



Joan Semmel: *A Necessary Elaboration*, installation view, Alexander Gray Associates (2019)

Joan Semmel: *A Necessary Elaboration*

January 10 – February 16, 2019

Alexander Gray Associates presents *A Necessary Elaboration*, an exhibition of new work by Joan Semmel (b.1932), in its fifth exhibition with the artist. In paintings made during the last two years, Semmel continues her investigation of the nude self-portrait, in a series of large-scale canvases featuring the artist's body as volumetric subject realized through expressive brushwork and brilliant color.

Rendered in highly saturated tones, these paintings mark a return to Semmel's 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."

In this new series, the single figure fills the frame in a manner that echoes the in-camera cropping of the photographs the artist takes as the basis for her compositions. In *Knee Up* (2017) and *Fleshed Out* (2018), for example, the twisting midsection of the body moves toward abstraction through an emphasis on lines and curves. In *In the Green* (2017), in which the artist's face also appears within the frame, her limbs map a division of the picture plane into areas illuminated by blocks of vibrant background hues.

Semmel's paintings evidence a confidence in color and form. *Seated in Red* (2018), for one, employs a limited palette and symmetrical composition to create an elegantly meditative form. Semmel's brushwork makes a second link back to her early career, connecting these paintings to her engagement with Abstract Expressionism in the 1960s. In some areas more gestural with expressive color combinations, while in others more uniform, the paintings' surfaces serve as varied geographies comprised of a range of painting techniques, including smoother and more textured strokes, as well as washes, and drips. Writing in 2015, Semmel reflected, "The issues of the body from desire to aging, as well as those of identity and cultural imprinting, have been at the core of my concerns. The carnal nature of paint has seemed to me a perfect metaphor, the specifics of image, a necessary elaboration."

Joan Semmel's work has been the subject of numerous one-person exhibitions, including The Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York (2013); Jersey City Museum, NJ (2000); Guild Hall Museum, East Hampton, NY (1998); Pratt Manhattan Gallery, New York (1993); State University of New York, Oswego, NY, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY, and State University of New York, Albany, NY (1992); University of Virginia, Richmond, VA (1992); Greenville County Museum of Art, Greenville, SC (1991); East Hampton Center for Contemporary Art, East Hampton, NY (1989); University of Missouri, St. Louis, MO (1986); State University of New York, Plattsburgh, NY, Franklin and Marshall College, Lancaster, PA, and Kutztown State College, Kutztown, PA (1980); and University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT (1978). Her work has also been featured in group exhibitions including the Stadtgalerie Saarbrücken,

Germany (2018); Brooklyn Museum, New York (2018 and 2016); Jewish Museum, New York (2018 and 2010); Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2016); Dallas Contemporary, TX (2016); The Museum of Modern Art, New York (2014); National Portrait Gallery, Washington, DC (2014); Paula Modersohn-Becker Museum, Bremen, Germany (2013); Museum of Modern Art Arnhem, The Netherlands (2009); Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH (2008); Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2007); National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh (2007); and Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, TX (2006); among others.

Semmel's paintings are in the permanent collections of the Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, TX; Brooklyn Museum, New York; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA; Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, VA; Dallas Museum of Art, TX; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA; Jewish Museum, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, DC; Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA; Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, NY; Rose Art Museum, Waltham, MA; Tate, London, UK; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; 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.