



Joan Semmel

Alexander Gray Associates

Joan Semmel

Joan Semmel: *Across Five Decades*

April 2–May 16, 2015

Alexander Gray Associates

A Necessary Elaboration

When I came to Madrid in 1963, I was a mainstream Abstract Expressionist. I thought it would be exciting to join my husband, a civil engineer, whose firm had a contract there. I was glad of the opportunity to live overseas, although I had reservations about living in Franco's Spain.¹ I arrived with my eight-year-old daughter Patricia and a large crate with my abstract paintings. When we got off the boat in Algeciras, the customs officers made me open the crate as they couldn't believe it only contained paintings. Although we had come for one year, I remained in Spain for almost eight years, and our son was born there.

My work gradually developed from broad gestural and spatially referenced painting to compositions of a somewhat surreal figure/ground configuration. I felt a gradual influence of Spanish "Informalismo"² that toned down the performative aspects of American gestural bravura. The layered dense surfaces of my work evoked ambiguous unidentifiable symbolic elements. My highly saturated brilliant color separated my paintings from the leading Spanish artists whose work was darker, grayer and Goyesque. I exhibited in Madrid at Juana Mordó gallery, the Ateneo, and in various group and solo shows in cities such as Valencia and Barcelona. In 1968, a major solo show featuring thirty abstract large-scale paintings opened at the Museo de Artes Plásticas in Montevideo, Uruguay, and then traveled to Galería Bonino in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

The seven and a half years that I had spent in Spain made me acutely aware of the differences in culture, especially when it came to the relationships between men and women and the institutional restrictions placed upon women regarding travel, ownership of property, divorce, career expectations and limitations, social rules of behavior and dress, and the overlay of religion on all aspects of human relationships. I remember that the front page of the leading newspaper always had a large reproduction of the saint of the day. It was as if I had stepped into a time warp where time had gone back two hundred years. In the United States the hippie revolution was in full swing, and news of the movement spread across the world. In Spain the mere thought of a sexual revolution created the dream of much desired freedom from the religious and political restraints so long endured under the Franco regime.

¹ Francisco Franco was a Spanish general who ruled Spain from 1939 until his death in 1975.

² "Informalismo" was a prevalent artistic movement in Spain in the 1950s and 1960s. Through abstraction and the cultivation of irrationalism, it attempted to challenge prevailing artistic norms.

As an American artist and a foreigner in Madrid I was not expected to conform. They considered all foreign women totally immoral, so it didn't really matter. In addition, artists were expected to reject bourgeois rules of behavior. I enjoyed the benefits of affordable help in caring for my children, entrance to the bohemian artists' world of the poet's cafe, social access to an international mix of people from all strata of life—from the film industry to foreign correspondents, ambassadors, business expatriates, and any number of characters out of F. Scott Fitzgerald. It was a heady mix, an education that no graduate school could replicate, and I emerged a different person. My husband and I separated while in Madrid. He moved to another job in South America, while I remained in Madrid with my children for several years. Divorce was impossible in Spain at the time so I needed to return to New York, plus I wanted my children to be educated in the United States. At that point, I enjoyed an independence of thought and action that I could never have imagined while growing up in the Bronx in the 1950s.

I returned to my native New York in 1970 and found that my way of working and my ideas shifted radically. I wanted my work to directly reflect the issues in which I was involved. I found a loft in SoHo and made it livable, got a divorce, enrolled in the graduate program at Pratt—so that I would be qualified to teach—and earned just enough money through odd teaching jobs and a fellowship. It was a scary and precarious time. I began attending political meetings at the Art Workers Coalition, the Ad Hoc Women Artist's Committee, and various other women's groups. We would meet at each other's studios, something that allowed me to see much art that had not made it to the galleries. It was an exciting and wonderful time for a community of women, who despite all disappointments, drew support and nurturance from each other and confronted the status quo with demonstrations and picket lines. It was then when I realized many women were doing work that dealt with sexual issues. I started a collection of slides of women's sexual art that led to the book *A New Eros: Sexual Imagery in Woman's Art*. Although I was paid for the manuscript's contract, the book was never published, the reason—as I was told—was that, "Feminism was over." The year was 1973.

The political ferment that the Vietnam War generated in the United States and the subsequent awakening of the Civil Rights and the Women's Liberation Movement were profoundly influential in provoking my reconsideration of representation as a viable expressive tool. An artist needs to confound expectations, especially one's own. Last year's radicalism usually becomes next year's conservatism, and sometimes vice-versa. The flavor of the day in the New York art world was "color field

painting." My own abstract paintings, with their heavily worked surfaces and emotional tone, seemed totally out of place in this context. Moreover, my process seemed unresponsive to the changes in my life at this time. In order to make the move from abstraction to figuration I needed to avoid the traditional academic formulas, to find both content and form that spoke to contemporary concerns. I had returned from Spain looking for the "sexual revolution" and instead found sexual commercialization that mostly showed female bodies for sale. I wanted to find an erotic visual language that would speak to women. I was convinced that the repression of women began in the sexual arena, and this would need to be addressed at the source. Within the first two years of arriving in New York, I produced two series of large sexual works. The first group was "Sex Paintings" (1971), a series where the image exploded from the canvas in a loose, painterly, highly gestural manner, filling and crowding the large-scale canvas to its edges. The second was the "Erotic Series" (1972), a body of work that maintained the scale and vibrant color but utilized black and white photographs of couples that I had taken. The shift from drawing into photography was a significant departure for me. At that time, the use of photography by a painter was considered not quite legitimate. I appropriated the modeled form and smooth surface of the closely cropped photograph into my paintings which tended to push the image out from the picture plane into the viewer's space, and retained abstract color as a primary element in the work. This served as a distancing device defining the object as art, and separating it from the realm of pornography. The art world of the early 1970s was hardly prepared for such an open assault on its refined sensibilities, especially from within the holy ground of painting, and even more if it was done by a woman. I tried to find a gallery that would show the work, but even the more advanced political galleries found the content problematic. I was determined to get the work seen in public. Using my meager savings, I rented a space on Greene Street and organized an exhibition that was favorably and widely reviewed. It would be another ten years before sexual content could freely enter the art world dialogue and, even then, its presence was through the backdoor of appropriated pornography, which embodied all the male culture's power fantasies.

As I moved away from sexuality as a theme, and began to utilize self-nudes, my palette gradually became more naturalistic, but I continued to use the camera as a tool to locate and structure the image. This allowed for close-in views and cropping, which became almost landscapes or abstractions when blown-up into the scale of my canvases. I positioned the nude lying prone and the viewer seeing the body from the model/artist's

point of view. I was never focused on self-representation but rather on finding a way of reimagining the nude without objectifying the person, of using a specific body rather than an idealized form. I wanted the body to be seen as a woman experiences herself, rather than through the reflection of the mirror or male eyes. The fundamental problem of subject and object was always present, and using my own body was one method of dealing with this. More importantly, it made it clear that the artist was female, and undercut the stereotypes of male artist and female muse. I wanted to subvert this tradition from within.

My early years of painting abstractly always colored my thinking about painting, and from time to time I tried to resolve the tension between abstraction and figuration by combining them in various ways. My gallery at the time was planning a political show for the bicentennial anniversary called *A Patriotic Show* (1976). I wanted to be included, but Lerner-Heller didn't see how one of my nudes would read as political—so I said, "I'll paint you a diagram." Using an image from popular culture and another from the realm of "high art," I painted on single panels a parody of a Playboy girl and a parody of a De Kooning woman and positioned them to the left and right of one painting from the "Self-Images" series (1974–79). I titled the triptych *Mythologies and Me* (1976). In order to make the pairing work, I had to combine both the realistic and expressionistic styles, which was very challenging. The painting was exhibited in the show, and the work became a key reference image used in innumerable art history classes thereafter.

