ALMINE RECH

Tom Wesselmann & MATSUYAMA
Wesselmann x Matsuyama

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This fall, Tom Wesselmann's studio, where he worked from 1994 until his death in 2004, will host a collaboration with MATSUYAMA.

Presented by the Estate of Tom Wesselmann, with the generous support of Almine Rech, paintings by Wesselmann (1931–2004) hang alongside works by contemporary Japanese American artist MATSUYAMA. The exhibition brings together two artists separated by history and culture but united by a shared ambition: to transform the familiar into an experience of heightened perception. Installed in the space where much of Wesselmann's later work was created, the exhibition offers a rare opportunity to encounter two artists who challenge us to see the familiar world anew.

That exchange first took shape on an international stage in 2024, when MATSUYAMA was among the contemporary artists commissioned for 'Pop Forever, Tom Wesselmann & ...' at the Fondation Louis Vuitton. His contribution revealed striking affinities with Wesselmann's paintings, not only through shared imagery but through a common impulse to rework familiar codes of figures, interiors, and popular culture into bold, visually striking compositions. 'Wesselmann x Matsuyama' returns that encounter to Wesselmann’s former studio, allowing visitors to experience those affinities in the very setting where his late practice unfolded.

Wesselmann described his work as pursuing “super reality,” a sharpened state of perception in which the ordinary is encountered with renewed visual intensity. As he wrote, these everyday objects were “not especially significant... until they were isolated and their super-reality potential anticipated.” Once removed from habitual experience and reimagined within a painting, these objects become less things to recognize than things to see. Rather than commenting on American consumer culture, Wesselmann sought to intensify it pictorially, transforming the material world of daily life into one of extraordinary visual immediacy. Saturated color, monumental scale, printed imagery, functioning appliances, and shaped canvases all served that single aim.

MATSUYAMA approaches the contemporary image world from a different historical and cultural position. For him, the visual world of the twenty-first century is already global. Japanese visual traditions, Western art history, advertising, and the experience of living in Brooklyn coexist within a single visual vocabulary, which he reimagines through his own lived experience between cultures and geographies. If Wesselmann transformed the visual language of postwar America from within its own culture, MATSUYAMA works within a visual world in which cultural boundaries are already porous. His paintings transform recognizable imagery into renewed visual experiences while simultaneously reflecting the cultural and historical complexities of that global condition.

The affinities between the two artists are especially evident in their treatment of the interior. Wesselmann's *Bedroom Painting* series merges the nude and the still life, transforming domestic space through fragmented bodies, oversized flowers, and everyday objects. MATSUYAMA approaches the domestic interior through a different cultural lens. Shaped by a culture that prizes domestic privacy, he was struck by Americans' willingness to reveal their homes. He returns to that experience repeatedly, constructing fantastical interiors animated by saturated color, sensual poses, and lush, competing patterns. Here, memory, cultural identity, and contemporary visual culture converge, extending Wesselmann's exploration of domestic space into the twenty-first century. Both artists further expand that space through shaped canvases, treating the support as an active part of the composition rather than a neutral frame. The result is a painting that extends physically and conceptually beyond the conventional rectangle.

One of the exhibition's central pairings brings together Wesselmann's *Still Life #35* (1963) and MATSUYAMA's *We The People* (2025). *Still Life #35*, a billboard-scale still life composed of four canvases, depicts a table set with Royal Crown Cola, Made-Rite bread, and a can of Libby's Beef Stew. Rising from the tabletop is a monumental fragment of an actual Royal Crown Cola billboard. Rather than simply inserting an advertisement into a traditional still life, Wesselmann transforms the still life itself, enlarging it to the scale of the billboard so that the two occupy the same pictorial world. Familiar commercial imagery becomes an integral part of the painting's formal structure, embodying Wesselmann's idea of "super reality."

Across the studio, *We The People*, painted over eighteen months, presents a brightly lit American supermarket where everyday consumer packaging becomes the setting for a remarkable art historical encounter. At its center, MATSUYAMA reimagines the figures from Jacques-Louis David's *The Death of Socrates* (1787), one of the defining paintings of the Western canon, relocating them to the aisle of an American supermarket. Cereal boxes and medicine packages become formal elements—patterns of color, geometry, and typography that construct a deep, almost vertiginous space while drawing the eye repeatedly back to the central drama. For MATSUYAMA, the supermarket becomes a contemporary stage where art history, advertising, and everyday life coexist within a single pictorial order. Familiar brands are transformed from objects of recognition into a framework of looking. Rather than quoting familiar visual languages for their own sake, MATSUYAMA reorganizes them into a pictorial experience that rewards sustained attention. The new relationships that emerge are not only formal but cultural, inviting viewers to consider how art history, commerce, and contemporary life intersect within a global visual world.

Working in different historical moments and cultural contexts, Wesselmann and MATSUYAMA arrive at remarkably similar questions about what painting can do. Rather than asking us simply to recognize the world around us, both invite us to look again—to discover in the familiar the possibility of renewed visual experience. Seen together in the studio where Wesselmann developed many of these ideas, their works reveal a conversation across historical moments, united by a shared conviction that painting can still transform the familiar into something newly seen.