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Gagosian to Present *Francesca Woodman: Lately I Find a Sliver of Mirror Is Simply to Slice an Eyelid*

Opening in Rome on April 29, Exhibition Examines Woodman's Affinities with Surrealism



Francesca Woodman, *Untitled or #4 from a Series "Dissection of a Portrait"*, 1976, lifetime gelatin silver print mounted on mat board, sheet: 5 7/8 × 5 7/8 inches (14.8 × 14.8 cm), mat board: 14 × 11 inches (35.6 × 27.9 cm) © Woodman Family Foundation/SIAE, Rome

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ROME, March 18, 2026—Gagosian is pleased to present *Lately I Find a Sliver of Mirror Is Simply to Slice an Eyelid*, an exhibition of photographs by Francesca Woodman (1958–1981), opening on April 29. Focusing on her affinities with Surrealism, the exhibition features nearly fifty prints Woodman made during her lifetime, many of which have never previously been exhibited.

Picturing her own body as well as those of other models in natural landscapes and dilapidated interiors, Woodman used composition and *mise-en-scène* to convey a sense of mystery and theatricality. Destabilizing boundaries between bodies, objects, and settings, her photographs enact both assertions of self and themes of dissociation. They feature figures nude, clothed, or shrouded; exposed or partially hidden; and juxtaposed with everyday objects—eggs, gloves, masks, seashells, teacups, fruit, and fish—that hint at symbolic significance. These works reveal an artist who was creatively assured, playfully exploratory, and intrigued by the Surrealists' transformative use of allegory, language, and ordinary items to express the marvelous and uncanny.

Woodman studied Dada and Surrealism at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), and her notebooks contain many references to their ideas. Italy also played an important role in her development; she grew up spending summers in Tuscany with her parents, who were both American artists. Fluent in Italian and conversant with Italian art and culture, she lived in Rome in 1977 and 1978 while still enrolled at RISD. There, she frequented Libreria Maldoror, a bookstore and gallery specializing in Dada, Surrealist, and Futurist art and literature that held her first solo exhibition in Europe.

In 1979, she wrote to Italian editor Alberto Piovani, citing as influences “[Josef] Koudelka, Brassai, [Jean-Auguste-Dominique] Ingres, and Balthus,” and noting: “I would like words to be to my photographs what the photographs are to the text in André Breton’s ‘Nadja.’ He picks out all the allusion and enigmatic details of some rather ordinary unmysterious snapshots and elaborates them into a story. I’d like my photographs to condense experience.”

The exhibition’s title refers to that of Woodman’s c. 1975–77 photograph of hands holding a fragment of a mirror beneath a tabletop still life and has the associative shock of Surrealist imagery suggestive of Breton and Luis Buñuel. In a notebook entry written in 1976, Woodman connected it to a class on fairy tales that she took in her first year at RISD, linking the phrase to the fable of “The Snow Queen,” which imagines mystical mirror shards that distort the perception of beauty and ugliness. Additional works on view incorporate mirrors, panes of glass, and photographed, painted, and printed images, disrupting expectations of a single unified view through doubling and substitution.

According to art historian Alyce Mahon in her new article for *Gagosian Quarterly*, “Objects are not owned but are malleable in Woodman’s work, serving to bring the surreal into the lived space, whether it be the studio, an abandoned house, or nature. In this way their usefulness takes on a new understanding: they morph into vessels for novel encounters between strangers or strange things.”

Other photographs picture the female figure manipulated in unusual ways, draping eels and gar over her nude body, pinching her flesh with clothespins, or wrapping her legs with tape. The resulting images relate to Surrealist interests in dream imagery and fetishization while also suggesting parodies of the movement’s tropes. Operating on both sides of the camera to create her work, Woodman engaged with Surrealism within the contexts of contemporary photography, Conceptual art, feminism, and other sources that she encountered at RISD and in Rome.

For Francesca Woodman’s biographical information and exhibition history, [please visit gagosian.com](http://gagosian.com).

FRANCESCA WOODMAN

Lately I Find a Sliver of Mirror Is Simply to Slice an Eyelid

Opening reception: Wednesday, April 29, 6–8pm

April 29–July 31, 2026

Via Francesco Crispi 16, Rome

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