Combining stylistic processes in *Mythologies and Me* led me to the "Echoing Images" (1979–81), a series where the main compositional figure is repeated twice: once in realist style and a second much larger highly expressionistic version. They are almost like internal and external views of the self that combine a perceptual image with the ambition and striving of the emotive ego. Both the "Self-Images" and the "Echoing Images" were shown in several exhibitions at Lerner Heller gallery, and writers such as Lawrence Alloway, John Perrault, and Donald Kuspit, among many others, were very supportive. But by the mid-1980s, the art world had returned to the mighty male ego. The Germans had arrived on the New York scene in full force, and again, it was almost impossible to find venues for my work to be shown. I was also very upset at the Feminist backlash, and decided to recycle some of my paintings from the early 1970s. I used drawings from the "Locker-Room" series (1988–91), and superimposed them over paintings from the "Erotic Series," giving way to the "Overlays" (1992–96). It was a sacrifice of several of the early pictures that I regretted many years later when they aroused so much public interest. However, the sense of

time and memory implied in the "Overlays" brought new ideas into my work, and became my first venture into transparencies. At times, something appears in the work for which one is not quite ready, and it needs to gestate for a while until one comes back to it.

The balance between content and style has been an ongoing preoccupation. My formal training and passion for paint and high color are deeply held and instinctive in my work. The content has been consistently fired by my desire for the work to impact and to help change the way women are perceived and how we perceive ourselves. The prism of the self-view also serves to focus on the social and psychological aspects of gender and age. In my work, both the way we relate to the changing body when young, middle-aged or old, and how we occupy these roles come into play. The use of myself as model often steered me into subjects that are quite autobiographical: depicting myself together with male figures with whom I had been involved, locations where I spent my summers, and portraits of family and artist friends. I spend my summers in East Hampton, where I love to work until late afternoon and then walk down to the beach where the light and sound of the water are so restorative. I did a few paintings in the mid-1980s based on this experience: the aloneness of being part of the crowd on the beach. The psychological overtones in many of these paintings were much more pronounced than in the more iconic nudes from the 1970s. I combined realist and painterly methods insisting that a unified style was not preordained. This probably made me a pre-post-modernist artist, to coin a phrase.

While my work developed through series, the connecting thread across decades is a single perspective: being inside the experience of femaleness and taking possession of it culturally. I have used both the mirror and the camera as strategies to destabilize the point of view (who is looking at whom), and to engage the viewer as a participant. With the "Locker-Room" series from the late 1980s, I began taking photos in the gymnasium and women's locker-room, virtual houses of mirrors. In this landscape of Narcissus I wanted to engage the possibility of a female self-articulation, and conversely a necessary self-indifference. It was at this moment when the first issues of aging became important for me. I took pictures of women's reflections in the mirror so that they didn't know at whom the camera was pointed, thus avoiding the tendency of people posing for the camera. The unintended reflections of myself holding the camera in the mirror triggered a return to the self-image. This time, my paintings revealed a body at a more advanced age, and showed me aggressively pointing the camera at the viewer. By the late 1990s my interest turned to old mannequins that



Perfil infinito, 1966

I found on the street, and I began the series “Mannequins” (1996–2001). These idealized versions of the female body served as alter egos to explore the isolation and anomie of objectification and fetishization. The haunting beautiful faces, broken parts and empty armholes were eloquent witnesses to the way women were valued for their youth and beauty and discarded in later years as powerless and no longer viable. In the work that followed, I painted in layers so that the evidence of age would not be erased by virtuoso paint handling. The sensuality of the flesh permeates these paintings, a sensuality that is not confined to youth. I had entered into a relationship with artist John Hardy, with whom I lived for twenty-one years before he passed away in 2014. These late years were empowering and rewarding in every sense, something I hoped to communicate through my work.

In 2013 I completed a series of self-portraits focusing on my face, all done from photos in mirrors and video cameras as well as some other works which show the frame and edge of the mirror in the painting. The multiple ways in which we view images of ourselves and others create a virtual reality, one we tend to accept as true and real when, in fact, these images are all facsimiles that disconnect us from life. By revealing the way in which I construct my images, I posed the question: how do we create our own reality? My earlier preoccupation had been with a first person view point, seen through my own perspective, but the intervening camera was always apparent. More recently I tried to take my own pictures using a timer on the camera and then racing to be in front of the lens. Consequently, many of these photos were blurred and images doubled. I liked the implications of such images and began to paint modulated surfaces and blurred and shifting figures, which seem to reference the anxious moments of personal lives, as well as uncertain times. Layered transparencies suggest motion and time passing, a perfect way of visualizing the inevitability of aging. In a culture so driven by youth, but due to suddenly be overtaken by the baby boomer generation in old age, it seems essential to address our expectations and priorities. If we are lucky we will be old some day. Age cannot be denied as part of the human spectrum. My work from the last five years has tried to acknowledge and address some of these feelings for myself and others.

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. The last forty-five years of work, I think, reveal my ongoing interest in both process and relevance.

