

Frieze Los Angeles

February 14 – 17, 2019

Alexander Gray Associates

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Represented Artists:

Polly Apfelbaum
Frank Bowling
Ricardo Brey
Luis Camnitzer
Melvin Edwards
Coco Fusco
Harmony Hammond
Lorraine O'Grady
Betty Parsons
Joan Semmel
Hassan Sharif
Regina Silveira
Valeska Soares
Hugh Steers
Jack Tworkov

Works available by:

Sergei Eisenstein
Sam Gilliam
Jack Whitten

Hugh Steers

Hugh Steers (1962–1995) was born in Washington, D.C., and trained in painting at Yale University and Parsons School of Art and Design. Before his death at 32 from AIDS related complications, he created images that captured the emotional and political tenor of New York in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Embracing representational painting and figuration at a time when such approaches were deemed unfashionable, his intimate compositions are poignant symbols of life under the specter of AIDS.

Influenced by historical figures of American art, including Thomas Eakins, Edward Hopper, and Paul Cadmus, Steers embraced representational painting and figuration at a time when such approaches were deemed unfashionable. Describing his artistic perspective in an interview in September 1992, he outlined, “I think I’m in the tradition of a certain kind of American artist—artists whose work embodies a certain gorgeous bleakness. Edward Hopper, Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline—they all had this austere beauty to them. They found beauty in the most brutal forms. I think that’s what characterizes America, the atmosphere, its culture, its cities and landscape. They all have that soft glow of brutality.”

Capturing this “soft glow of brutality,” Steers painted intimate scenes that communicate joy even in the face of despair while embracing the polemics of identity politics, mortality issues, eroticism, and frailty. His compositions are distinguished by a dramatic and colorful palette, a skewed use of perspective, and a masterful depiction of light. At the same time, by portraying everyday moments imbued with a disconcerting charge, the artist’s scenes invite ambiguous narratives of alienation, defiance, illness, and compassion.

For example, in *Blue Dress* (1992), Steers presents a man in heels trying on a dress in front of a mirror. The empowering, yet precarious platforms the figure wears speak to the artist’s own evolving queer identity and the unstable emotional, social, and political landscape he found himself navigating as an HIV positive man. Inviting competing readings of sexuality and isolation, the tableau recalls Steers’ assertion that his work is “allegorical realism” created “to draw the viewer in through the lure of a comfortingly recognizable style and then confront him with a subject matter of a challenging nature.”

During the last five years of his artistic practice, Steers introduced a fictive alter ego, a slender figure wearing a hospital gown, as he focused his compositions on AIDS as a subject matter. These scenes draw on community experience and his own imagination to create dreamlike allegories intermixed with figurative realism. Ultimately, while Steers described his images as “metaphors that come from very specific needs and things on my part,” during his life, he repeatedly insisted that the meanings of his paintings depended on what the viewer brought to them. His images—sensuous and unsettling—gain new resonance in a contemporary art landscape informed by a return to figuration and a critical reappraisal of art from the 1980s and early 1990s.



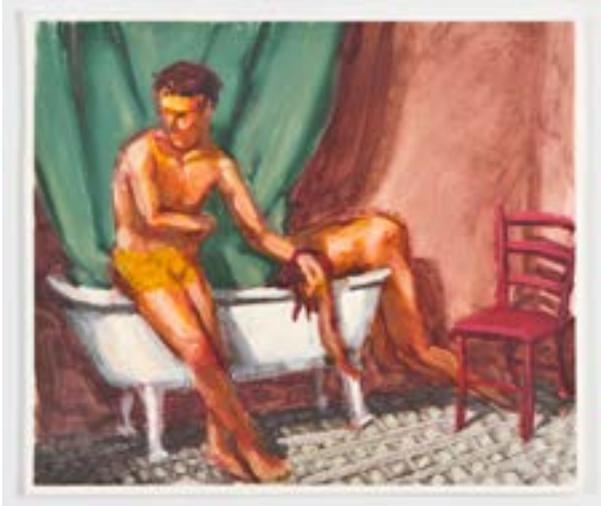
Hugh Steers, 1982.
Photo by Donald Suggs.



