

## REVIEWS

## Leandro Katz

HENRIQUE FARIA FINE ART

A series of images produced according to preset constraints, Leandro Katz's *S(h)elf Portrait*, 1972, recalls, at first glance, the Photoconceptualism of Ed Ruscha or John Baldessari, yet close inspection reveals something altogether more labyrinthine than anything those artists ever did. Fifty photos, set in six uneven, vertically aligned rows, document the artist converting his studio into an office, working around a pay phone hung incongruously above a desk. The topmost photographs show shelves being constructed and filled with books and knickknacks. Starting in row 2, the photographs from row 1 appear, one by one, on the wall next to the telephone, so that the office's prior states are folded into the new images; this is repeated in row 3 with the row 2 photographs, tripling the effect. In row 4, Katz zooms in as the images from row 3 appear above the desk, ultimately isolating the photograph in which two of row 2's photographs were up. Rows 5 and 6 continue to zoom in, tunneling through the *mise en abyme* to offer a much-magnified glimpse of the very first photo in the series, now almost illegible thanks to the repeated enlargements. In four of the images, running in a diagonal line between the topmost and fourth rows, Katz can be seen flitting about before the camera, out of focus, elusive as the work itself.

First working solely as a poet, Katz moved in 1965 from Buenos Aires to New York, where he lived until 2005 before returning to Argentina. This means that he effectively missed the now-celebrated radicalization of art in his native country in the late 1960s and, like fellow expats Liliana Porter and Jaime Davidovich, adhered to the austere, linguistic Conceptualism prevailing in New York. This exhibition—titled “The Hours (flowers in the sky)” and surveying Katz's drawings, photographs, and films from the 1970s and '80s, as well as one new work, *The Hours*, 2012—demonstrated that a persistent theme from then until now is the camera as a dispassionate observer of movement in time. The films *Paris Has Changed a Lot*, 1976, and *Crowd 7 x 7*, 1974, record, respectively, Park Avenue's traffic flow into Grand Central Station and the swarm of a *Semana Santa* (or Holy Week) crowd in Quito, Ecuador, while *The Hours* consists of twelve surveillance-style photographs of pedestrians in Santiago, Chile, spread across the wall and on stands in the gallery space. *The Hours* juxtaposes its indexical evidence with twelve circles of handmade paper colored with raw pigment, evoking the experiments of Hélio Oiticica, Katz's downstairs neighbor when he lived in New York. A thirteenth, larger circle is illuminated, literally making light of the piece.

Much of Katz's work exemplifies his career-long interest in semiotics, which he taught at Brown University; students from that now-defunct department included Ira Glass and Todd Haynes. An entire room of the exhibition was devoted to seven of the artist's many works featuring the moon, ranging from placid films to a large-scale photo-



Leandro Katz, *S(h)elf Portrait*, 1972, fifty gelatin silver prints, each 10 x 8 1/8".

graph of a typewriter fitted for a lunar-coded alphabet, with images of the moon in twenty-seven phases replacing the letters on the keys. (The full moon stands in for the Spanish Ñ.) In Katz's practice, the moon is a paradigmatic subject. Like a crowd of commuters or a throng of Holy Week revelers, it invites disinterested observation with its mutable form while nevertheless generating an excess: a sense of mystery wholly unexpected in works of Conceptual art.

—Daniel Quiles