—Joan Semmel, New York, April 2015



Rhapsody in Blue, 1967



Red Ground, 1969



Untitled (abstract study), c. 1966



Untitled (figure study), c. 1971



Untitled, 1971



Flip-Flop Diptych, 1971



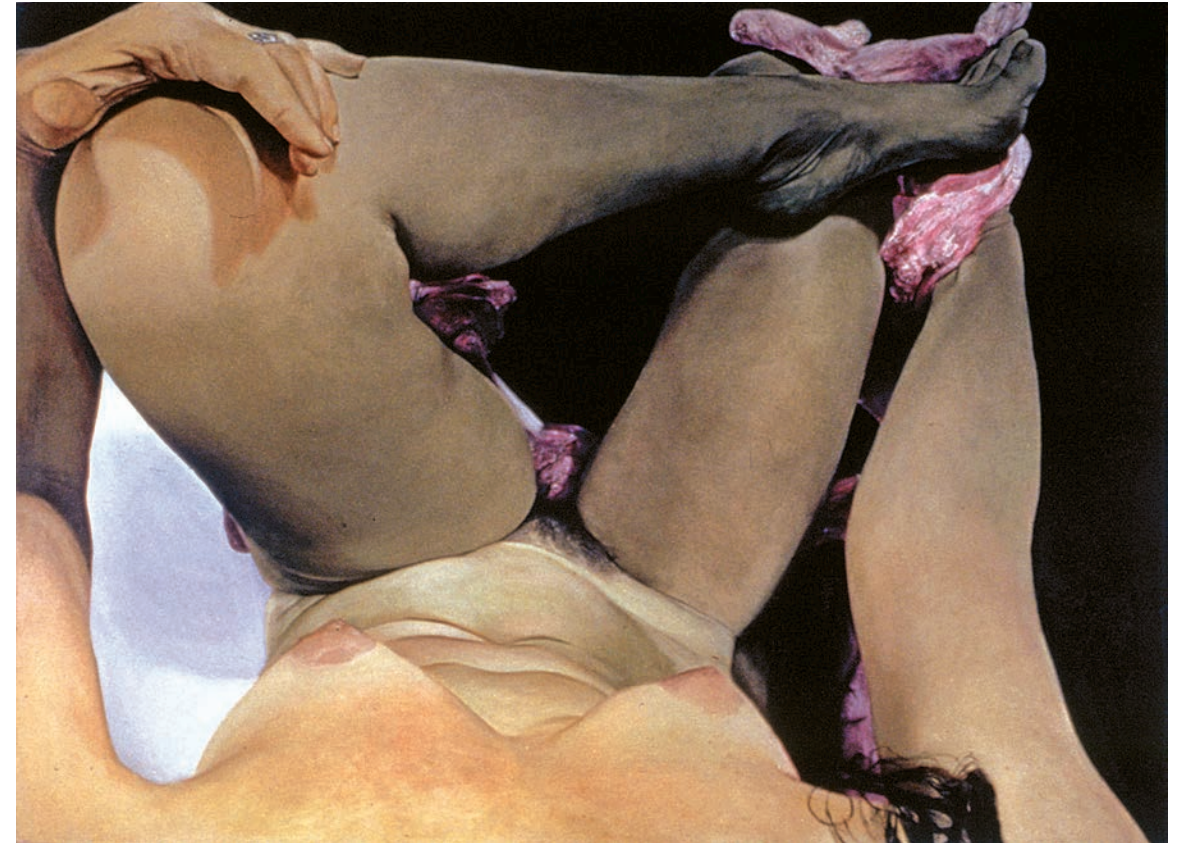
Green Heart, 1971



Hold, 1972



Erotic Yellow, 1973



Me Without Mirrors, 1974



Intimacy-Autonomy, 1974



Renoir Revisited, 1977



Touch, 1975



Mythologies and Me, 1976



Out of Darkness, 1977



On the Grass, 1978



Sunlight, 1978



Untitled, 1978



Untitled, 1978



Side Pull, 1979



Purple Diagonal, 1980



Abeyance, 1986



Double Torso, 1987



Beachbody, 1985



Mirror Mirror, 1988



Cage of Mirrors, 1991



Flash, 1973/1992



Overlay Series "Twins", 1973/1992



Odalesque, 1998



Multiples, 1998



Close-Up, 2001



Centered, 2002



Knees Together, 2003



Body & Sole, 2004



Double X, 2005



Camera Choreography, 2006



Disappearing, 2006



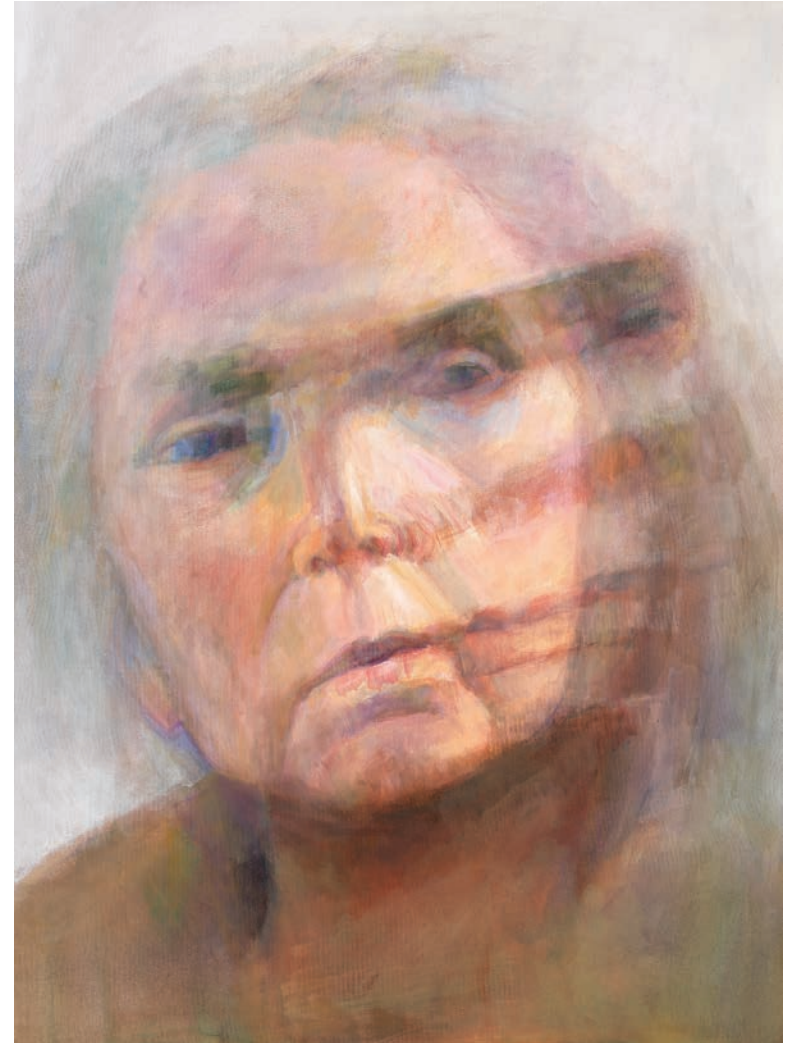
Untitled, 2007



Squat, 2007



Ghost, 2009



Self-Portrait #4, 2010



Unveiling, 2011



Crossed Legs, 2011



Transitions, 2012



Skin Patterns, 2013



Transparent Mask, 2014

THROUGH THE OBJECT'S EYE
Sexual Imagery in Women's Art

edited by Joan Semmel

contributors Lucy Lippard
 Carol Duncan
 April Kingsley
 Eunice Lipton

introduction by Joan Semmel

Through the Object's Eye

Introduction

The ferment of feminist activity in New York City in the early 1970's broke the profound isolation in which women artists had always worked. Meetings -- innumerable meetings-- began bringing women together. Into each other's studios they trouped, exchanging information on jobs and exhibition opportunities and comparing tales of put-downs and rip-offs. Looking---looking--looking, they at long last saw each other's work, some of which had never been shown. Exhibitions began to take shape, and many of us who would have had previously cringed at the identification "woman's exhibition" began to show together.

When the Woman's Interart Center was formed in 1971 one of my paintings was included in the opening exhibit. Subsequently, I was invited to participate in the first exhibition at a new gallery of erotic art. Because so much of the work brought to this gallery was done by women, the dealer decide to do an all woman show. It was then that I began to recognize the strong undercurrent of sexuality in women's art, and to question the reasons for it.

This book was conceived as an inquiry into that content. Most critical art writing of the last two decades concentrated on formal esthetic and stylistic problems. In much of this work

Those problems seemed almost extraneous. The intensity of the content involvement gave the work an authenticity and communicative power that touched on the raw nerves of the total social fabric.

I decided to organize the material so that it would be presented on two levels, one for its psycho-sexual-political implications and secondly for its esthetic considerations. Each contributor has therefor chosen works to illustrate her point of view and the photographic essay by April Kingsley presents an overview of all of the work from a descriptive position.

Despite a wide range of stylistic differences, there seem to be several basic content areas in which many women center their imagery. There are four thematic ideas which occur with uncommon frequency in women's art; sexual imagery, both abstract and figurative; autobiography and self-image; the celebration of devalued subject matter and media that have been traditionally relegated to women; and anthropomorphic or nature forms. There is, of course a great deal of over-lapping.

Much of this work has been seen in other contexts, and most often the content and its implications have been ignored. This is particularly true in the case of sexual imagery. In some of the earliest modern examples, sexual themes were abstract and ambiguous subconscious manifestations, often denied by the artist herself. Yet powerful sexual overtones in the work of)'Keefe, Bontecou, Nevelson and Frankenthaler, among others, consistently evoke those readings. The ambiguousness of abstract forms of expression permitted the disguising of explicit sexual content, content which fifteen to twenty years ago was socially and psychologically unacceptable. Some artists are still unwilling

to permit sexual readings of their work, but many others have insisted on those interpretations.

Women, for whom the sexual experience in all its ramifications, has been historically the central life experience (other avenues being blocked) have seldom been permitted to comment upon that experience. Carol Duncan points out although the Bohemian romance with sexuality as a liberating revolutionary force in the beginning of the century was embodied in the works of innumerable male artists, that liberation was unfortunately seldom extended to the women of their fantasies who were usually objectified and presented as prostitutes. She writes:

---"the modern art that we have learned to recognize and respond to as erotic is frequently about the supremacy of men over women."

1.

Significantly, erotic work by contemporary men often celebrates the same attitudes found in the girlie magazines, albeit with considerably more style and class. Artists such as Wesselman, Lindner, Ramos, and Kacere purposely adopt the slick brassy look of the pop vernacular and consciously appropriate porno iconography, skillfully referring us back to other contexts. This referral to a realm of experience thought to be antithetical to "sacred" art is characteristic of Pop art in general. However, in the case of erotic imagery the evocation of the pop culture tends to absolve the artist of any responsibility for the content and its implications. The Pop look thus facilitates the acceptance of the subject matter.

The sexual art of women, on the other hand, runs a very wide range of styles and attitudes and is far more direct and concrete. Moreover, much of the imagery is disturbing on a subliminal level. In 1966, Allen Kaprow in an article in the Village Voice referred to an exhibition of Martha Edelheit's work which states the contrast;

"Female art in general plays no games as men's art does; no one wins, there are no victims or protagonists. It is thoughtful, but not intellectual insofar as intellectuality is a game. It is not editorial either, insofar as discriminations between degrees of moral good and bad are also a game. Female fantasy is pervasive, boundless, unconcerned with definitions and measure. When sex is its primary involment the involvement is total and therefore shameless. It is for this reason terrifying to men, not because it implies the loss of their status, but because it implies the loss of the game (which is their life)."