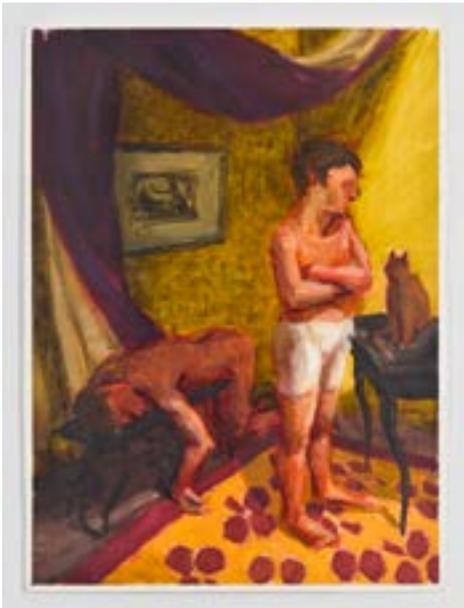
Strangle, 1988, oil on canvas, 33.75h x 27.06w x 2.25d in (85.72h x 68.74w x 5.71d cm)



High Tops, 1994, oil on canvas, 51.13h x 39.25w in (129.86h x 99.69w cm)



In the Tub, 1989, oil on gessoed paper, 11.3h x 13.1w in (28.70h x 33.27w cm)



On the Bench, 1988, oil on gessoed paper, 15h x 11.2w in (38.10h x 28.45w cm)



Black Bag, 1993, oil on canvas, 45h x 38w in (114.30h x 96.52w cm)



Above: *Blue Dress*, 1992, oil on canvas, 71.9h x 60.1w in (182.63h x 152.65w cm)
Left: 1982, photo by Donald Suggs.



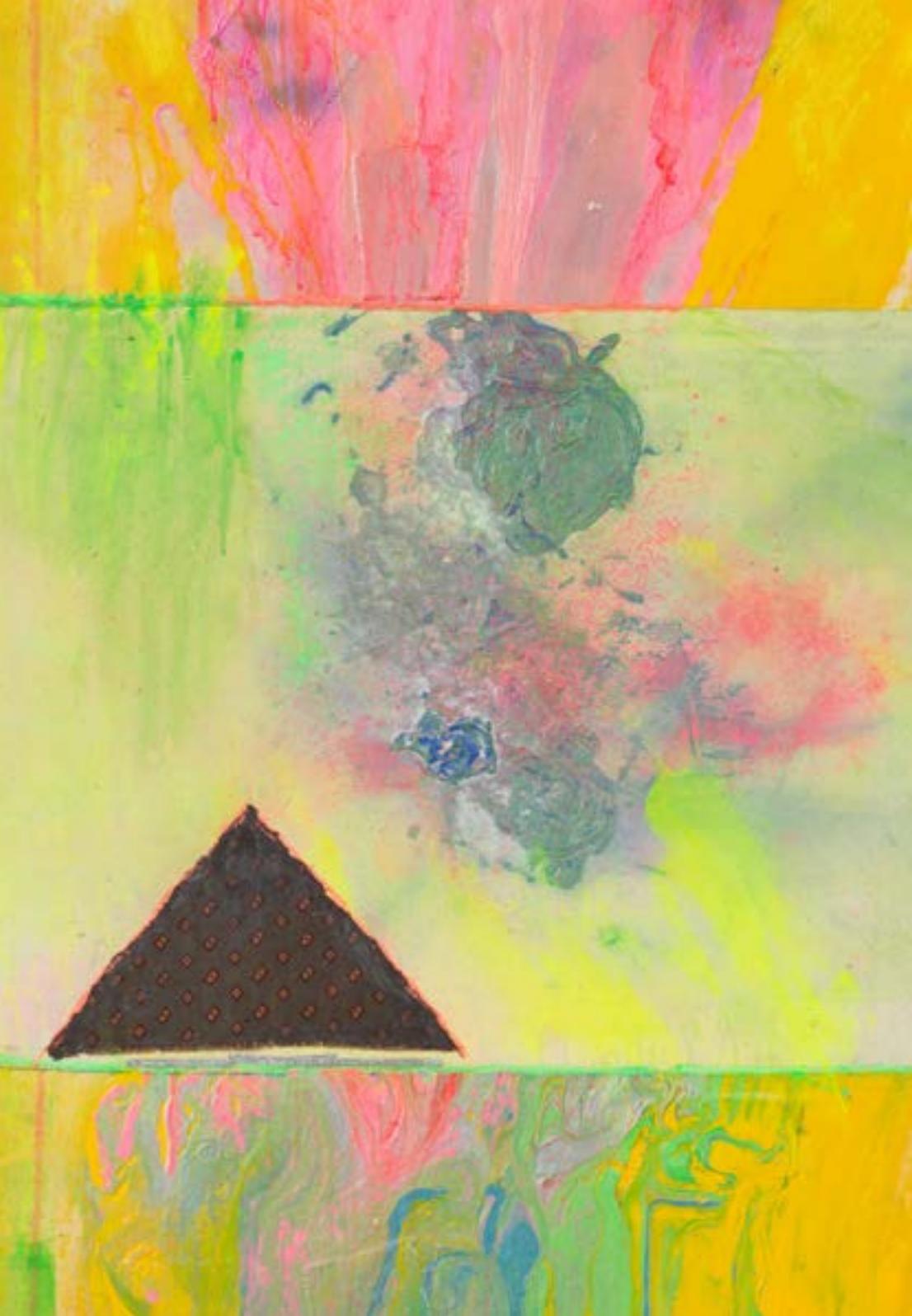
Valentine, 1987, oil on gessoed paper, 11.10h x 15w in (28.19h x 38.10w cm)



