



Left: Joan Semmel, *Yellow Sky*, 2015, oil on canvas, 51h x 71w in (129.54h x 180.34w cm). Right: Hugh Steers, *Hospital Bed*, 1993, oil on canvas, 61.3h x 65.1w in (155.7h x 165.35w cm)

Art | Basel Miami Beach

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Alexander Gray Associates presents recent paintings and drawings by **Joan Semmel** (b.1932). A defining feminist artist, Semmel has explored representation through her ground-breaking use of color, scale, and perspective as well as her command of the painterly language through self-portraiture.

Semmel's recent work combines and elaborates on conceptual and formal concerns that echo some of her previous series that have focused on representation of the aging female body. The artist has layered two figures, one depicted in naturalistic detail, and the other as a painted outline, recalling motifs from both her "Overlays" and "Echoing Images." About this relationship to past work she noted, "it's all there. Everything I've ever done is in it, and yet it's new." Her paintings from 2015 and 2016 are executed with a virtuoso application of abstract color. As in her early "Sex Paintings" and "Erotic Series," color serves for the artist as a means of distinguishing her nude figures from the realm of pornography. When she does depict figures in naturalistic color, Semmel crops the composition so closely as to abstract the body to the point that it reads as a landscape.

Included in the presentation is *Yellow Sky* (2015), the first work in this series. Demonstrative of Semmel's passion for painting, she bridges abstraction and representation through saturated colors and superimposed images that seem to enter the viewer's space. Semmel depicts her flesh in a vibrant green, and yet she carefully mottles the paint thus simultaneously evoking fantasy and an unidealized reality. Working across five decades, Semmel considers the unifying element throughout her body of work "a single perspective: being inside the experience of femaleness and taking possession of it culturally." Her work over the last half century firmly situates the female body as a place for autonomy and a vehicle to challenge the objectification and fetishization of female sexuality and the invisibility of the female aging body.

The Gallery's Kabinett presentation features paintings by **Hugh Steers** (b.1962—d.1995). Steers embraced representation and figuration at a time when such approaches were especially unfashionable, capturing the emotional and political tenor of New York in the late 1980s and early 1990s as well as the impact of Queer identity and the AIDS crisis. The presentation is anchored by one large-scale painting, *Hospital Bed* (1993), in which Steers depicts two male figures, likely lovers, entwined in a hospital bed. A complementary selection of works on paper further addresses the topics he most often depicted, including illness, isolation, alienation, companionship, and sexuality. As art historian, James Smalls explains, "Implicating the viewer in the space of his protagonists, [Steers'] canvases are populated with ordinary, unglamorous, real individuals bonded by a collective ordeal. Their world is likewise one in which men bond in communal suffering and are heroic in empathy for one another."

Steers studied under Semmel at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture during the summer of 1991, a turning point in his practice, when he began using brighter colors and more pronounced natural light to display a sense of immediacy. The dual presentations highlights Steers' and Semmel's interest in sexual politics and identity, utilizing color to emphasize texture and the presence of light in their compositions. Both artists display a deep commitment to figuration, particularly the representation of marginalized subjects—aging women and gay men— in vulnerable and intimate settings.

Joan Semmel's work has been featured in exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2016); Brooklyn Museum, New York (2016); Dallas Contemporary, TX (2016); Museum of Modern Art, New York (2014); National Portrait Gallery, Washington, DC (2014); Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York (2013); Museum of Modern Art Arnhem, The Netherlands (2009); Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH (2008); among others. Semmel's paintings are part of the permanent collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, IL; Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, TX; Brooklyn Museum, New York; Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, VA; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA; The Jewish Museum, New York; The Jocelyn Art Museum, Omaha, NE; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, DC; Orange County Museum of Art, CA; The Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, NY; among others. She is the recipient of numerous awards and grants, including the Women's Caucus for Art Lifetime Achievement Award (2013), *Anonymous Was a Woman* (2008), and National Endowment for the Arts awards (1985 and 1980). She is Professor Emeritus of Painting at Rutgers University.

Hugh Steers' work has been exhibited at the Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York (2016); Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2013); New Museum of Contemporary Art (1994); Richard Anderson, New York (1992); Midtown Galleries, New York (1992); Denver Art Museum, CO (1991); Albright-Knox Gallery, Buffalo, NY (1988); and the Drawing Center, New York (1987); among others. Steers' work is in private and public art collections such as the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Walker Art Center, and the Denver Art Museum. In 1989, Steers received a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Fellowship. His work was recently featured in the exhibition *Art AIDS America* curated by Jonathan Katz and Rock Hushka at the Tacoma Art Museum, WA in September 2015, traveling to the West Hollywood Library and One Archives Gallery and Museum, Los Angeles, CA, the Zuckerman Museum of Art, Kennesaw, GA, and the Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York, NY in 2016. A comprehensive monographic catalogue of Steers' work was published by Visual AIDS in 2015.