Alexander Gray Associates

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Joan Semmel
April 13 – May 21, 2011



Transformation, 2010, Oil on Canvas, 60h x 48w in

Alexander Gray Associates is pleased to debut recent self-portraits by Joan Semmel, in the gallery's first solo exhibition with this acclaimed artist. Working consistently with figurative painting for over four decades, Semmel is primarily associated with the establishment of the Feminist art movement in the 1970s.

In the exhibition at Alexander Gray Associates, recent paintings continue the artist's exploration of self-portraiture and female identity. The selected works represent the artist's body, doubled, fragmented, and in-motion. Dissolving the space between artist and model, viewer and subject, these 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 in which the point of view that remained within the canvas itself.

About her work, Semmel has noted, "Much of the revolutionary nature of Feminist art has been a seeking for new forms to invent a voice free of the dominant patriarchal tradition of the past. I have tried to find a contemporary language in which I could retain my delight in the sensuality and pleasure of painting, and still confront the particulars of my own personal experience as a woman. My intention has been to subvert the tradition of the passive female nude. 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. Sexuality for women has changed radically in the last century, and the possibility for female autonomy is connected to these changes."

Joan Semmel (b. New York, 1932) studied at the Cooper Union, Pratt Institute and the Art Student's League of New York. She began her painting career in Spain and South America in the 1960s. In the early 1970s, she returned to New York, where her practice turned towards figurative paintings, many with erotic themes, in response to pornography, popular culture, and concerns around representation. Her museum exhibitions include: *Shifting the Gaze* at the Jewish Museum (2010); *Rebelle* at the Museum of Modern Art Arnhem, The Netherlands (2009); *Solitaire: Lee Lozano, Sylvia Mangold Pilmack, Joan Semmel* at the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH (2008); and the touring exhibition *WACK! Art and the Feminist Movement*, MoCA, Los Angeles (2007). Semmel's paintings are part of the permanent collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; the Blanton Museum, Austin, TX; Newport Beach Art Museum, 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; the Jewish Museum, New York; and the Brooklyn Museum. She is the recipient of numerous grants, including Anonymous Was a Woman and the National Endowment for the Arts awards. She is Professor Emeritus of Painting at Rutgers University.

Alexander Gray Associates is a contemporary art gallery based in New York. The gallery has established a profile for high-quality exhibitions focused on mid-career artists who emerged in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Influential in political, social and cultural spheres, these artists are notable for creating work that crosses geographic borders, generational contexts and artistic disciplines. Gallery hours: Tuesday–Saturday, 11:00 AM – 6:00 PM.