Women's sexual art tends to stress either the strongly positive or strongly negative aspect of their experience. Feelings of victimization and anger often become politically directed especially in the more recent works. When female sexuality is celebrated as joyous, liberating and creative, the influence of feminist ideals is strongly sensed. At times, it is clearly elucidated as in the concept of "central core" imagery developed by Miriam Schapiro and Judy Chicago which relates the use of a central image of female body identification. Joan Snyder whose earlier dripping slashes were accepted as another abstract-expressionist variant, has recently introduced explicit vaginal

4

and written allusions to sexual experiences and feminist protest into her paintings. The sculpture of Marisol always seemed uneasy in the company of Pop art. After seeing her black drawings of 1975, pregnant with sexual tension, one cannot overlook the pointed references to sexual role-playing in her early pieces. The obsessive use of her own mask/face heightens these meanings.

The constant recurrence of self-images and autobiographical references in women's art has ~~paralleled~~ paralleled feminist preoccupation with the connections between the personal and the public. Contemporary art criticism has eulogized individual personality, but has paradoxically regarded personal content as negative and quirky-- a nonuniversal. Unfortunately the definition of the universal has consistently excluded women's experience and concerns. The depersonalization, anomie, and alienation, so much a part of ~~the~~ men's world, are balanced in women's by an emphasis on intimacy and connectiveness.

The ties of family and community are evoked in women's art by the use of skills traditionally passed from mother to daughter like sewing, weaving, and cooking. The result has been some very unconventional art objects: soft and poured sculptures, diaphanous fabric constructions, embroidered and beaded paintings. There has been a conscious effort to attach affirmative meanings to subject matter and media formerly avoided as unsophisticated and unsuitable, or worse yet as decorative. This sense of connectedness has also yielded works which celebrate our anonymous past, our history and heroines.

6

Biological processes, so central to woman's nurturing role are inextricably bound up with the rhythms and forms of nature. Flower and bird images with varying degrees of anthropomorphic connotations, abstract biomorphic forms, process art, are all indications of women artists' identification with unity and continuity of nature.

Sexuality for the male has always been equated with power but a fragile power easily threatened and jealously guarded. The complexity and mysteriousness of female powers of reproduction, menstruation, and fertility have been fearful threats fraught with danger for him.²

" In the Jewish religious experience, Yahwah, the fierce and stormy desert God, abominated the fertility goddesses and their rites; all power, even that of fertility, came from him and was subject to him."

" One must understand that virginity was a liberating idea in early Christianity. It was a weapon against the vestiges of paganism, which saw a woman's sexuality as a threat to the freedom of man. A woman had to be kept a prisoner of her sexuality, or she would imprison a man with it."

The insistence on domination as an emotional imperative began in the sexual arena, and its roots still remain there. The pattern of male dominance and female submissiveness has been so deeply imbedded in the cultural consciousness that at times a kind of psychological and sexual trauma is caused when that balance is disturbed. Female sexuality is very frightening because it attacks the basis of that relationship.

7

Thus woman's sensuality--like her intellectuality-- has of necessity been suppressed and then denied. Religion and art have come together to create the idealization of the "virgin" birth, the "pure" woman. The male has had free reign to invent sexual mythology in terms of his own fears and fantasies.

The woman who is openly sexual must also demonstrate her vulnerability, her mindlessness, her inherent weakness in order not to be threatening. Marilyn Monroe is the perfect example. Her enormous hold on the public imagination had to do with her ability to project both of these aspects of her personality: her sexuality and her vulnerability. The innumerable odalisques and slave victims of art history demonstrate those same attributes.

Throughout the history of post-Renaissance art, the female nude as a genre has been a vehicle for the expression of the male erotic imagination. Women have enjoyed no equivalent outlet. In the past female painters were even excluded from life drawing classes. Male painters from Titian through Ingres, from Gauguin to Picasso, and from Wesselman to Lindner have been the interpreters of women as the subject of erotic art. In the literary field as well, the Flauberts, Henry Jameses and D.H. Lawrences have invaded the secret provinces of our hearts and minds to create our classic prototypes and heroines.

8

As women gain their economic independence and begin to participate in the total culture from a more equalized educational and power base, they have begun to assert the validity of their own vision. As woman assumes the role of artist, she does not shed her sexual identity. The artist's constant search for self merges with the woman's need for self-definition.

The sexual theme touches on the most universal and personal kind of human experience, one in which the female has always been deeply involved but seldom permitted to comment upon. Suddenly in all the arts, women today are dealing with the heretofore forbidden. We finally realize that the need to express ourselves as we really are, in all of our aspects, is a vital necessity if we are to break the invisible chains which have immobilized us for centuries. It is time to see ourselves through our own eyes!

Joan Semmel

Joan Semmel: Chronology

- 1932 Born in the Bronx, NY.
- 1955 Daughter is born in New York.
- 1952 Receives Diploma from Cooper Union Art School, New York.
- 1953 Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* is published in English by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. The book will be influential for Semmel (fig. 1).
- 1955 Vietnam War Begins (fig. 2).
Rosa Parks denies her bus seat to a white man in Montgomery, AL.
- 1959 Participates in group exhibitions at the City Center Gallery, NY; Hilda Carmel Gallery, NY; and Woodstock Artists Association, NY.
Barbie doll is created by Ruth Handler and manufactured by Mattel (fig. 3).
- 1960 First solo exhibition opens at Manhasset Little Gallery, Manhassast, NY.
The Food and Drug Administration approves birth control pills for contraceptive use.
- 1963 Receives BFA from Pratt Institute, New York.
Moves to Spain (fig 4). At this time, the law towards women under Francisco Franco's dictatorship was defined by the *permiso marital*, which prohibited wives from gaining employment, opening a bank account, signing a contract, initiating legal proceedings, or traveling without their husbands permission (fig. 5).
Begins exhibiting in Spain and South America (fig. 6).
United States President John F. Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas, TX (fig. 7).
Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* is published.
- 1964 Participates in Sal3n de Mayo, Barcelona, Spain.
The United States government passes Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, which prohibits employment discrimination based on race, sex, religion, or nationality (fig. 8).
- 1965 First solo exhibition opens in Spain, Galer3a Eburne, Madrid.
Son is born in Madrid.
- 1966 *Joan Semmel* opens at the Ateneo de Madrid (fig. 9).
National Organization for Women is founded in the United States.

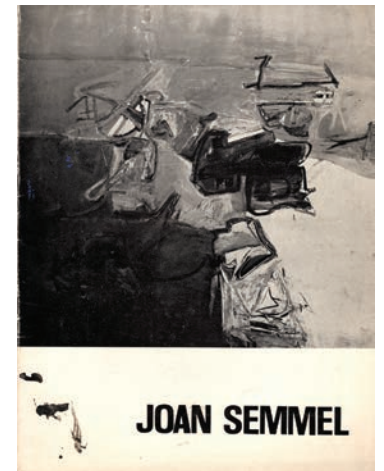
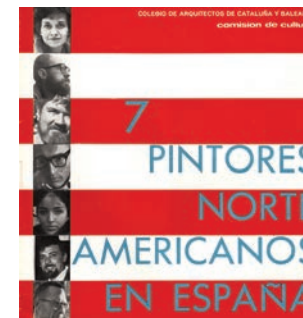
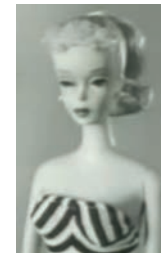


Fig 1 Cover, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, 1949

Fig 2 American troops and Vietnamese Army in combat operations against the Communist Viet Cong guerillas, 1961

Fig 3 First Barbie doll television commercial, 1959

Fig 4 Joan Semmel in her studio, Madrid, 1964

Fig 5 Francisco Franco and Carmen Polo, n.d., Dutch National Archives, The Hague, Fotocollectie Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau

