ALMINE RECH

Tom Wesselmann
The Greatness of the Everyday

Nov 9, 2026 — Jan 9, 2027 | Shanghai

Almine Rech Shanghai is pleased to present Tom Wesselmann's first solo exhibition in mainland China, on view from November 9, 2026 to January 9, 2027.

'The Greatness of the Everyday', Tom Wesselmann's first solo exhibition in mainland China, offers an opportunity to discover or revisit the work of this major figure in American Pop Art. The exhibition traces the development of his practice through the series that defined it, from his early *Great American Nudes* to his late *Sunset Nudes*.

Wesselmann worked tirelessly, developing distinct series linked by recurring subjects and evolving aesthetic interests. Driven by a desire to innovate, he explored new media and approaches to composition through familiar motifs. His experiments included collage, unconventional cropping, and dramatic shifts in scale. These approaches allowed him to reimagine traditional subjects, transforming the familiar into the remarkable.

Three genres stand out in the exhibition: still life, the nude, and landscape. Central to Wesselmann's practice, they also connect his work to the wider history of art. As he explained: "When I made the decision in 1959 that I was not going to be an abstract painter, that I was going to be a representational painter, I had absolutely no enthusiasm about any particular subject or direction or anything. I was starting from absolute zero. And in choosing representational painting, I decided to do, as my subject matter, the history of art: I would do nudes, still lives, landscapes, interiors, portraits, etc."[1]

The earliest and latest works in the exhibition, *Little Great American Nude #23* (1964) and *Sunset Nude with Matisse Self-Portrait* (2004), demonstrate Wesselmann's enduring commitment to the nude, particularly the reclining figure of the odalisque. They also reveal the evolution of his visual language, from collage to bold, economical lines. Henri Matisse was a lasting influence on this development. After first encountering the French artist's work in 1959, Wesselmann continued to draw inspiration from it throughout his career, particularly in the late *Sunset Nudes*. In *Sunset Nude with Matisse Self-Portrait*, painted in the year of Wesselmann's death, Matisse himself appears within the composition.

Several works offer a glimpse into Wesselmann's studio practice. *Maquette for Still Life with Johns and Matisse* (1991), *Study for Mouth #5* (1966), and *Study for Bedroom Painting #23* (1969), among others, reveal how he developed his compositions. His interest in scale and in isolating individual motifs is evident across different media and series, from the tightly cropped *Bedroom Paintings* and isolated *Mouths* to his steel cutouts. In *Fast Sketch Woodstock Area, England* (1989/93) and *Birthday Bouquet for Claire (Black)* (1990), drawing, painting, and sculpture converge to offer fresh interpretations of landscape and still life.

'The Greatness of the Everyday' reveals a distinctive artistic voice shaped by a fascination with contemporary life and ordinary experience. A woman's hand, a bowl of goldfish, a rural landscape: for Wesselmann, these everyday subjects offered endless possibilities for artistic invention.

— Louisa Mahoney, researcher

Read the full essay by Lu Mingjun here

1. Tom Wesselmann, in Marco Livingstone, “Telling it like it is,” *Tom Wesselmann: A Retrospective Survey 1959 to 1993*, Cantz Editions, 1996, p. 10