

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Joan Semmel

Self-Images

September 9 – October 9, 1999

The **Mitchell Albus Gallery** presents an exhibition of paintings by **Joan Semmel** opening on Thursday, September 9 and continuing through Saturday, October 9, 1999. A reception for the artist will be held on the day of the opening from 6 to 8 pm.

Joan Semmel first received widespread attention in 1973 when she exhibited, in a necessarily ad hoc space on Prince Street next to Food, large explicit paintings of couples engaged in sex. Using studio photographs, Semmel placed her paramours against monochrome grounds, differentiated the partners by the use of colored skin tones and employed extreme cropping and unusual perspectives to increase the viewers' psychological engagement with the image. The exhibition caused a stir, with Edit DeAk, Lawrence Alloway, Lil Picard and John Perrault writing reviews. In their depiction of erotic subjects Semmel's paintings stretched social and artistic boundaries. Painted by a woman, without the overtly romantic trappings in which such subjects are usually caught, these pictures were a disturbingly straightforward coda to their times.

A year later Semmel made the move which came to define her painting, shifting the perspective depicted in the painting's image from that of the observer to the prospect of the observed. This first person point of view radically transformed Semmel's art, putting her painting at the forefront of what was then becoming defined as a feminist groundswell. By altering her painting's perspective, by placing the viewer in the position of the artist looking at her own body and those of her intimates, Semmel proffered a palpable intimacy which neatly subverted (by inversion) the possessive carnality of looking. The first first person images Semmel painted were of the artist with her lovers and her children. Then came paintings of just the artist herself.

The self-images from 1977 and 1978 in the current show represent the culmination of this phase of Semmel's career. Not only are these seminal works associated with the self-definition of feminism in the 1970s, but they are among the most original and significant figurative painting of the second half of this century; a position that will only be further substantiated as Semmel's work becomes more widely known. Already Semmel has proved to be a mentor to younger artists (such as Patricia Cronin) who have used her innovations in making their own work. This summer Robert Gober included three of Semmel's paintings in a subtly pointed group installation (with Anni Albers, Cady Noland, Nancy Shaver and Robert Beck) at Matthew Marks' gallery, a kudos which recognized the prescience and increasing pertinence of Semmel's art (through September 10).

Joan Semmel is a professor of fine art at Rutgers University. She recently had a career survey at East Hampton's Guild Hall Museum with a catalog essay by Laura Cottingham. An exhibition of new paintings – startling images of mostly female mannequins – is scheduled at the Jersey City Museum this spring.

Gallery hours are 3 to 7 pm, Tuesdays through Fridays and Saturdays from 11 am to 6 pm