Fig 6 Catalogue cover, *7 Pintores Norte Americanos En Espa3a*, Colegio de Arquitectos de Catalu3a Baleares, 1965

Fig 7 John F. Kennedy and Jacqueline Kennedy, Dallas, TX, November 22, 1963

Fig 8 President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act, 1964

Fig 9 Catalogue cover, *Joan Semmel*, Sala del Prado del Ateneo de Madrid, 1966



Fig 10 Exhibition brochure, Museo Nacional de Artes Plásticas, Montevideo, Uruguay, 1968

Fig 11 Cover, *Joan Semmel: Pinturas*, 1968

Fig 12 Women artists meeting at Museum, October 21, 1971



Fig 13 Joan Semmel in Soho, New York, 1974

Fig 14 Joan Semmel in her Soho loft, background her painting *Green Heart*, 1971



Fig 15 Cover, *ARTnews*, January 1971, Courtesy *ARTnews*

Fig 16 Semmel, from "Women in the Erotic Arts" by Lynda Crawford, *Viva*, January 1974

1968 Travels to South America.

Solo exhibition opens at Museo Nacional de Artes Plásticas, Montevideo, Uruguay; and at Galería Bonino, Buenos Aires, Argentina (fig. 10, see pages 12, 13).

Ediciones Contemporáneas Universales publishes *Joan Semmel: Pinturas* (fig. 11).

Civil Rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. is assassinated in Memphis, TN.

1969 Art Workers' Coalition is formed in New York. Semmel attends Coalition meetings when she returns to New York the following year.

Women Artists in Revolution (WAR) is formed in New York (fig. 12).

1970 Returns to New York and establishes at SoHo (fig. 13).

Ad Hoc Women Artist's Committee is co-founded in New York by Lucy Lippard. Semmel actively participates in the Committee by compiling lists and sending letters to universities noting the low number of female faculty.

1971 Enters Pratt Institute, New York, and begins working with representation (see page 15).

Begins first figurative series "Sex Paintings" (fig. 14, see page 21).

Begins spending her summers in East Hampton.

Linda Nochlin's renowned essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" is first published in *ARTnews* magazine (fig. 15).

1972 Receives MFA from Pratt Institute, New York.

Begins "Erotic Series," working from photographs rather than drawings (fig. 16, see page 22).

Formally divorces her husband.

As the representative for the Women's Ad Hoc Committee, Semmel gives a talk at the Political Committee of the College Art Association after Title IX is passed. She calls it "immoral and unscrupulous" that studio art departments at colleges and universities admit women as the majority of their incoming students, yet will not hire women in their departments and do not foster or provide post-graduation employment and visibility opportunities.



Fig 17 United States Representative and co-author of the Title IX Amendment, Patsy Mink in a meeting with four cabinet members, n.d.



Fig 18 Installation views, "Erotic Series," 141 Prince St. Gallery, New York, 1973



Fig 19 Vintage photograph of Semmel and partner, which she used for her painting *Antonio and I* (1974)

1972 The United States government passes Title IX of the Education Amendments prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex and gender in any federally funded education program or activity (fig. 17).

Women's Caucus for Art (WCA) is founded.

Feminist Art Journal is published, its first issue exposes the exploitation and denigration of women by the New Left.

Playboy magazine's November issue becomes the best-selling edition in the publication's history, selling 7.16 million copies

The first stand-alone issue of *Ms.* magazine is published, co-founded by Gloria Steinem and Letty Cottin Pogrebin.

1973 Solo exhibition of "Erotic Series" opens in New York at 141 Prince St. Gallery. Semmel organizes the show, after she is unable to find gallery representation (fig. 18, see pages 22, 23).

Paints *Untitled (coffee cup)* shifting for the first time to first-person perspective.

Joins the Fight Censorship Group, a loose collective of women artists whose work centered on sexually explicit imagery, founded by Anita Steckel. Fellow members included Louise Bourgeois, Hannah Wilke, Judith Bernstein, Martha Edelheit, Eunice Golden, and Juanita McNeely.

Edits and writes introduction for *A New Eros* (originally *Through the Object's Eye: Sexual Imagery in Women's Art*, with contributions by Lucy Lippard, Carol Duncan, Eunice Lipton, April Kingsley, Roz Schneider, and Elizabeth Weatherford. She works on the publication until 1976, but the book is never published by Hacker Art Books (see pages 87–95).

Holds a summer teaching position at Maryland Art Institute, Baltimore, MD.

Thomas B. Hess and Elizabeth C. Baker publish *Art and Sexual Politics: Women's Liberation, Women Artists, and Art History*.

The Supreme Court ruling on *Roe vs. Wade* legalizes abortion in the United States.

1974 Paints *Under the Sheet*, first painting from "Self-Images" (through 1979; see pages 25–38), framing the viewer's perspective of the female nude from the model/artist's point of view (fig. 19).

Teaches at Rutgers University, Livingston, New Jersey (through 1975).

PERFORMANCE-AUG 29 8 PM L I L
 PICARD CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN
 FRANCES ALENIKOFF & DANCERS
 WOMEN ARTIST FILMMAKERS INC
 AUG 24 & 26 CONTRIBUTIONS

WOMEN ARTISTS HERE AND NOW

ASHAWAGH HALL, SPRINGS
 OPENING AUG. 23, 5-8 PM
 AUG. 24-SEPT. 1, 12-5 PM

LYNDA BENGLIS ELAINE DEKOONING
 PERLE FINE AUDREY FLACK
 JANE FREILICHER BUFFIE JOHNSON
 JOYCE KOZLOFF FAY LANSNER L-I-LAN
 BETTY PARSONS LEATRICE ROSE
 MIRIAM SCHAPIRO JOAN SEMMEL
 HEDDA STERNE JANE WILSON
 PHOTOGRAPHY-DOROTHY BESKIND
 TRACY BOYD ANNE SCHWARTZ

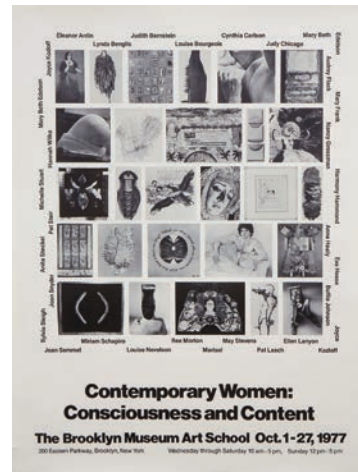


Fig 20 Exhibition poster, *Women Artists Here and Now*, 1975

Fig 21 Catalogue cover, *The Year of the Woman*, The Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1975

Fig 22 Untitled, 1972, from the "Erotic Series," oil on canvas, 48h x 56w in, Private collection, Madrid

Fig 23 President Ford in the Oval Office, 1975. National Archives, Washington, DC

Fig 24 *Secret Space*, 1976, oil on canvas, 68h x 68w in, Private collection, New Jersey

Fig 25 Barbara Jordan, member of the United States House of Representatives, April 7, 1976. United States Library of Congress

Fig 26 Cover of "Feminism, Art, and Politics," *Heresies: A Feminist Publication of Art and Politics*, Vol. 1, January 1, 1977. Courtesy Harmony Hammond

Fig 27 Exhibition poster, *Contemporary Women: Consciousness and Content*, Art School gallery at the Brooklyn Museum, 1977

Fig 28 Semmel with artists Harmony Hammond, Carter Ratcliff, May Stevens, Joyce Kozloff and Lawrence Alloway at panel discussion at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, 1977

1975 Co-curates the exhibition *Women Artists Here and Now* with Joyce Kozloff in Ashawagh Hall, Springs, East Hampton, NY. Artist Carolee Schneemann performs *Interior Scroll* for the first time on August 29 as part of the show (fig. 20).

The presiding justice of the Appellate Division of the State Supreme Court calls for the removal of an all-women exhibition *The Year of the Woman* (fig. 21) with "explicit male nudity" at the Bronx County Museum of the Arts. Semmel's Untitled (1972; fig. 22) is one of the offending artworks. Bronx Borough President Robert Abrams allows the exhibition to continue.

