

GAGOSIAN



TOM WESSELMANN

Wesselmann: 1963–1983

Opening reception: Thursday, July 12, 6–8pm

July 12–August 24, 2018

456 North Camden Drive, Beverly Hills

Tom Wesselmann, *Still Life #29*, 1963, oil and collage on canvas, in 2 parts, 108 × 144 inches (274.3 × 365.8 cm) © The Estate of Tom Wesselmann/Licensed by VAGA, New York

June 12, 2018

I used what was around me, so my culture was what I used. But I didn't use it for cultural reasons—it was not a cultural comment.

—Slim Stealingworth (a pseudonym of Tom Wesselmann)

Gagosian is pleased to present *Wesselmann: 1963–1983*, an exhibition of seven monumental paintings made by Tom Wesselmann over a span of two decades. This is the first time this group of works has been shown on the West Coast.

During the 1950s, when Wesselmann was a student at Cooper Union in New York, his drawings often took the form of hybrid collages that incorporated sketches and scraps of wallpaper and advertisements that he found in the New York City subway. As experimentation evolved into

technique, his early assemblage paintings, which included functional objects and gadgets, gave way to shaped canvas paintings in which objects are arranged in space as tableaux. Diverging from the Abstract Expressionist principles that reigned in 1950s New York, Wesselmann played an integral role in defining New York Pop art, while retaining art historical precedents, including a notable inheritance from Henri Matisse.

In 1962 Wesselmann began accumulating printed commercial billboard posters, which he then transformed and recontextualized with his own brushstrokes and anomalous configurations. *Still Life #29* (1963), twelve feet in width, depicts ordinary objects arranged on a kitchen table, including a fruit bowl in which a photographic apple is collaged over a lemon and orange that are flatly rendered in oil paint. Beyond the objects, common to any American kitchen, a Volkswagen traverses a road as if through the window of Wesselmann's chimerical kitchen interior.

The scale of the billboard works was unprecedented in Wesselmann's oeuvre, and prefigured the spatial and pictorial innovation of his *Standing Still Life* paintings, collaged compositions with proportions that dwarf human scale. These still lifes comprise multiple canvases shaped like the objects they depict and mounted on both wall and ground. Wesselmann achieved precise formal and chromatic arrangements by shifting panels until the composition "locked into place."

Wesselmann's *Standing Still Life* works, along with the contemporaneous *Bedroom Paintings*, are charged with narrative implications. He used still-life motifs to approach portraiture anew, suggesting human presence through arrangements of inanimate objects: the still life in place of the portrait, or nude. In *Bedroom Painting #30* (1974), the objects in the still life become a surrogate for Wesselmann's wife and lifelong muse, Claire, who is portrayed via her belongings placed on a bedside table. Absent from the image itself, the subject remains present to the artist. *Still Life #61* (1976) turns this method inward, to self-portraiture. A six-part work measuring over thirty feet in width, it shows Wesselmann's own toothbrush, cocktail ring, and house key. With a canny and irreverent eroticism, the objects suggest the passage of time: an arrival, an activity in progress, a night spent together.

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue, including a new text by Ara H. Merjian, a conversation between Michael Craig-Martin and Jeffrey Sturges, and a chronology by Lauren Mahony.

Tom Wesselmann was born in Cincinnati in 1931, and died in New York in 2004. Collections include Tate, London; Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main, Germany; Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, Germany; Albertina Museum, Vienna; Museu Coleção Berardo, Lisbon, Portugal; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; High Museum of Art, Atlanta; and Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo. Recent institutional exhibitions include Museo d'Arte Contemporanea di Roma, Rome (2005); *Tom Wesselmann DRAWS*, Kreeger Museum, Washington, DC (2011); and *Beyond Pop Art: A Tom Wesselmann Retrospective*, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (2012, traveled to Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond; Denver Art Museum; and Cincinnati Art Museum).

Tom Wesselmann: La Promesse du Bonheur will open at Le Nouveau Musée National de Monaco in June 2018.

#Wesselmann1963to1983

Press

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