Man in White, 1988, oil on gessoed paper, 12h x 11.13w in (30.48h x 28.26w cm)



Foot Care, 1987, oil on gessoed paper, 15.20h x 11w in (38.61h x 27.94w cm)



Frank Bowling, *Peeping Dan*, 2015, detail

Frank Bowling

Frank Bowling OBE, RA (b. 1934) was born in British Guiana and maintains studios in London and New York. For over five decades, his distinct painting practice has been defined by an integration of autobiography and postcolonial geopolitics into abstraction.

Bowling moved to London in 1953, where he studied painting at the Royal College of Art from 1959–62. Emerging at the height of the British Pop movement, his early practice emphasized the figure while experimenting with expressive gestural applications of oil paint. In 1966, he moved to New York to immerse himself in Post-War American Art, and his practice shifted towards abstraction. As the art historian Mel Gooding remarked “for Bowling, the complexities and complications of New York art were compounded by the problematic issues of personal expression and public representation that much occupied the thoughts and discussions of his Black friends and associates in a largely segregated art world.” It was in this environment that he became a unifying force for his peers— he curated the seminal 1969 exhibition *5+1*, which featured work by Melvin Edwards, Al Loving, Jack Whitten, William T. Williams, Daniel LaRue Johnson, and himself. He was also a frequent contributor to publications, including *Arts Magazine*, where he was a contributing editor and wrote incisive texts on race and artistic production. His long friendship and intellectual sparring sessions with the renowned art historian and critic Clement Greenberg opened up further conversations about painting and politics.

Concurrent with his move towards abstraction, Bowling sought inventive ways in which to continue incorporating pictorial imagery into his work. In 1964, the artist began screen-printing personal photographs onto canvas, notably a 1953 image of his mother’s general store in Guiana, Bowling’s *Variety Store*. He would go on to create a number of these works in the following years, embedding personal narratives into the surface of his paintings. Subsequently, Bowling began his groundbreaking series of *Map Paintings* (1967–71). In these expansive, chromatic canvases, thin soaks of acrylic provide the ground for images of re-oriented continental landmasses spray-painted with stencils. As the curator Okwui Enwezor explains, “by staking a ground around the idea that abstraction need not be disunited from content, especially as it intersects cultural experience and historical subject matter, Bowling boldly experimented with diverse modes of building a painted surface.”

Since 1971, Bowling has abandoned his use of figurative imagery, and focused primarily on material and process. In place of the earlier map formations, geometry provides the foundation for his compositions. He begins with swathes of color and applies gestural drips overtop, harnessing multiple techniques to create dynamic, yet unified surfaces. In this way, he inherits and interprets the multifaceted legacy of American abstraction— both gesture and field. His palette is vibrant and diverse, fluctuating between warm saturated tones and soft pastel hues, muddied textures and sometimes shimmering surfaces.