President Ford declares the end of the Vietnam War, ending aid to Saigon (fig. 23).

1976 Teaches at the Brooklyn Museum Art School (through 1978).

Begins to work from color Xeroxes rather than photographs. The first work completed using this method is *Secret Spaces* (fig. 24).

The Heresies Collective is founded in New York City.

The exhibition *Women Artists: 1550-1950*, curated by Linda Nochlin and Ann Sutherland Harris, opens at Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA.

The Institute for Research on Women (IRW) is founded at Douglass College, Rutgers University.

Barbara Jordan, the first woman elected to congress becomes the first woman and first African American to deliver the keynote address at the Democratic National Convention (fig. 25).

1977 Semmel's *Mythologies and Me* (1976; see page 33) is included in "Feminism, Art, and Politics," the first issue of *Heresies: A Feminist Publication of Art and Politics* (fig. 26).

Curates the group exhibition *Contemporary Women: Consciousness and Content* in the Art School Gallery at the Brooklyn Museum to coincide with the museum's exhibition *Women Artists: 1550-1950* (figs. 27, 28).

1978 Receives a tenure track teaching position at the women's school Douglass College (now Rutgers University), New Brunswick, NJ. When Semmel was hired, Douglass College had no permanent female faculty on a tenure track in the art school. She became the first tenured woman faculty member in studio art department.

1979 Begins "Echoing Images" series (through 1981; see pages 40-45).



Fig 29 Installation view, Lerner-Heller Gallery, New York, 1979

Fig 30 President Reagan and Supreme Court Justice nominee Sandra Day O'Connor at the White House, June 15, 1981

Fig 31 *Portrait of Benny Andrews*, 1985, oil on canvas, 44h x 30w in

Fig 32 Geraldine Ferraro at the Democratic National Party Convention, San Francisco, CA, 1984

Fig 33 *Semmel in Springs*, East Hampton, Summer 1993

Fig 34 Guerrilla Girls, *Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?*, poster campaign, 1989/1990. New York City ©1989, 1995 Guerrilla Girls

Fig 35 Installation view, Gruenebaum Gallery, New York, 1987

1979 Solo show opens at Lerner-Heller Gallery, New York (fig. 29).

Participates in the exhibition *Feministische Kunst International (International Feminist Art)*, Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, The Netherlands.

1980 Receives National Endowment for the Arts Grant.

1981 Sandra Day O'Connor is appointed to the Supreme Court, becoming the first woman to join the judiciary body (fig. 30).

1982 Begins a series of individual and group portraits of friends and family (through 1986; figs. 31, 40).

1984 Solo exhibition opens at 112 Greene Street, New York.

Receives Distinguished Alumnus Award from Cooper Union.

An International Survey of Painting and Sculpture, curated by Kynaston McShine, opens at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York. From 169 artists included, only 13 were women.

Geraldine Ferraro accepts the nomination as Vice President, running with Democratic presidential candidate Walter Mondale, becoming the first woman to be nominated for higher office (fig. 32).

1985 Begins "Beach" series (through 1986), painting in her East Hampton studio (fig. 33, see pages 47, 49).

Receives National Endowment for the Arts Grant.

The Guerrilla Girls, an anonymous group of female artists, is formed in New York in response to MoMA's *An International Survey of Painting and Sculpture* exhibition. They begin a poster campaign throughout New York City with statistics about the underrepresentation of women artists in museums and galleries (fig. 34).

1986 Paints the "Gymnasium" series, marking the beginning of her interest in issues of aging as subject (see page 46).

1987 Solo show of painting from her "Gymnasium" series opens at Gruenebaum Gallery, New York (fig. 35).

Purchases a house in Springs, East Hampton, where she continues to work every summer.

Eleanor Heartney writes "How Wide is the Gender Gap?" published in the Summer issue of *ARTnews*. The article addresses the decline of visibility for women artists since the 1970s.



Fig 36 *Mirror, Mirror*, 1988, oil on canvas, 68h x 78w in

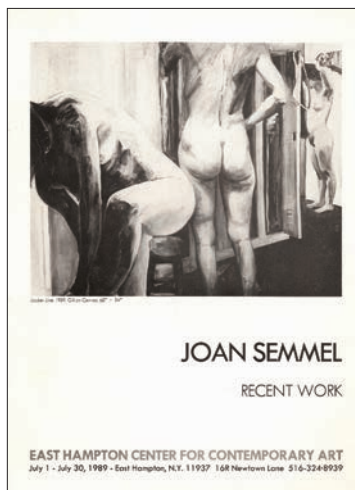


Fig 37 Catalogue cover, *Joan Semmel: Recent Work*, East Hampton Center for Contemporary Art, 1989

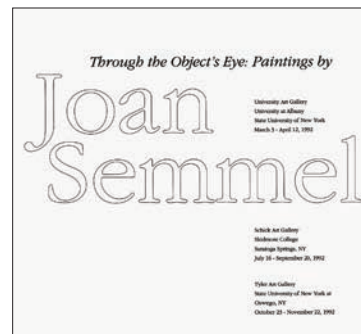


Fig 38 Catalogue cover, *Through the Object's Eye: Paintings by Joan Semmel*, University Art Gallery, Albany, NY, 1992

Fig 39 Women's Action Coalition at the New York City Pride March, 1992 ©Teri Slotkin, 1992

1987 The National Museum of Women in the Arts opens to the public in Washington, DC. Its first show *American Women Artists: 1830–1930* opens amidst much controversy within feminist communities and the larger national art world.

The Art Bulletin publishes “The Feminist Critique of Art History,” an essay by Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Matthews.

1988 Paints *Mirror Mirror*, beginning the “Locker-Room” series (through 1991; see pages 50, 51), and marking the start of her depiction of the camera as a device to frame and question issues of perception and representation (fig. 36).

The book *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* by Linda Nochlin is published, which includes seven landmark essays on women artists and women in Art History.

1989 *Joan Semmel: Recent Work* opens at the East Hampton Center for Contemporary Art, NY (fig. 37) with a catalogue essay by Robert Storr.

Semmel participates in the March for Women’s Lives organized by the National Organization for Women in Washington, DC.

The Guerrilla Girls release a study revealing that out of all the artists represented by 33 of the top New York City art galleries, only 16% are women. This figure is compared to the 49.2% of bus drivers who are women, 48% of sales people, 43% of managers, and 17% of truck drivers.

1991 Teaches at Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Summer. *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, Susan Faludi’s study of antifeminism in the media, is published and becomes a bestseller.

1992 Begins “Overlays” series (through 1996; see pages 53, 55). Mid-career survey *Through the Object’s Eye: Paintings by Joan Semmel* opens at the University Art Gallery, Statue University of New York, Albany, NY. The exhibition traveled throughout New York State, including the city (through 1993; fig. 38).

Women’s Action Coalition (WAC) is formed in New York. Semmel attends the Coalition’s meetings (fig. 39).

1993 In the spirit of her New York exhibition in 1973 at 141 Prince Street, Semmel organizes a show of her own work titled *An Other View* at Bypass Gallery, New York.



Fig 40 *Portrait of John Hardy*, 1994, oil on canvas, 26h x 44w in

Fig 41 Video still from *Joan Semmel: Painting a Portrait*, 1995

Fig 42 Brochure interior, *The Mannequin Series: Recent Work by Joan Semmel*, Jersey City Museum, 2000

Fig 43 Semmel at the International Summer Academy of Fine Arts in Salzburg, Austria, 2000

1993 Begins living with artist John Hardy (fig. 40).

1993 Whitney Biennial, curated by Elisabeth Sussman, opens at the Whitney Museum of American Art, marking the most multicultural and representative exhibition in the series.

Betty Friedan's *Fountain of Age* is published, examining issues of aging in a culture that worships youth.

1994 *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact*, edited by Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, is published. Semmel's work is included (see pages 25, 26).

Bad Girls, curated by Marcia Tucker, opens at the New Museum, New York, to much controversy within the New York Feminist community and the larger art world.

1995 Videos *Joan Semmel: Painting a Portrait* and *Joan Semmel: A Passion for Painting* are produced by Paul Tschinkel, Inner-Tube Video (fig. 41).

