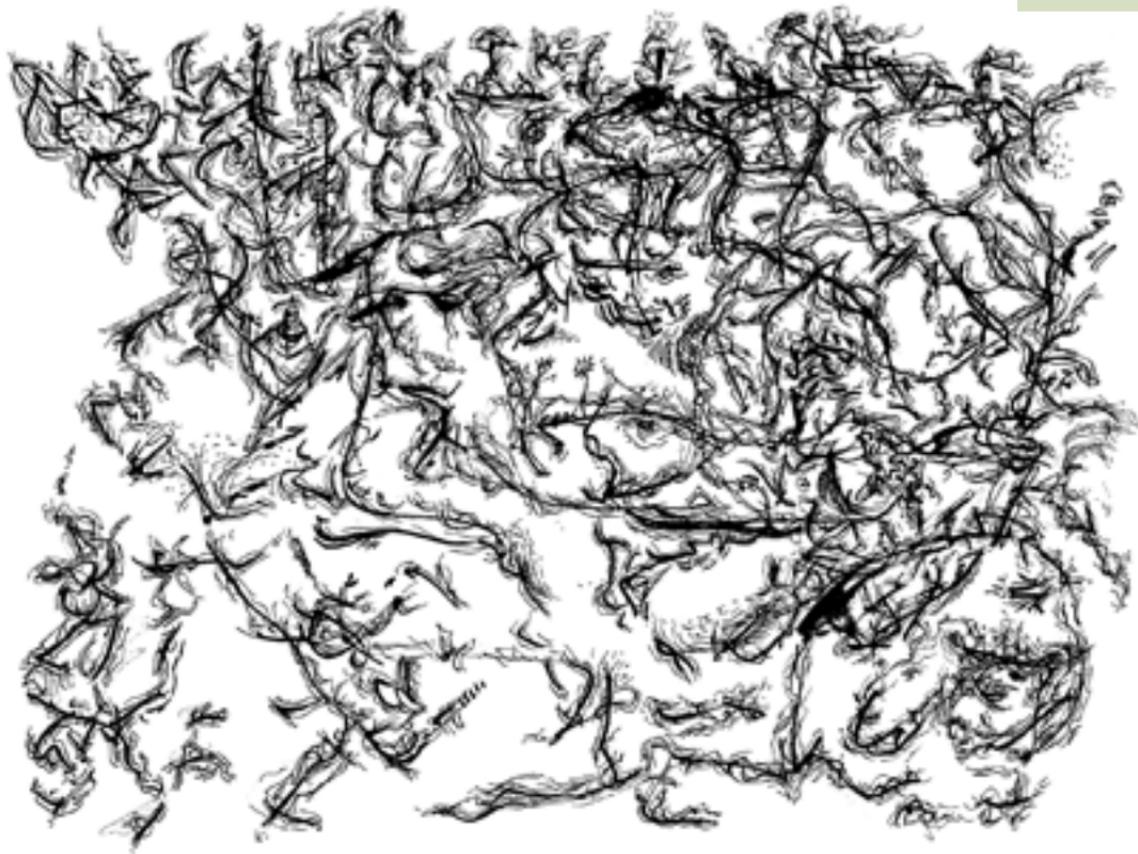
40 x 56 inches
acrylic on canvas, 1983



untitled #15 | 14 x 11 inches
wax, acrylic on foam and board, 1998



untitled #18 | 20 x 16 inches
acrylic, mixed media on board, 1997



pen & ink on paper, 2006



untitled #20 | 24 x 24 inches
acrylic on board, 1995



untitled #19 |
39 x 49 inches
acrylic on canvas, 1987

Charles Katz Biography



untitled #22 | 14 x 11 inches
acrylic, glass, gold on board, 1995

Charles Lawrence Katz was born in Toronto, Ontario on January 1, 1956. His initial years in public school were rather difficult due in large part to his dyslexia. But early on his family and teachers recognized his natural and intuitive affinity for visual art. It was through the help of special education instructor Mr. Cohen and his art making that Charles overcame his subtle handicap. In the mid 1970s he attended the *Ontario College of Art* and studied for two years at its New York campus (1977-79). While

in New York he ran a gallery called *Public Image Gallery* where he was responsible for giving many Canadian artists their first exhibitions in New York. He returned to Toronto in the Fall of 1980 and opened an art gallery called *Studio 620* on Richmond Street near Spadina Avenue. Again, he selflessly promoted other artists' work and ran as many as 5 exhibitions a year. During these years he continued to paint and exhibit his paintings while experimenting with unusual materials and new techniques. In 1985, Charles had a successful exhibition of his paintings in Tokyo.