Peeping Dan, 2015, acrylic and mixed media on collaged canvas, 68.31h x 34.33w in (173.50h x 87.20w cm)



If not now when? - 2017 False Start - 2013, 2007-2017, acrylic on paper, 29.84h x 21.93w in (75.80h x 55.70w cm)



Green Tail Coat for Iona's Sake, 1978, acrylic on canvas, 71h x 27w in (180.34h x 68.58w cm)

Jack Whitten

Jack Whitten (1939—2018) began his earliest experiments in painting during the 1960s by creating dynamic works inspired by Abstract Expressionism. Born and raised in Bessemer, Alabama, he moved to New York City in 1960 to attend The Cooper Union. Noted for raucous colors and density of gesture combined with topical content, his artwork from this period manifests emotionally complex meditations on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the Civil Rights movement, and the Vietnam War.

Whitten turned to abstraction in the 1970s as he developed new methods to create paintings that more closely resonated with photography. Eschewing the brushy, expressive gestures of Abstract Expressionism, he began to “process” the paint and canvas, creating works by dragging large troughs of paint across the canvas with a variety of tools, including squeegees, rakes, and Afro combs.

In the 1980s, Whitten utilized paint as a metaphor for skin as he experimented with “casting” acrylic paints and compounds to create new surfaces and textures. In contrast to the didactic and narrative-based work made by many African American artists during this period, Whitten’s artwork married gesture with aspects of sculpture and collage to push the limits of the medium.

Continuing to question the limits of painting, in the 1990s, Whitten’s experiments with paint became progressively more sculptural. Transforming paint into tiles, he repurposed the medium into a material to construct mosaics on canvas. The resulting artworks allude to ancient architecture and murals while serving as homages and memorials to celebrated public figures and close friends.

Before his death in 2018, Whitten repurposed the gamut of techniques he developed over the decades to further deepen his engagement with art history. Re-contextualizing his experimental approach to painting, he achieved innovative new surfaces, structures, and symbols.

Featuring blurred horizontal lines of paint, *Untitled I* (1974—1975) reveals Whitten’s interest in developing alternative approaches to painting that disavowed the painterly gestures of Abstract Expressionism. Experimenting with different modes of paint application, the artist turned to tools that allowed him to apply and manipulate large amount of acrylic in a single stroke, including a proprietary implement he dubbed the “developer.” Comparing the resulting “slabs” of paint to the “sheets of sound” of jazz music, he established a direct connection between his practice and that of musicians like John Coltrane. Ultimately, his improvisational approach to painting reflects on the legacy of modernism and abstraction and is aligned with the practices of contemporaries like Sam Gilliam, Al Loving, and Frank Bowling.



Untitled I, 1974–1975, acrylic on canvas, 41.75h x 41.75w in (106.05h x 106.05w cm)

Melvin Edwards

Melvin Edwards (b.1937) is a pioneer in the history of contemporary African-American art and sculpture. Born in Houston, Texas, he began his artistic career at the University of Southern California, where he met and was mentored by Hungarian painter Francis de Erdely. In 1965 the Santa Barbara Museum of Art organized Edwards' first solo exhibition, which launched his professional career. He moved to New York City in 1967, where shortly after his arrival, his work was exhibited at the then newly created Studio Museum, and in 1970 became the first African-American sculptor to have works presented in a solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum.

Edwards' work reflects his engagement with the history of race, labor, violence, as well as with themes of African Diaspora. Making welding his preferred medium, his compositions are studies in abstraction and minimalism. Edwards creates sculptures by welding metal objects such as tools, knives, hooks, and machine parts, to construct objects distinguished by formal simplicity and powerful materiality. He is best known for his sculptural series *Lynch Fragments*, which spans three periods: the early 1960s, when he responded to racial violence in the United States; the early 1970s, when his activism concerning the Vietnam War motivated him to return to the series; and from 1978 to the present, as he continues to explore a variety of themes. Edwards has felt deeply connected to Africa and the African Diaspora since the 1970s, when he and his late wife, poet Jayne Cortez, began visiting the continent. He taught metal-welding in several countries, establishing workshops and mentoring a younger generation of African welders.

