

The Great Unseen Collection:
A Selection of Works from Joel and Carole Bernstein

May 7–June 13, 2026
525 West 19th Street, New York



Alex Katz, *Ada and Flowers*, 1980. © 2026 Alex Katz / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

David Zwirner is pleased to present and offer a selection of works from the collection of Joel and Carole Bernstein. Affectionately dubbed The Great Unseen Collection by the Bernsteins and their family, this grouping of works will be on view at the gallery's location at 525 West 19th Street in New York. The selection reflects the refined eye and distinctive taste that the couple honed over more than six decades of collecting, and will include works by Romare Bearden, Joan Brown, Roger Brown, Joe Coleman, Jean Dubuffet, Eric Fischl, Audrey Flack, David Gilhooly, Alex Katz, Alice Neel, Fairfield Porter, Peter Saul, Bob Thompson, Andy Warhol, John Wesley, Tom Wesselmann, and Joseph Yoakum; along with a selection of additional works.

Highlights from the presentation include a double portrait by Alice Neel of artist Red Grooms and his wife and collaborator Mimi Gross from 1967; Fairfield Porter's significant 1966 work *Iced Coffee*, one of his largest paintings, which debuted in his 1967 show at Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York; Alex Katz's monumentally scaled portrait of his wife Ada, *Ada and Flowers* (1980); a 1975 self-portrait by San Francisco painter Joan Brown that features on the cover of the catalogue for her 2022–2023

retrospective organized by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; a late Romare Bearden collage, *Street Serenade* (1979–1980); and Andy Warhol's silk-screened pastiche *Judy Garland* (1979); among other important works.

Joel and Carole Bernstein met as teenagers in Chicago in 1961 and from the beginning, art was at the center of their relationship. For Joel especially, who passed away in 2025, the collection reflected his love for and abiding interest in art. Lacking the funds for more extravagant dates, they would frequently visit the city's art galleries including Allan Frumkin Gallery, Richard Gray Gallery, and B. C. Holland Gallery—run by well-regarded dealers with whom Joel would develop lasting friendships. Bud Holland in particular became an important mentor, training Joel's eye through their frequent conversations. Soon thereafter, Joel began collecting lithographs by artists including Jean Dubuffet and Pablo Picasso, whose work he displayed proudly in his dorm room at Carleton College to the bafflement of many of his classmates.

Settling in Chicago's Hyde Park while Joel pursued medical training, the Bernsteins began to expand their collection, turning their focus to painting. Joel's work in pharmaceuticals for Abbott Laboratories frequently took him to New York where he would visit galleries and make calls to artists whose studios he was interested in visiting. In 1975, Joel opened Dart Gallery in Chicago with Rebecca Blattberg and was integral in bringing the work of a number of New York-based artists including Jules Olitski, David Smith, Sam Gilliam, and Jim Dine to Chicago. After three years, tired of saving the best works for others, Joel sold his stake in the gallery and returned to collecting as his primary pursuit.

While early on, the Bernsteins collected abstract works by artists including Helen Frankenthaler, Frank Stella, and Larry Poons, by the 1980s they began to feel that they wanted to live with art that more directly reflected the circumstances of its era, and began transitioning their collection to primarily figurative works. A voracious reader, Joel avidly tracked art world movements through his large library of books and art periodicals, following their trajectory with great interest and often predicting emergent trends. He also imparted his deep knowledge and appreciation for the works to anyone who passed through his carefully curated home, from his medical colleagues to board members of prestigious museums that he served alongside, to his children and grandchildren. Carole too became a dedicated steward of the collection, meticulously keeping track of the works while also working to expand the arts education programs in her children's schools.

Joel came up with the name The Great Unseen Collection, which the deeply private couple delighted in seeing as a credit line in catalogues and on checklists. Their hope was not that their works remain hidden from view, but to the contrary, that they would exist and circulate and be appreciated without a particular attachment to the collectors. Joel served on the boards of the Phoenix Art Museum and the Smart Museum of Art, Chicago, where a gallery and garden are named in the Bernsteins' honor. He also donated numerous works to these and many other institutions, such as the Milwaukee Art Museum and the Art Institute of Chicago, where a major Jo Baer painting gifted by the Bernsteins regularly hangs in the permanent collection galleries.

Of their time together, Carole recently reflected: "Art has taken me places in my life that I never thought I would see, or become part of. Our pictures have been in museums. It's been quite a ride. Joel put me on that ride."

Jonathan Laib, associate partner at David Zwirner, noted about the Bernsteins: "I have been grateful to know the Bernsteins, and to witness their level of dedication. They quite literally surrounded themselves and their children with art—art and artists they felt connected to and challenged by. The range of their collecting knows no bounds, reflecting a curiosity and desire to expand their worldview to include the perspectives of the artists they love and respect. At David Zwirner, we hope our presentation honors their purposeful immersion in the arts and encourages others to explore the visual world as voraciously as they did."

Kristine Bell, senior partner and head of secondary market sales at David Zwirner, added: "It is an honor to present a selection of artworks from Joel and Carole's extraordinary collection. In a recent conversation, Carole noted that they had always considered themselves custodians of the art, and that they were grateful for the time they were able to spend with it. Now it is time for these works to find their next home and become part of someone else's life. We look forward to placing them with the care they deserve."

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