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**REPRESENTATIONAL ART IS BACK
 IN THE HOME OF THE AVANT-GARDE,
 SAYS JOHN RUSSELL TAYLOR**

- ALICE NEEL**
Victoria Miro, N1
★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆
- ALEX KATZ**
Timothy Taylor, W1
★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆
- ANSEL KRUT**
DomoBaal, WC1
★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆

SEVERAL OF THE galleries most closely associated with the avant-garde are at the moment showing fairly traditional, carefully representational art. **Alice Neel** (1900-1984) was noted in her early years as an artist of social engagement, especially in the later Thirties, when she lived in Spanish Harlem. That would seem to make her work more at home in the Victoria Miro Gallery, but it is not the subject of this striking show, which aims exclusively to reconstruct her "chronicle of New York 1950-1976".

During those years she re-engaged with the New York art world. The portraits in this show are hardly ever of famous and influential people, and their approach to their subjects is sufficiently unsparring to suggest that she was doing what she wanted rather than manipulating art politics.

The evolving style is intriguingly — and rather unfashionably — Germanic. In the Fifties it ranges from a sort of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, "objective" approach, as in the portrait of *The Baron*, to something much more expressionistic, heavily influenced by Beckmann, as in the contemporary *Baron's Aunt* (both 1959). Later the two are fused, and strong colours start to invade the canvas: by the time of the latest picture in the show, *Bella Abzug* (1976), one can even sense Neel's awareness of Pop Art, though she is still never less than her own woman.

Some people have seen

Alex Katz as the natural successor of the Alice Neel generation. For many years now critics have divided between those who see his devotion to simple forms and flat planes of pale and rather pretty colour as a sort of elegant austerity, and those who regard it as tiresomely superficial. His new show at Timothy Taylor is half portrait and half landscape. The portraits are tall, slim pieces, chopping off their young, period-looking women somewhere in the middle of the face, which renders them, according to the attitude of the beholder, either more abstract or more cartoony. The landscapes are larger, more conventional, and much more innocuous.

For something representational which really sets you back on your heels we have to look to a fringe gallery, domoBaal, which offers a home to **Ansel Krut's** first London painting exhibition for seven years, entitled *Lie Still My Beating Heart*. Those who remember Krut from his beginnings with the lamented Fischer Fine Art will really be surprised. Instead of monochromatic, slightly Goya-esque fantasy scenes peopled often with small figures, we have here large paintings of rather cartoony figures, suggestive of anthropomorphised insects (*Turd Eaters on a Flatcar*, pictured below).

Colour, sometimes brilliant, breaks in. A certain built-in grotesquerie of vision indicates a clear continuity with the early work, but the development is phenomenal. It is good to have Krut back. ● **Alice Neel**, Victoria Miro Gallery, 16 Wharf Road, N1 (020-7336 8109), to July 31. **Alex Katz**, Timothy Taylor Gallery, 24 Dering Street, W1 (020-7409 3344), to July 10. **Ansel Krut**, domoBaal, 3 John Street, WC1 (020-7242 9604), to July 24