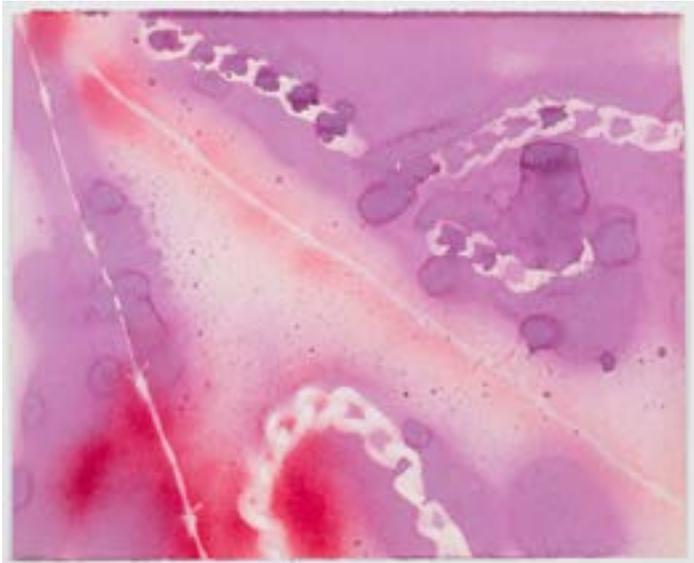
Edwards has had a longstanding commitment to public art, working on projects for public housing and universities since the 1960s, including *Homage to My Father and the Spirit* (1969) at the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York; *Holder of the Light* (1985) at Lafayette Gardens, Jersey City, NJ; and *Asafokra* (1990) at the Utsukushi-Ga-Hara Open-Air Museum, Nagano Prefecture, Japan. His large-scale public sculptures exemplify his extraordinary range of aesthetic expression as well as his keen commitment to abstraction.



For Modie 218, 1982–1994, welded steel, 11.75h x 7w x 8.50d in (29.84h x 17.78w x 21.59d cm)



Untitled, 1974, watercolor and ink on paper, 18.25h x 24w in (46.35h x 60.96w cm)



Untitled, c. 1975, watercolor and ink on paper, 18h x 24w in (45.72h x 60.96w cm)



Harlem, 1986, welded steel, 9h x 8w x 8d in (22.86h x 20.32w x 20.32d cm)

Lorraine O'Grady

For more than four decades, Lorraine O'Grady (b.1934) has challenged cultural conventions. Her multidisciplinary practice utilizes the diptych as a tool to critique Western society. As she argues, "With the diptych, there's no being saved, no before and after, no either/or; it's both/and, at the same time." Insisting on both/and, for O'Grady, the diptych presents a constant exchange between equals, forwarding "miscegenated thinking" by eroding hierarchical oppositions. This thinking, which seeks to confront the limitations of a culture built on exclusivity and resistance to difference, advocates for concepts like hybridity, gender fluidity, and process rather than resolution.

Born in Boston to West Indian parents, O'Grady was a talented scholar. She was educated at the Girls Latin School before studying economics and Spanish literature at Wellesley College (class of 1955). While still a student, she passed the US government's challenging Management Intern Program (MIP) exam and worked as a Research Economist at the Bureau of Labor Statistics. By the late 1960s, she was working in Chicago at a commercial translation agency while volunteering for Jesse Jackson and his organization Operation Breadbasket. However, after opening her own translation agency and fulfilling large contracts for *Playboy* and *Encyclopædia Britannica*, she decided to abandon her career as a translator.

By the early 1980s, O'Grady had become an active voice in the alternative New York art scene. A volunteer at the black avant-garde gallery Just Above Midtown, she produced work that critically reflected on race, class, and social identity. In her performance *Mlle Bourgeoise Noire* (1980–83), for example, O'Grady pioneered institutional critique, attacking the racial apartheid of the mainstream art world. Championing hybrid subject positions, in the 1990s, she addressed issues surrounding class, gender, racism, and ethnography with series like *Miscegenated Family Album* (1980/1994). Constructing what O'Grady terms a "novel in space," *Miscegenated Family Album* consists of 16 diptychs, pairing the artist's family with ancient Egyptian imagery of Nefertiti and her relations. Weaving together narratives that connect personal stories with past events, the work presents both families—one ancient and royal, one modern and descended from slaves—as products of shared forces of migration and hybridization.

