

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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PRESS RELEASE

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David Smith: The Last Nudes

January 25th – March 3rd, 2001

Opening Reception: January 25th, 6-8pm

*These paintings have a radical freshness, breadth, and apparent spontaneity, due in part to the fact that Smith radically cropped them from unstretched canvas ... As a group, the paintings convey a dynamic multitude of facial expressions and attitudinal types, ranging from the supine odalisque, ... to the intellectual reader, ... to the confrontational gladiator. They even seem to include the descriptive allusions to such popular types as the silver-screen vamp...the coy teenage temptress, post-Lolita...the bohemian earth mother, and the modern -day Amazon--a powerful woman on the phone.**

Gagosian Gallery is pleased to announce the opening of **David Smith: The Last Nudes**. The exhibition is a selection of paintings made in the winter of 1964, during the last months of Smith's life. Painted at his studio in Bolton Landing, upstate New York, they are being shown for the first time in Europe.

Beginning in the late twenties, and throughout his life, Smith used the figure as a touchstone from which drawings, paintings and sculpture drew resonant meaning. In the case of the *Last Nudes*, the starting point was photographs taken by Smith of models in everyday poses: standing in a hallway, reading a book, casually sitting in a chair, their nudity a disjunctive confrontation. As Candida Smith points out, "*the mediation of the photographic technique created an abstracted space between artist and model.*"

The physical potency of the photographs was transformed by Smith through his dynamically gestural painting process into these formally powerful, sexually charged paintings. Due to their shocking anti-puritanical content, as well as the difficulty in integrating them with the heroically "pure" concept of "Abstract Expressionism," the Nudes have been censoriously omitted from most discussion of Smith's work. Ranging from lyrically rendered drawing to explosively gestural abstraction, these paintings exemplify Smith's refusal to allow for a delineation between painting and sculpture or between abstract and figurative work.

The *Last Nudes*, painted with enamel paint in tones of blacks and browns, were executed with an ear syringe. By squeezing the bulb of the syringe, Smith dripped, squirted, puddled and drew the enamel paint across unstretched, pre-primed canvas. It is evident that he moved and tipped the canvas while working; the paintings show the pouring and dripping marks of constant motion when the enamel was still wet.

The *Last Nudes* were painted in 1964 during the peak of Smith's creative output. Made concurrently with the sculptural series: *Cubi*, *Gondola* and *Zig*, they underline the significance that the figure held throughout Smith's work. The spontaneity and sensuality of the *Last Nudes* adds to our understanding of the depth and complexity of Smith's achievement and compliments the massive grandeur of his sculpture.

*David Smith, now at home in a more diverse pantheon, turns out not to be the monolithic figure once imagined ... a truly seminal, multifarious artist whose work, grounded in all the senses, continues in unexpected ways to make his mark.**

A fully illustrated catalogue with an essay by Brooks Adams will accompany the exhibition.

* Excerpts taken from Brooks Adams: David Smith's Last Nudes.
Published by Gagosian Gallery, 2000.