

Alexander Gray Associates, New York presents Joan Semmel: *Against the Wall*, the artist's eighth exhibition with the Gallery. These new paintings—all made on the advent of Semmel's ninth decade—continue her long-standing project of reclaiming the female nude from the objectifying lens of popular culture. Collapsing the distance between artist and subject, these intimate self-portraits foment an uninterrupted and inward facing gaze, advocating for an approach to female sexuality freed from fetishization.

In these new works, Semmel captures her body in continual movement. Paintings like *Shadowed* and *Parade* (both 2023) foreground the artist's own shadow. This silhouette's flatness and deeply saturated hues are juxtaposed with the expressive rendering of the artist's flesh, whose corporeality is further underscored by thick, near impasto, brushstrokes. To Semmel, these alternative approaches to describing her form underscore the "irrevocable interconnectedness of the two figures," their interplay and contrast "becom[ing] a kind of dance."

Meanwhile, paintings like *Morphing* (2023) build on the artist's earlier *Shifting Images* series (2006–13), in which Semmel layered multiple images of her body to evoke the sensation of time passing. As in these earlier paintings, *Morphing* portrays what the artist has referred to as "the actuality of how one sees and experiences oneself." She explains, "We do not experience the moment in isolation from the past. Rather, each moment is part of a layering process, moment over moment, by which we build meaning from our past and present experience."

Reflecting this layered understanding of time—one in which the present is always reframed through the lens of the past—Semmel's new canvases nod to her early training as an Abstract Expressionist. Her gestural technique and palette of intensely saturated and diluted hues often blur the distinction between representation and abstraction, occupying a liminal space in which flesh is transfigured into pure pigment. For Semmel, this transformation results in "another kind of dance, full of surprises and pirouettes." This dance unites shadows with figures and color with form; it ultimately draws its steps from Semmel's decades-long commitment to championing an expanded understanding of female subjectivity grounded in distinctive imagery that, in the artist's words, seeks, "... a truth that stretches to encompass time."

Semmel's work was the subject of a career retrospective, *Skin in the Game*, presented by the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, PA in 2021, followed by Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY in 2022. Other one-person exhibitions include those held at The Bronx Museum of the Arts, NY (2013); Jersey City Museum, NJ (2000); and Guild Hall Museum, East Hampton, NY (1998); among others. The artist's work has been featured in group exhibitions at Tate Modern, London, United Kingdom (2023); Brooklyn Museum, NY (2023 and 2016); The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY (2020); Stadtgalerie Saarbrücken, Germany (2018); The Jewish Museum, NY (2018 and 2010); Whitney Museum of American Art, NY (2016); Dallas Contemporary, TX (2016); The Museum of Modern Art, NY (2014); National Portrait Gallery, Washington, DC (2014); Paula Modersohn-Becker Museum, Bremen, Germany (2013); and Museum voor Moderne Kunst, Arnhem, The Netherlands (2009); among others. Semmel's paintings are in the permanent collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, IL; Brooklyn Museum, NY; Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, TX; Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, VA; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA; The Jewish Museum, NY; Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, NE; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; The Museum of Modern Art, NY; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, DC; Orange County Museum of Art, CA; Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, NY; Tate, London, United Kingdom; and Whitney Museum of American Art, 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).