

Tom Wesselmann

Oct 3, 2017 — Jan 13, 2018 | London, Grosvenor Hill

Almine Rech Gallery and Gagosian are pleased to announce two concurrent and related exhibitions of works by Tom Wesselmann in London. Organized in partnership with The Estate of Tom Wesselmann, both exhibitions highlight the bold approach to scale and color, art history and erotic representation that make Wesselmann one of the most inventive Pop artists of his time.

Over the years, I'd gotten excited about scale...I wanted to deal with these big shapes; so I came in closer and closer on the nude...That was really when my work began. —Tom Wesselmann

Wesselmann first gained critical acclaim in the early 1960s for his *Great American Nude* series. Many of these lounging female subjects, with pouted lips and tan lines, were painted in patriotic red, white, and blue, combining the prototypes of Western figure painting—from Titian to Matisse—with the high voltage of American advertising. After the *Great American Nude* paintings, Wesselmann shifted his focus, exploring more intimate, close-up views of the nude in the *Bedroom Paintings*.

At Gagosian, a selection of *Bedroom Paintings* made between 1968 and 1983 reveals the full breadth of the series that Wesselmann considered so central to his oeuvre. Fragments of the human body, such as a hand or a breast, are juxtaposed with objects common to the bedroom—a light switch, flowers, the edges of pillows and curtains. These large-scale compositions draw attention to the abstract properties of each depicted form, the interlocking positive and negative shapes evoking the technique of collage in areas of sharp delineation, bold color, and softly rendered detail. In *Bedroom Painting #63* (1983), the bedroom is framed by a female nude, her arm, torso, and thigh forming a triangular window. Although she is not at the center of the image, her presence is unmistakable, determining the complex shape of the canvas.

The first time I broke the rectangle, it seemed like a big deal, even though it had been done for years in advertising. —Tom Wesselmann

At Almine Rech Gallery, the key work *Nude with Lamp* (1977-80) is accompanied by related paintings and works on paper. For Wesselmann, *Nude with Lamp* posed two challenges: the eccentric shape of the canvas and the *chiaroscuro* of the nude in shadow. While his first shaped canvases were determined by the silhouette of a single depicted object, as in the *Smoker* series, later works such as *Nude with Lamp* are shaped according to their own logic, rather than that of the painted image, utilizing the blank space of the bare wall behind. Repurposing the formal elements of advertising, such as shaped posters and cutouts, Wesselmann complicates the relationship between his female figures and their environments, their long, tanned legs often appearing to extend beyond the two-dimensional surface. After *Great American Nude #100* (1973), his titles became more descriptive, even personal, sometimes naming the model, as in *Pat Nude* or *Barbara and Baby*, detailed studies of which are included in this exhibition. Wesselmann commented that these works were “his first attempts to be emotionally touching, on levels other than sexual.”

Tom Wesselmann was born in Cincinnati in 1931, and died in New York in 2004. His work is featured in museum collections worldwide, including Tate, London; Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt; Hamburger Kunsthalle, Germany; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Albertina, Vienna; Berardo Museum, Lisbon; Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Contemporary Art North Miami, FL; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA; Israel Museum, Jerusalem; and Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo. Recent institutional exhibitions include Museo d'Arte Contemporanea di Roma (2005); "Tom Wesselmann DRAWS," The Kreeger Museum, Washington, D.C. (2011); "Beyond Pop Art: A Tom Wesselmann Retrospective," Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Quebec (2012, traveled to Cincinnati Art Museum, OH; and Denver Art Museum, CO, through 2014); and "Pop Art and Beyond: Tom Wesselmann," Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, VA (2013).