Further mapping the intertwining of histories and identities, *Landscape (Western Hemisphere)* (2010/2011) also adapts and plays with the diptych. Abstracting O'Grady's waving hair and transforming it into an evocative landscape, this video collapses the both/and structure of the diptych into a single frame. Solely recording the artist's tresses, whose textured curls reveal both her African and European ancestry, *Landscape* positions the diptych as a theoretical structure, which, in O'Grady's words, "advocates for the kind of miscegenated thinking that's needed to deal with what we've already created."



The Fir-Palm, 1991/2012, silver gelatin print (photomontage), 50h x 40w in (127h x 101.60w cm)

Valeska Soares

Valeska Soares (b.1957) was born in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, and from a young age, she was exposed to references from a variety of cultural milieus, including poetry, literature, film, psychology, and mythology. She studied architecture at Universidade Santa Úrsula, Rio de Janeiro; this training reinforced an interest in site specificity, with artworks that consider both contextual history and spatial constructs. The Brazilian art scene in the late-1980s and early 1990s catalyzed Soares' artistic career in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, and in 1992, she moved to Brooklyn, NY, continuing her artistic education and career. From New York, throughout the 1990s and 2000s, her work has been positioned in multiple platforms, reinforcing the globalized art world's questions of geography, cultural and national identity, discipline, and form.

Soares' bodies of work are linked thematically, but deploy diverse strategies to address issues and concerns through materials, forms, and experiences. Utilizing tools of minimalism and conceptualism, her work embraces emotion and humanity, mining territories of love, intimacy and desire; loss and longing; memory and language. She has explored these elusive themes through a myriad of tactics, infusing objects such as mirrors, clocks, glass, books, furniture, and flora with poetics, narrative, and alchemy. The resulting artworks—painting, sculpture, installations, video, and audio experiences—morph the physical and the psychological, the body, and the mind. In Soares' refined visual language, reflective objects suggest reflective thinking, concealed images reveal unexpected mysteries, and accumulated words disintegrate linear narrative.

Desire is a central theme in Soares' practice, enticing viewer engagement by alluring all five senses. Her installations have included perfume, decaying flowers, or spirits; these works result in phenomenological experiences that shift perception and expectations. In her words, "desire is like a vanishing point: every time you go towards it, it recedes a little." Another motif in her work is the transference of personal memory and collective history; the artist frequently re-purposes second hand objects that she considers charged by "the lives and memories [of former owners], becoming for a moment in time, part of those personal narratives as each one travels from subject to subject." Canvases made of book covers convene and re-orient individual narratives; while collections of empty antique cake platters or half-filled drinking glasses suggest rituals or celebrations that have been suspended in time. Soares' art encourages the widest possible viewer experience, rejecting the idea of a singular interpretation or message.

She describes this interest in unrestricted opportunities for engagement; as "what interests me is the surprise in how each person is going to perceive the piece. And even the same person, on different days—depending on the sun and the moon, a dream they had, how they woke up—the work is never the same."



Doubleface (Cobalt Green), 2017, oil paint and cut out on vintage oil painting, 28h x 18w x 4d in (71.12h x 45.72w x 10.16d cm)

Joan Semmel

Joan Semmel (b.1932) has centered her painting practice around issues of the body, from desire to aging, as well as those of identity and cultural imprinting. She studied at the Cooper Union, Pratt Institute, and the Art Student's League of New York. In the 1960s, Semmel began her painting career in Spain and South America, where she experimented with abstraction. Returning to New York in the early 1970s, she turned toward figurative paintings, constructing compositions in response to pornography, popular culture, and concerns around representation. Her practice traces the transformation that women's sexuality has seen in the last century, and emphasizes the possibility for female autonomy through the body.

In the 1970s, Semmel began her exploration of female sexuality with the Sex Paintings and Erotic Series, large scale images of sexual encounters. In these works, Semmel employs expressive color and loose, gestural brush strokes to depict couples entwined in various intimate positions. Produced in a cultural landscape shaped by Second-wave Feminism, the two series celebrate female sexuality, heralding a feminist approach to painting and representation. Building on these paintings, in 1974, Semmel embraced a more realistic style, and began to use her own body as her subject, shifting the perspective from that of an observer to a more personal point of view. Using a camera to frame her body, she created images notable for their formal complexity. In the 1980s, Semmel built on this complexity, painting dynamic scenes that featured her camera and body doubled and refracted via mirrors.