1996 Begins "Mannequin" series (through 2000; see pages 56, 57).

1999 Participates in *Anni Albers, Robert Beck, Cady Noland, Joan Semmel, Nancy Shaver*, curated by Robert Gober, Matthew Marks Gallery, New York (see pages 26, 30).

2000 Retires as Professor at the Mason Gross School of Arts, Rutgers University.

The Mannequin Series: Recent Work by Joan Semmel opens at the Jersey City Museum, NJ (fig. 42).

Co-curates with artist Arnold Mesches *Private Worlds* at Art in General, New York.

Teaches at International Summer Academy of Fine Arts in Salzburg, Austria (fig. 43).

Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards' *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future* is published. The book discusses the third wave of Feminism.

2001 Begins "With Camera" series (through 2006), which marks the first time she purposefully poses in front of the mirror with the camera (see pages 59–67).

9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center, New York; the Pentagon, Washington, DC; and in an open field in Pennsylvania.

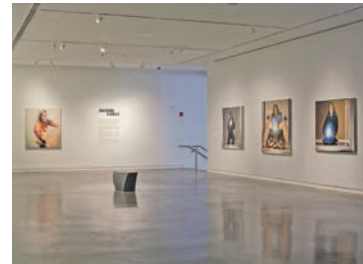


Fig 44 Semmel, with artists Harmony Hammond and May Stevens at the opening of *Personal and Political: The Women's Art Movement*, East Hampton, NY, August 2002

Fig 45 Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the House of Representatives, Washington, DC, August 2007

Fig 46 *Wack!: Art and the Feminist Revolution*, MoMA PS1, 2008. Courtesy of MoMA PS1

Fig 47 Catalogue cover *Solitaire: Lee Lozano, Sylvia Mangold Plimack, Joan Semmel*, The Ohio State University, Wexner Center for the Arts, 2008

Fig 48 Hillary Clinton speaking at a campaign rally, Minneapolis, MN, February 3, 2008

Fig 49 Installation view, *Joan Semmel—A Lucid Eye*, 2003. Courtesy of The Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York

2002 Participates in *Personal and Political: The Women's Art Movement, 1969–1975*, curated by Simon Taylor and Natalie Ng, opens at the Guild Hall Museum, East Hampton, NY (fig. 44).

Nancy Pelosi becomes the first woman elected as Democratic Minority Leader in the United States House of Representatives and in 2007 becomes the first woman to be Speaker of the House (fig 45).

2003 *Transgressive Women: Yayoi Kusama, Lee Lozano, Ana Mendieta, and Joan Semmel*, curated by Annette Dimeo Carozzi, opens at the Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, TX.

Overlook Book publishes Allan Tannenbaum's *New York in the 70s* photography book, which includes a feature on Semmel.

2006 Begins "Shifting Images" series (through 2013; see page 68–79).

High Times, Hard Times: New York Painting 1965–1975, curated by Katy Siegal, opens at the Weatherspoon Art Museum, Greensboro, NC. It re-examines painting practices in New York as they were impacted by Feminism and the Civil Rights Movement.

2007 Begins "Heads" series (through 2013; see page 69).

Participates in the landmark exhibition *Wack!: Art and the Feminist Revolution*, curated by Cornelia Butler, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA. The exhibition traveled to Washington DC, New York, and Vancouver, Canada (fig. 46).

The Museum of Modern Art in New York organizes "The Feminist Future Symposium" to discuss the relationship of art and gender.

2008 Receives Anonymous Was a Woman Award.

Participates in *Solitaire: Lee Lozano, Sylvia Mangold Plimack, Joan Semmel*, curated by Helen Molesworth, Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH (fig. 47).

Hillary Clinton runs for the Democratic nomination for President of the United States (fig. 48).

2010 Since the beginning of this decade, the percentage of women artists' solo exhibitions in major New York institutions is 33%.

2013 *Joan Semmel—A Lucid Eye*, curated by Sergio Bessa, opens at The Bronx Museum of the Arts, NY (fig. 49).

Awarded Women Caucus for Art Lifetime Achievement Award.

2014 Selected as a National Academician of the National Academy Museum, New York.



GUERRILLA GIRLS' 1986 REPORT CARD			PUSSY GALORE'S 2015 REPORT CARD		
GALLERY	%	WOMEN	GALLERY	%	WOMEN
Boris Mellore	0	0	203 Gallery	100	100
Henry Bone	0	0	Alexander & Benet	100	100
Conte Bessard	0	0	Henry Bone	100	100
Chase Brown	0	0	Lee Corral	100	100
Lee Corral	0	0	Chase & Bond	100	100
Christie Curlee	0	0	Paula Cooper	100	100
Andrea De Leo	0	0	David Fine	100	100
Allen Fineberg	0	0	Randy Feldman	100	100
Andrea Goodness	0	0	Jack Fine	100	100
Pat Heenan	0	0	Gracie	100	100
David Hurn	0	0	Alison Goodman	100	100
Oil & Steel	0	0	Curry Kington	100	100
Paula	0	0	Paul Kwon	100	100
Bara Shafiq	0	0	Tom Lambert	100	100
Samara Shafiq	0	0	Johnstone Kwon	100	100
Robert Thack	0	0	Andrea Loring	100	100
Michael Thack	0	0	Leonard Rose	100	100

Fig 50 *Touch*, 1975, oil on canvas, 57h x 103w in

Fig 51 The Guerrilla Girls' 1986 Report Card (left) with Pussy Galore's 2015 Report Card (right)

2014 Begins "Transparencies" series (ongoing; see page 83), in which she explores motion and time as well as the nuances of invisibility as it is experienced by older women.

Exhibition *Anni Albers, Robert Beck, Cady Noland, Joan Semmel, Nancy Shaver* is recreated as part of the retrospective *Robert Gober: The Heart is Not a Metaphor* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (fig. 50).

John Hardy, Semmel's partner for 21 years, dies.

2015 Pussy Galore releases "2015 Report Card" on the percentage of women artists represented at major New York galleries. Only 5 of the 34 galleries investigated have rosters with 50% of women artists (fig. 51).

Tom Finkelppearl, Commissioner of Cultural Affairs in New York City, announces diversity initiative to assess the demographic makeup of New York cultural organizations employees.



Installation view, Alexander Gray Associates, New York, 2015

List of Illustrated Works

- *Perfil infinito*, 1966
Oil on linen
76.38h x 67.32w in (194.01h x 170.99w cm)
- Rhapsody in Blue*, 1967
Oil on canvas
69.63h x 62.69w in (176.86h x 159.23w cm)
- *Red Ground*, 1969
Oil on linen
50h x 36w in (127h x 91.44w cm)
- *Untitled (abstract study)*, c.1966
Mixed media on paper
22.38h x 30.13w in (56.85h x 76.53w cm)
- *Untitled (figure study)*, c.1971
Mixed media on paper
35h x 22.5w in (88.9h x 57.15w cm)
- *Untitled*, 1971
Oil on canvas
70h x 80w in (177.8h x 203.2w cm)
- Green Heart*, 1971
Oil on canvas
48h x 58w in (121.92h x 147.32w cm)
Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston
Gift of Barbara Lee, The Barbara Lee Collection of Art by Women
- Flip-Flop Diptych*, 1971
Oil on canvas
68h x 136w in (172.72h x 345.44w cm)
- Hold*, 1972
Oil on canvas
72h x 108w in (182.88h x 274.32w cm)
- *Erotic Yellow*, 1973
Oil on canvas
72h x 72w in (182.88h x 182.88w cm)
- Me Without Mirrors*, 1974
Oil on canvas
50.3h x 68.2w in (127.76h x 123.24w cm)
Greenville County Museum of Art, Museum purchase and gift of Keller and David Freeman
- Intimacy-Autonomy*, 1974
Oil on canvas
50h x 98w in (127h x 248.92w cm)
Brooklyn Museum, Anonymous gift, 2004.117
- Touch*, 1975
Oil on canvas
57h x 103w in (144.78h x 261.62w cm)
- Mythologies and Me*, 1976
Oil and collage on canvas
60h x 148w (152.4h x 375.92w cm)
The Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Gift of Buffie Johnson, 1978
- Renoir Revisited*, 1977
Oil on canvas
56h x 104w in (142.24h x 264.16w cm)
Collection Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA
Gift of Rosemary McNamara
- Out of Darkness*, 1977
Oil on canvas
49h x 67w in (124.46h x 170.18w cm)
- *On The Grass*, 1978
Oil on canvas
48h x 74w in (121.92h x 187.96w cm)
- Untitled*, 1978
Oil crayon and collage on paper
22h x 30w in (55.88h x 76.2w cm)
- Sunlight*, 1978
Oil on canvas
60h x 96w in (152.4h x 243.8w cm)
The Jewish Museum, New York
Purchase, Fine Arts Acquisition Fund, 2010-35