untitled #26 |
28 x 28 inches
acrylic on canvas, 1996



unfinished musings #3 | 18 x 18 inches
oil, glass, acrylic on canvas, 2007



unfinished musings #4 | 18 x 18 inches
oil, glass, acrylic on canvas, 2007

In 1992 Charles was diagnosed with leukemia and became determined to live and overcome the disease. After having a difficult time with three rounds of chemotherapy he ventured on the path of self-healing. He continued to be generous with his time and energy for others especially terminally ill cancer patients. Charles did not become cynical; rather he pushed on trying to cure himself as well as those around him. He tried several unorthodox substances to treat the disease. Some of these treatments



pen & ink on paper, 2007

inspired paintings, such as *Coral Bacteria*, *Awakening Spiral* and *MonoAtomic Gold*. Through his faith and determination Charles beat the odds and his cancer went into remission. In the years following his illness Charles had fewer exhibitions, though he did continue to paint and had a successful show in Berlin in the fall of 2002. Some of his last works, painterly musings, were among his most promising. Charles was a dynamic fixture in the city's vibrant art community until his untimely passing from an integral cerebral hemorrhage on January 5, 2008, at his home in Toronto.

EXHIBITIONS

Solo Exhibitions:

- Jet Fuel Inc, 23 paintings - Toronto, 2001
She Said Boom, 4 paintings - Toronto, 2001
STUDIO 608, 15 paintings - Toronto, 1999
College Street Bar, 11 paintings - Toronto, 1997
Gallery 104, Scollard St. Artist Cooperative - Toronto, 1996
STUDIO 608, 15 paintings - Toronto, 1994
De Merry Inc, 10 Paintings - New York City, 1985
STUDIO 620, Six Years, 35 works painting, lithographs, drawings - Toronto, 1984
RUG Factory Studio, 15 paintings - Toronto, 1980
Gallery 76, paintings, lithographs - Toronto, 1979
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Group Exhibitions:

- Der Kinsterigen, Galerie Bohin & ZOU - Berlin, 2002
Here & Now Gallery - Toronto, 2002
STUDIO 608, 7 Artists - Toronto, 2001
Beaver Hall Gallery - Toronto, 1999
LOCAL Colour Gallery - Flesherton, 1993
LOCAL Colour Gallery - Flesherton, 1992
Group Material - Mass Exhibition - New York City, 1985
The Air Gallery, Young Canadian Artists - Tokyo, 1985
Private Image/Public Myth, Public Image Gallery - New York City, 1985
Shoe Box, *Small Works/Big Myths*, Artculture Gallery - Toronto, 1985
THE MICRO WAVES, Now Gallery - New York City, 1985
CELTIC FESTIVAL, Harbourfront - Toronto, 1985
Pauline McGibbon Cultural Centre - Toronto, 1984



ESSAY NOTES:

1. The Rasa-Jala-Nidhi is a detailed ancient Indian text on Chemistry, Medicine and Alchemy.
2. The Cathars or Albigensians were a popular Gnostic sect of Christianity in southern France with some followers in northern Italy during the 12th to the 14th Centuries. They were declared heretics and slaughtered in a series of crusades.
3. Alchemy (originally from an Arabic word meaning *transformation*) is popularly known in the West for its searching for the **Philosopher's Stone** which would ultimately be able to transform base metals into gold. Carl Jung interpreted alchemical symbolism to show the internal meaning of Alchemical work as a spiritual journey. He felt that Alchemy was the vehicle by which Gnosticism had survived. He also concluded that alchemists in every culture he studied were psychologically very healthy and stable.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

This exhibition was made possible through the commitment of Harry & Marjorie Katz, Charles' brothers and sister; Daniel, Neil and Louise; and a group of special people called *The Friends of Charles Katz* which includes: Judy Blumstock, Phillipa Pires, Paul Bloore, Nick Boehm, Leila Boujnané, Janet Hethrington and Michael Alstad. - with a special thanks to project director and peacekeeper - Daniel Katz.

Essay and biography by Ewan Whyte who is both a writer and translator and has written for the Globe & Mail, Books in Canada and The Literary Review of Canada. His short stories, translations and essays have been published in literary journals and magazines and he has read his translations of Horace and Catullus on US Public Radio. His translation of the poetry of Catullus was published in December 2004. He is currently finishing a novel and is translating the complete poetry of Horace. He lives in Toronto.

Photography by Volcovich Photography. Moy Volcovich, was born in Mexico City and studied photography in Israel where he received the Grinbald Award and Awards from the Ministry of Education. He has participated in over 25 group exhibitions and 10 solo exhibitions in Israel, Canada and Mexico, including exhibitions at the Museo de la Ciudad de Mexico and Museo Nacional de Arte. www.volcovich.com.

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