Since the late 1980s, Semmel has meditated on the aging female physique. Recent paintings continue the artist's exploration of self-portraiture and female identity, representing the artist's body doubled, fragmented, and in-motion. Dissolving the space between artist and model, viewer and subject, the paintings are notable for their celebration of color and flesh. Semmel applies saturated abstract colors in a variety of styles, merging figure and ground. Approaching her own form as a site of self-expression, in these works she challenges the objectification and fetishization of women's bodies by redefining the female nude through radical imagery that celebrates the aging process—refuting centuries of art historical idealization.

Rendered in highly saturated tones, Semmel's recent paintings mark a return to her palette of the early 1970s, which comprised vivid color in the rendering of paired bodies in sexual play. Later in that decade, she began employing her own body—alone or with a partner—in compositions that introduced her work into the tradition of self-portraiture, which has remained a steady theme throughout her career in the four decades since. Long associated with the representation of female sexuality, Semmel positions these latest paintings in direct relation to her well-known works of the 1970s and 80s, but with a very specific inflection. At this later stage in life, she says, "You're still dealing with sexuality but it's not about seduction... The colors are the seduction here."



Joan Semmel in her New York City studio, 2019. Photo: Ross Collab.



White Skin, 2018, oil on canvas, 38h x 50w in (96.52h x 127w cm)
Left: detail

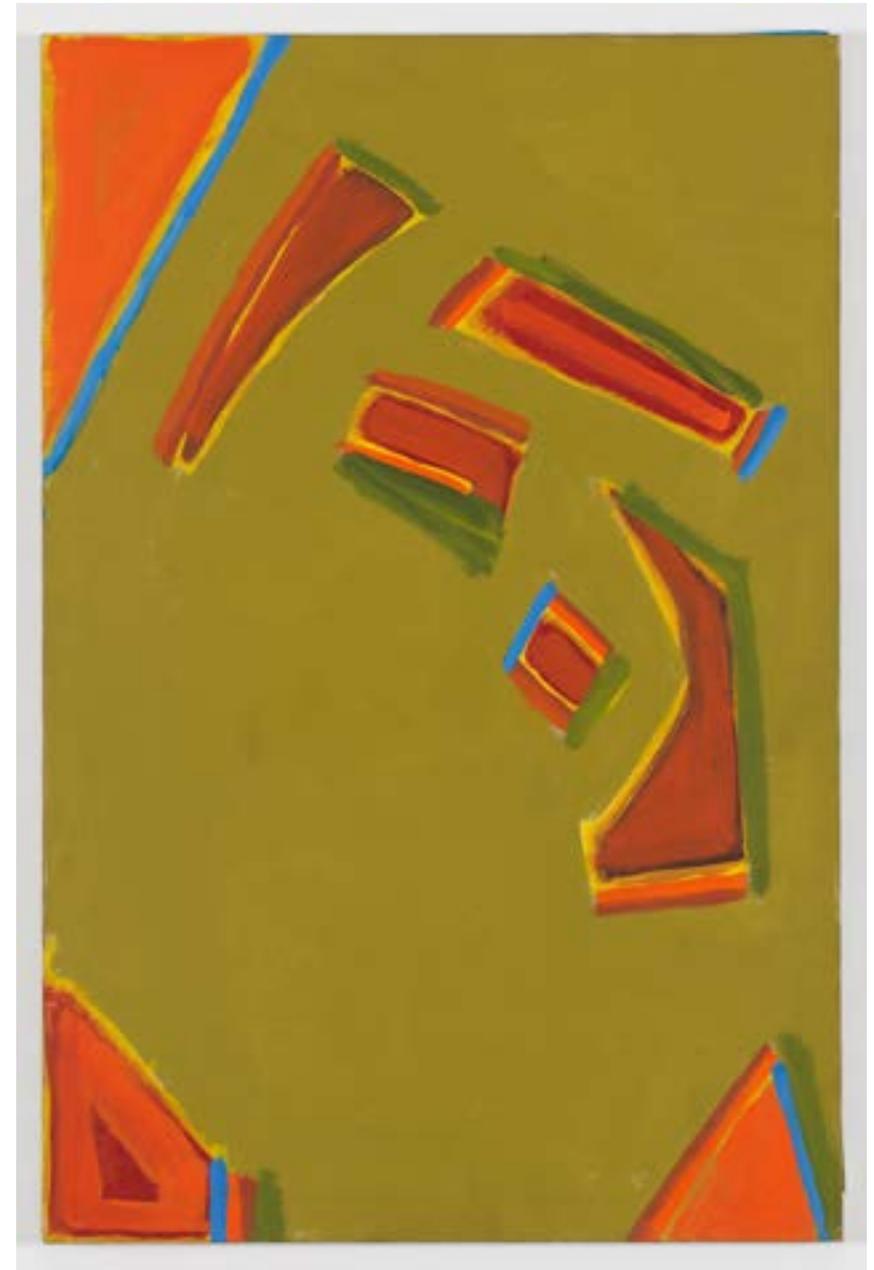
Betty Parsons

Betty Parsons (b.1900, New York, NY – d.1982, Southold, NY) was an abstract painter and sculptor who is best known as a dealer of mid-century art. Throughout her storied career as a gallerist, she maintained a rigorous artistic practice, painting during weekends in her Long Island studio. Parsons' eye for innovative talent stemmed from her own training as an artist and guided her commitment to new and emerging artists of her time, impacting the canon of twentieth-century art in the United States.

Parsons was drawn to art at an early age when in 1913 she attended the Armory Show in New York City. As she came of age, she became dissatisfied with the traditional models of education and limited occupations for women at the time. In 1935, she had her first solo exhibition of paintings at Midtown Galleries, New York, and following this show, she was offered a job installing works and selling paintings on commission, sparking her curatorial interest and developing her professional identity as an art dealer. In 1946, Parsons opened her eponymous gallery in New York, and after the closure of Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century Gallery in 1947, she inherited Guggenheim's roster of artists, including Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, and Clyfford Still. While her gallery's legacy is closely tied to these leading figures, Parsons also championed a diverse program of artists, showcasing work by women, gays, and artists of color, reflecting her liberal and inclusive values, and eclectic tastes.

