



CADE TOMPKINS PROJECTS

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Art Fairs

Why Is a Multimillion-Dollar Portrait by Alice Neel for Sale at an Emerging Art Fair in Los Angeles?

The painting, a tribute to a Hollywood screenwriter, hasn't been seen by the public in 25 years.

Sarah Cascone, February 16, 2023

Since 2012, Spring Break Art Show has been known as a burgeoning source of emerging art, a place to encounter up-and-coming creatives for the first time. That's still true, but at the fair's fourth Los Angeles edition, you can also buy a masterful portrait by Alice Neel.

Cade Tompkins of Cade Tompkins Projects in Providence is breaking out the big guns for Spring Break this year, with a booth dedicated to 1940s-era Hollywood screenwriter Fanya Foss, anchored by a 1930 oil painting by her good friend Neel. The price is available on request, but Tompkins confirmed that it is in the multiple millions.



Alice Neel, *Fanya* (1930)



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“I felt that Spring Break is experimental enough that it could welcome a painting of Alice Neel that also tells the story of Fanya Foss,” Tompkins told Artnet News. (The dealer has previously participated in six editions of Spring Break New York.)



Alice Neel, *Fanya* (1930). Photo: Samuel Morgan Photography

Born in Odessa, Foss was was a part of the milieu of artists and intellectuals in Greenwich Village during the Great Depression, as well as a Columbia University librarian, *Brooklyn Eagle* reporter, and bookstore owner. She became friends with Neel after hiring her at the shop, and Neel went on to do four portraits of Foss.

“Alice was definitely looking up to Fanya,” Tompkins said.

It was during a trip across the U.S., heading west to see the country, that Foss got her break in Hollywood, with RKO Radio Pictures purchasing one of her scripts, kicking off her career in film and television.

The portrait of Foss at Spring Break is on view for the first time in 25 years, since it was in a show at New York’s Robert Miller Gallery. It’s been in a private collection ever since, and the owner has asked Tompkins to help her find it a new home.



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Even if you didn't know the work's art-historical import, the painting has a commanding presence at the fair, perched above a mirrored desk featuring a trio of historical photographs of its subject.

"She's very calming," Spring Break cofounder Ambre Kelly told Artnet News, admitting she kept returning to Fanya during the fair's chaotic install period. "She's been my center."

Spring Break Art Show is on view at Skylight Culver City, 5880 Adams Boulevard, Culver City Arts District, Los Angeles, February 15–19, 2023.