

# Medium



michael tomeo

Lives in nyc. Writes art reviews.

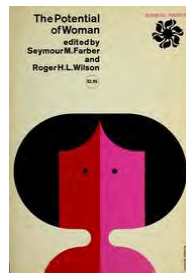
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## Polly Apfelbaum *The Potential of Women* at Alexander Gray Associates



Polly Apfelbaum, *The Potential of Women*, Installation View, Alexander Gray Associates, 2017

“Hi I’m Polly, thanks for coming last night! What’re your names?” My nine year old son and I stood kind of agog in the chips aisle of the Key Food on Fulton Street one Saturday when Polly Apfelbaum came up to us like a long lost friend. First of all, no one comes up to anyone in Key Food. I’ve walked right past neighbors in there that I’ve known for years. Cashiers that I’ve been to a million times barely look up from their scanners. But Polly remembered us from her opening at 56 Henry the night before and wanted to say hi. Truth is, an artist of her caliber, with her cv, really doesn’t have to remember us, let alone introduce herself at a grocery store the next day. But she did, and after some further small talk we realized we lived sort of near each other and, even though I’ve always really liked her work, at that moment I became a fan for life.



The Potential of Woman, 1968. Cover by Rudolph deHarek

For her current show at Alexander Grey Associates, *The Potential of Women*, Apfelbaum uses a 1968 book of nearly the same name and its cover by Rudolph deHarek as a launch point. She appropriates the book's cover for a series drawings and hand-woven rugs. And by “appropriates” I mean she manipulates, repurposes, expands the geometry of, re-energizes the color theory behind, and basically takes whole ownership of the image. It's as if she takes the book's coy pat on the head to feminism and says, “Potential of woman? I'll show you the potential of women” and then proceeds to roll out a stellar, striking and topical show.



Polly Apfelbaum, The Potential of Women, 2017

Apfelbaum is the antidote for all the artists who never consider installation as part of their work. Taking the stairs up to the second floor, one is confronted with AN ACTUAL IMMERSIVE ENVIRONMENT. (See? It's not just something galleries say in in every press release.) It

includes striped walls, dozens of unique ceramic works, and hand-woven rugs that you can walk on if you put on those shoe cover bootie things. For the record, I never put on the booties for any show, I refuse to stand in line for art and I try like hell to never pay for museums. But Polly is a friend. So I gladly put on the booties and gently stepped out onto the carpets.



Polly Apfelbaum, *The Potential of Women*, Installation View, Alexander Gray Associates, 2017.

I'm glad I did. I was rewarded with a more intimate experience of the show than if I'd only perused the perimeter. Walking on the rugs slowed me down just enough to really take the show in. From atop the rugs you get the sense that the ceramic wall works, which are titled after the names of friends and fellow artists, hover over the room like a line up of vibrant personalities. They harken back to a sort of bygone era of hippie art, but they manage to avoid folksy nostalgia as each one is personalized and sophisticated.



Polly Apfelbaum, Olafur, 2015

In the shadow of Trump, I think a lot of people are looking back to the counter culture movement of the 60s and wondering how the heck did we get from peace and love to this? The 60s were by no means perfect, (I've seen Easy Rider) and Trump isn't the first time the dream seemed to falter. Maybe because every word he speaks feels like a kick in the crotch of progress, intelligence and human decency, exhibitions like Apfelbaum's feel especially necessary right now. Standing on the rugs in *The Potential of Women*, it was easy to be transported to a place where beads are actually cool, hippies never turn into Trump voters, art can be accessible yet still have edge, and people say hi to each other in grocery stores. Can you dig it? Yes we can.

*Polly Apfelbaum, The Potential of Women is open through October 21st.*

*Alexander Gray Associates is located at 510 West 26th Street.*