

Petzel

JOYCE PENSATO

Batman vs. Spiderman

January 15 – February 27, 2021
35 East 67th Street

In collaboration with the Joyce Pensato Estate, Petzel Gallery is pleased to announce the exhibition *Batman vs. Spiderman* from January 15 – February 27, 2021 at its Upper East Side location, 35 East 67th Street, Parlor Floor.

“I was resisting working with the traditional still life—apples and pears and all that crap. I just fell in love with Batman. I think it was the ears.”¹

The exhibition will consist of over fifteen charcoals on paper from the mid-1970s of the cartoon characters Batman and Spiderman and a selection of enamels on paper from the 2000s of Mickey Mouse and other characters, most of which have never been exhibited publicly.

In the mid-1970s while a student at the New York Studio School, Joyce Pensato found herself at odds with the traditional pedagogy of a still life drawing class, frustrated and unable to find “life” in a still life. At the encouragement of her teacher and mentor, Mercedes Matter, the artist decided to incorporate her own language, which took its first form in the life-size cut out of Batman, the fictional superhero created by DC Comics, that the artist found discarded on the street and dragged into her studio. It was by posing the cut out with traditional still life elements, such as a chair, for example, that the artist began to assume her distinctive voice of melding Pop iconography with rigorous artistic technique, resulting in charcoals on paper of Batman and Spiderman wrestling with other, more traditional still life elements in the picture plane. Superman made a brief appearance as well. In a question and answer with Faye Hirsh in *Art in America* in 2012, Pensato replied of her interest in Batman: “Yes, he’s mysterious, he has a mask on him. And you don’t know what’s behind.”² Yet in Pensato’s drawings the invincible caped crusader seems to mightily struggle with a chair or doll, while Spiderman interacts with the chair as though it’s a barre class. In her insightful way, the artist brings these masked superheroes ironically down to earth.

For her enamels on paper in the 2000s, Pensato continued her interest in the disembodied head of cartoon characters, facing frontal as though in a passport photo, a white visage on a black background. The grainy, scattershot effect, which the artist achieved by blotting newspaper onto the enamel while still wet, seems to reference an FBI “Most Wanted” alert. In fact, Pensato sometimes referred to these enamels and some of her paintings as “mug shots,” even titling a series of enamels on paper from the early 2000s “Wanted.” Even on a best day, no criminal looks well in a mug shot; in Pensato’s hands, Batman, Snoopy, Tony the Tiger, and her dog Max look particularly disheveled and despondent. Akin to monoprints, these works proved a harbinger of the artist’s paintings to come from the mid-2000s until her passing in 2019.

Joyce Pensato (1941–2019) lived and worked in Brooklyn, New York and studied at the New York Studio School. The artist was best known for her paintings and drawings which employed a familiar cast of cartoon characters, including Mickey and Minnie Mouse; Donald and Daisy Duck; Batman; Felix the Cat; Homer, Bart, Marge, and Lisa Simpson; and the characters Stan and Cartman from the series “South Park.” Pensato was committed to her baleful transmutation of American cartoon culture—employing her fast, assured, and gestural hand—to shed light on the arguable darkness lurking within our familiar Pop iconography through her own Abstract Expressionist technique.

Petzel

Joyce Pensato received many awards in her lifetime including: Robert De Niro, Sr. Prize (2013); Award of Merit Medal for Painting from the American Academy of Arts and Letters (2012); Anonymous Was A Woman Award (2010); Pollock-Krasner Foundation Award (1997); Guggenheim Fellowship (1996); New York Foundation for the Arts (1995); and Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation (1992).

Her work has been shown widely, including in exhibitions at: South London Gallery, UK (2018); Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL (2016/2017); Whitney Museum of American Art, NY (2017); Kunstraum Innsbruck, Austria (2016); Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, TX (2015); Rose Art Museum, Waltham, MA (2015); Santa Monica Museum of Art, CA (2013); Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis, MO (2013); Speed Museum of Art, Louisville, KY (2011); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, CA (2000); and St. Louis Art Museum, MO (1994).

Pensato's work is included in the collections of: Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL; Dallas Museum of Art, TX; FRAC des Pays de la Loire, France; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA; Museum of Modern Art, NY; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, CA; and Whitney Museum of American Art, NY, among others.

Petzel Gallery is located on the parlor floor and third floors of 35 East 67th Street New York, NY 10065. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 10:00 AM–6:00 PM. For press inquiries, please contact Ricky Lee at ricky@petzel.com, or call (212) 680-9467.

¹ John Yau. "Joyce Pensato's Rescue Operation," *I Killed Kenny*, catalogue. Santa Monica Museum of Art, 2014.

² Faye Hirsch, "Cartoon Studio: Q + A with Joyce Pensato," *Art in America*, January 31, 2012 (ill.).