



Polly Apfelbaum: *The Potential of Women*, installation view, Alexander Gray Associates (2017)

## **Polly Apfelbaum: *The Potential of Women***

September 7 – October 21, 2017

Alexander Gray Associates presents Polly Apfelbaum: *The Potential of Women*, the artist's first exhibition at the Gallery. The exhibition features all new work, including gouache drawings, hand-woven rugs, and wall-mounted ceramics. The key visual motif comes from the 1963 book, *The Potential of Woman*, published in conjunction with a symposium of the same name.

Apfelbaum draws inspiration from graphic designer Rudolph deHarek's cover design for *The Potential of Woman*, which features a flattened, stylized view of a female figure's head. Her appropriation of this image, chosen as an icon, is consistent with her ongoing interest in applied design and popular culture. Apfelbaum was also fascinated by the book's provocative and ultimately patronizing message. The book and its related symposium imagined a future in which women might be useful contributors; Apfelbaum instead reflects the desire for a broader appreciation and empowerment of legions of capable women in the present. In the exhibition's title, Apfelbaum changes the word 'woman' to 'women' to reinforce an inclusive communal narrative around feminism.

In the second floor Gallery, the artist has created an immersive environment, in which she occupies and transforms the entire space with four rugs, painted walls, and dozens of wall-mounted ceramics. Critic Christopher Knight has described her similarly expansive 2016 installation at Otis College of Art as a "secular chapel of abstract art," an association that Apfelbaum invites. The rugs, the central element of the installation, deploy deHarek's graphic design in orange, pink, tan, and black; they were woven in Oaxaca by Zapotec artisans indigenous to the region using their traditional weaving and dyeing methods. The walls are painted in large horizontal stripes of orange, pink, and white, matching the tones used in the original book cover. Intimately-scaled abstract ceramic portraits are hung around the walls to mimic what the artist describes as a participatory audience for the work, much like "a Greek Chorus that gives voice to the performance." Apfelbaum has depicted another crowd of women in polychromatic gouache drawings installed on the ground floor of Gallery. She renders the same face appropriated from the cover of *The Potential of Woman* in a variety of sizes, and color spectrums, creating a kaleidoscopic effect. Her use of vibrant dense pigment here is a tribute to Josef Albers' landmark book on color theory, *Interaction of Color*, also printed in 1963, emblematic of her fusion of pop-cultural and art historic references.

With the recurrent aesthetic of accumulation and diverse color saturations, Apfelbaum expands the visuals of the political landscapes surrounding the 2017 election and its resulting activism. Collectively,

her densely populated drawings, row of ceramics, pay homage to the recent resurgent prominence of women's marches and enforce the power of community to engage in collective action and activism.

Polly Apfelbaum's work is currently on view at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, and Chapelle Saint-Jean, Le Sourn, France. She has exhibited widely since the 1980s, including recent one-person exhibitions at: Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles, CA (2016); Bepart, Waregem, Belgium (2015); Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, MA (2014); lumber room, Portland, OR (2014). A major mid-career survey of her work opened in 2003 at the Institute for Contemporary Art in Philadelphia, PA and traveled to Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, MO, and Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH, both in 2004. She has upcoming solo-exhibitions at Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, England, and 21er Haus, Vienna. Her work has been featured in numerous group exhibitions including: *Wall to Wall: Carpets by Artists*, Katonah Art Museum, NY (2017); *An Irruption of the Rainbow*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA (2016); *Routes of Influence*, Perez Art Museum, Miami, FL (2016); *Wall to Wall*, MOCA Cleveland, Cleveland, OH (2016); *Defining Sculpture*, Albright Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY (2016); *Pretty Raw: After and Around Helen Frankenthaler*, Rose Art Museum, Waltham, MA (2015); *Three Graces*, Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, NY (2015); *Pathmakers: Women in Art, Craft and Design, Midcentury and Today*, Museum of Art and Design, New York (2015); *Regarding Warhol: Sixty Artists, Fifty Years*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, (2012); *Lines, Grids, Stains, and Words* (2008), *Comic Abstraction* (2007), and *Sense and Sensibility: Women and Minimalism in the 90's* (1994) all at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; *As Painting: Division and Displacement*, Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH, (2002); *Operativo*, Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico City, (2001).

Apfelbaum's work is in the collections of The Museum of Modern of Art, New York; The Whitney Museum of Art of American Art, New York; Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York; The Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY; The Henry Art Gallery, Seattle, WA; The Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA; The Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA; Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia, PA; and The Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, NY. She was the recipient of a Pollack-Krasner Foundation grant in 1987, a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1993, an Artist's Fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts in 1995, an Anonymous Was a Women Award in 1998, a Richard Diebenkorn Fellowship in 1999, a Joan Mitchell Fellowship in 1999, an Academy Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 2002, and most recently the Rome Prize in 2012.