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Gagosian to Present *Tom Wesselmann: Intimate Spaces*, Opening in Beverly Hills on May 3, 2023

Featuring a Number of Important Works from the Artist's Estate and Personal Collection



Tom Wesselmann, *Great American Nude #53*, 1964, oil and printed reproductions on canvas, in 2 parts, overall: 120 × 96 inches (304.8 × 243.8 cm) © The Estate of Tom Wesselmann/Licensed by ARS/VAGA, New York

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My one intention is to always find new ways to make exciting paintings using the situation of the traditional nude.

—Tom Wesselmann

BEVERLY HILLS, April 11, 2023—Gagosian is pleased to present *Tom Wesselmann: Intimate Spaces*, an exhibition of paintings of nudes by Tom Wesselmann. Following the 2018 exhibition *Wesselmann: 1963–1983* at Gagosian, Beverly Hills, and *Tom Wesselmann: Standing Still Lives* at Gagosian, New York, the same year, *Intimate Spaces* is organized in collaboration with the Estate of Tom Wesselmann. The exhibition includes a number of important works held by the artist's estate, including key examples recognized as the pinnacle of their respective series.

A defining artist of US Pop art, Wesselmann produced innovative mixed-media paintings that brought the energy of commercial culture to still lifes, interiors, landscapes, and nudes. The exhibition concentrates on the artist's primary subject, the female nude, with key works from *Great American Nudes* (1961–73) and subsequent series. With a nod to both the great American novel and the American dream, the title of *Great American Nudes* also refers to Wesselmann's affinity for the scale of Abstract Expressionist paintings, billboards, and movie screens. Inspired by Henri Matisse's odalisques, Wesselmann employed a saturated palette, clearly defined contours, and interlocking positive and negative shapes. The paintings are set in domestic interiors and often incorporate collage and assemblage elements, appearing highly contemporary in their provocative discontinuities of style.

Wesselmann's nudes became icons of the 1960s sexual revolution. Wishing to avoid portraiture, the artist frequently deemphasized facial features, foregrounding both abstraction and overt eroticism. "The figures dealt primarily with their presence," he wrote (as his pseudonym, Slim Stealingworth). "Personality would interfere with the bluntness of the *fact* of the nude. When body features were included, they were those important to erotic simplification, like lips and nipples. There was no modelling, no hint at dimension."

Great American Nude #38 and #41 (both 1962) share a red-white-and-blue palette and stars-and-stripes motifs, further emphasizing their American origins. In #38, the reclining nude has prominent tan lines, with a tropical scene of palm trees collaged into the window frame behind her. As the series progressed, Wesselmann further increased the works' scale and adopted brighter colors, sharper contours, and more audacious juxtapositions of painting, collage, and assemblage, then transitioned to painting primarily by hand.

Great American Nude #53 (1964) measures ten by eight feet over two joined canvases and includes large-scale images collaged from commercially printed billboards; it is one of only two works in the series to do so. (The figure's mouth is from a billboard for RC Cola, and the roses are from an advertisement for Four Roses Bourbon.) A central painting in the series, it focuses on a tightly cropped torso of the reclining figure, introducing a composition that would dominate the second half of the series. Made without collage elements, *Great American Nude* #73 (1965) depicts a figure with waves and a cloud-filled sky. *Great American Nude* #74 (1965) is a plastic-formed, molded work produced in a series of twelve, each painted with a unique color variation.

Bedroom Painting #4 (1968) features a close-up of a single breast, its shape harmonizing with an orange, flowers, and window blinds in a taut composition of highly contrasting colors. The *Smoker* series further explores fragmented representations of the body, along with the possibilities of a shaped canvas. More than thirteen feet long, *Smoker* #8 (1973) is the largest and most significant of its series. Here, Wesselmann introduces a hand to the isolated image of a partially open mouth, adding slender fingers holding a cigarette, glossy nails, and a veil of smoke. *Bedroom Blonde with TV* (1984–93) is the only *Bedroom Painting*, and one of five works by Wesselmann in total, to incorporate a working television—a motif he first used in 1962. Whereas earlier televisions in his works were black and white, here he developed a composition around a moving color picture.

A forthcoming book, *Tom Wesselmann: Great American Nudes*, will be published by the Estate of Tom Wesselmann, Almine Rech, and Gagosian. Authored by Susan Davidson with an essay by Rachel Middleman, it will be the first comprehensive publication dedicated to this body of work.

The exhibition *Tom Wesselmann: After Matisse* is on view at Musée Matisse, Nice, until May 29, 2023.

Tom Wesselmann was born in Cincinnati in 1931 and died in New York in 2004. Collections include Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; High Museum of Art, Atlanta; Tate, London; Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main, Germany; Hamburger Kunsthalle, Germany; Albertina, Vienna; Museu Coleção Berardo, Lisbon; and Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo. Recent exhibitions include *Beyond Pop Art*:

A Tom Wesselmann Retrospective, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (2012, traveled to Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, 2013; Denver Art Museum, 2014; Cincinnati Art Museum, 2014–15); and *Tom Wesselmann: La Promesse du Bonheur*, Nouveau Musée National de Monaco (2018–19).

#TomWesselmann

TOM WESSELMANN

Intimate Spaces

Opening reception: Wednesday, May 3, 6–8pm

May 3–June 16, 2023

456 North Camden Drive, Beverly Hills

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