While operating her gallery, Parsons continued to make art. Following her formal training as a sculptor and landscape watercolorist, Parsons made a stylistic departure in 1947 when she began to work abstractly to capture what she called "sheer energy" and "the new spirit." From the late 1940s onward, her paintings conveyed her passion for spontaneity and creative play through impulsive gestural brushstrokes and organic forms. She utilized thin layers of vibrant paint, often allowing the surface of the canvas to remain visible. Parsons had a long interest in ancient and ethnographic arts, as well as mystical and non-Western spiritual practices, including meditation. Through these interests, she chose to set aside the rigid theoretical framework of contemporary abstraction, allowing instead for expressive improvisation in her paintings.

Throughout her life, Parsons traveled widely in pursuit of new influences, taking frequent trips to Mexico, France, Italy, Africa, and Japan. She meticulously recorded her travels in her journals as watercolors and sketches, and often drew on a sense of place in her work. In the 1960s, Parsons would increase her time in Long Island, having built a painting studio designed by the sculptor Tony Smith, perched above the Long Island Sound. Her weekends would be consumed by observing nature, and her painting became increasingly saturated with color. In addition to painting, in the late 1970s she returned to sculpture, making polychrome assemblages of discarded wood and driftwood she would collect on the beach. Parsons died in 1982, a year after closing her 57th Street gallery, leaving a multi-faceted legacy as a woman, and an artist, of the twentieth century.



A Spring Start, 1976, acrylic on canvas, 36h x 24w in (91.44h x 60.96w cm)

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Printing: Puritan Capital

Through exhibitions, research, and artist representation, the Alexander Gray Associates spotlights artistic movements and artists who emerged in the mid- to late-Twentieth Century. Influential in cultural, social, and political spheres, these artists are notable for creating work that crosses geographic borders, generational contexts and artistic disciplines. Alexander Gray Associates is a member of the Art Dealers Association of America.

About Frieze Los Angeles

Frieze Los Angeles 2019 brings together around 70 of the most significant and forward-thinking contemporary galleries from across the city and around the world, alongside a curated program of conversations, site-specific artists' projects and film.

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