Untitled, 1978
Oil crayon and collage on paper
20h x 27w in (50.8 x 68.58w cm)
Collection of the Herbert F. Johnson Museum
of Art, Cornell University
Acquired through the generosity of Helen Appel,
Class of 1955, and Robert J. Appel, Class of
1953; and through the David M. Solinger, Class
of 1926, Fund; with additional support from the
Beth Treadway, Class of 1970, and Stephen
Treadway, Class of 1969, Fund 2013.20

Side Pull, 1979
Oil on canvas
78h x 108w in (198.12h x 274.32w cm)

**Purple Diagonal*, 1980
Oil on canvas
78h x 104w in (198.12h x 264.16w cm)

**Beachbody*, 1985
Oil on canvas
68h x 68w in (172.72h x 172.72w cm)

Abeyance, 1986
Oil on canvas
68h x 96w in (172.72 x 243.84w cm)

Double Torso, 1987
Oil on canvas
20.13h x 30.25w in (51.13h x 76.84w cm)
Private Collection, New Jersey

Mirror Mirror, 1988
Oil on canvas
68h x 78w in (172.72h x 198.12w cm)

Cage of Mirrors, 1991
Oil on canvas
68h x 72w in (172.72h x 182.88w cm)

Flash, 1973/1992
Oil on canvas
68h x 78w in (172.72h x 198.12w cm)

**Overlays Series "Twins,"* 1973/1992
Oil on canvas
68h x 58w in (172.72h x 147.32w cm)

Odalesque, 1998
Oil on canvas
54h x 66w in (137.16h x 167.64w cm)

Multiples, 1998
Oil on canvas
58h x 48w in (147.32h x 121.92w cm)

Close-Up, 2001
Oil on canvas
72h x 62w in (182.88h x 157.48w cm)

**Centered*, 2002
Oil on canvas
48h x 53w in (121.92h x 134.62w cm)

Knees Together, 2003
Oil on canvas
60h x 48w in (152.4h x 121.92w cm)

Body & Sole, 2004
Oil on canvas
46h x 58w in (116.84h x 147.32w cm)

Double X, 2005
Oil on canvas
56h x 58w in (142.24h x 147.32w cm)

Camera Choreography, 2006
Oil on canvas
76h x 100w in (193.04h x 254w cm)

Disappearing, 2006
Oil on canvas
54h x 46w in (137.16h x 116.84w cm)

Untitled, 2007
Oil on canvas
18h x 24w in (45.72h x 60.96w cm)

Squat, 2007
Oil on canvas
48h x 48w in (121.92h x 121.92w cm)

**Ghost*, 2009
Oil on canvas
48h x 48w in (121.92h x 121.92w cm)

Self-Portrait #4, 2010
Oil on canvas
48h x 36w in (121.92h x 91.44w cm)

Unveiling, 2011
Oil on canvas
48h x 48 w in (121.92h x 121.92w cm)

Crossed Legs, 2011
Oil on Canvas
48h x 48w in (121.92h x 121.92w cm)

Transitions, 2012
Oil on canvas
70h x 90w in (177.8h x 228.6w cm)

Skin Patterns, 2013
Oil on canvas
59.5h x 48w in (151.13hw x 121.92w cm)

**Transparent Mask*, 2014
Oil on canvas
48h x 36w in (121.92h x 91.44w cm)

* Included in *Joan Semmel: Across Five Decades*,
Alexander Gray Associates, April 2–May 16, 2015



Installation view, Alexander Gray Associates, New York, 2015



Installation view, Alexander Gray Associates, New York, 2015







Installation view, Alexander Gray Associates, New York, 2015



Installation view, Alexander Gray Associates, New York, 2015

Joan Semmel (b.1932) has centered her painting practice on 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. She returned to New York in the early 1970s, where her practice turned towards figurative paintings, exploring erotic themes in response to pornography, popular culture, and concerns around representation of the female body. 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 depictions of highly sexual positions. Her reclaimed gaze of the female nude heralded a feminist approach to painting and representation in the 1970s. Produced at a pivotal moment in her practice and in the cultural landscape of First-wave Feminism, these series depict couples entwined in various coital positions rendered with expressive gesture, exemplifying her keen understanding of color and composition. In 1974, she made a definitive formal shift from abstraction by fully embracing figuration. Using her own body as subject, she began depicting her nudeness on canvas, shifting the perspective from that of an observer to a personal point of view. During the mid-1970s, Semmel turned to photography to capture reflections of her own body, later bringing the camera and her reflection in mirrors into her work from the 1980s.

Since the late-1980s, Semmel has meditated on the aging female physique. Recent paintings continue her 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. Soft and milky colors provide background for the luminous skin tones Semmel captures, as figure and ground merge. In many of the works, the artist confronts the viewer with a direct gaze, a departure from iconic earlier works where the point of view remained within the composition. Semmel's most recent series "Transparencies" continues her interest in movement and explores the invisibility of the aging female body in culture at large.

Joan Semmel's work has been featured in exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2014); National Portrait Gallery, Washington, DC (2014); Paula Modersohn-Becker Museum, Bremen, Germany (2013);

Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York (2013); Jewish Museum, New York (2010); 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 part of the permanent collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, IL; Brooklyn Museum, New York; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA; Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, TX; Orange County Museum of Art, CA; Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, VA; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, DC; The Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, NY; the Jocelyn Art Museum, Omaha, NE; Jewish Museum, 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.



Joan Semmel, New York, 2013
Photo: Elfie Semotan

Published by Alexander Gray Associates on the occasion of the exhibition

Joan Semmel: Across Five Decades

April 2–May 16, 2015

Publication © 2015 Alexander Gray Associates, LLC
Artwork © 2015 Joan Semmel/Artist Right Society (ARS, New York)

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, or stored in any retrieval system of any nature without prior written permission of the copyright holders.

Alexander Gray Associates made every effort to contact copyright holders for images. Please address any inquiries to the publisher.

ISBN: 978-0-9861794-1-9

Cover image: *Body & Sole*, detail, 2004, oil on canvas, 46h x 58w in
(116.84h x 147.32w cm)

Chronology: Ursula Davila-Villa and Rebecca Wolff

Image research: Carly Fischer

Design: Rita Lascaro

Printing: Bedwick & Jones Printing, Inc.

Photographic credits:

Jeffrey Sturges: illustrated works and installation views except pages 25, 26, 29, 32, 38, 46

Chronology: Walt Cisco: fig. 7; Joan Semmel: fig. 9; Thomas J. O'Halloran: fig. 25; Nancy Wong: fig. 32; John Hardy: fig. 33; Teri Slotkin: fig. 39; Bill Kontzias: fig. 49; Thomas Griesel: fig. 50; Maura Reilly/Facebook: fig. 51

Alexander Gray Associates:

Alexander Gray, David Cabrera, Ursula Davila-Villa, Carly Fischer, John Kunemund, Victoria Pratt, Chad Seelig, Peter Vargas, Rebecca Wolff

Interns: Emily Christensen, Jay Jadick

Through exhibitions, research, and representation, Alexander Gray Associates spotlights artistic movements and artists who emerged in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Influential in political, social and cultural 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.

Alexander Gray Associates
510 West 26 Street
New York NY 10001
United States
Tel: +1 212 399 2636
www.alexandergray.com