

Body as Volumetric Subject - Joan Semmel's New Nude Portraits

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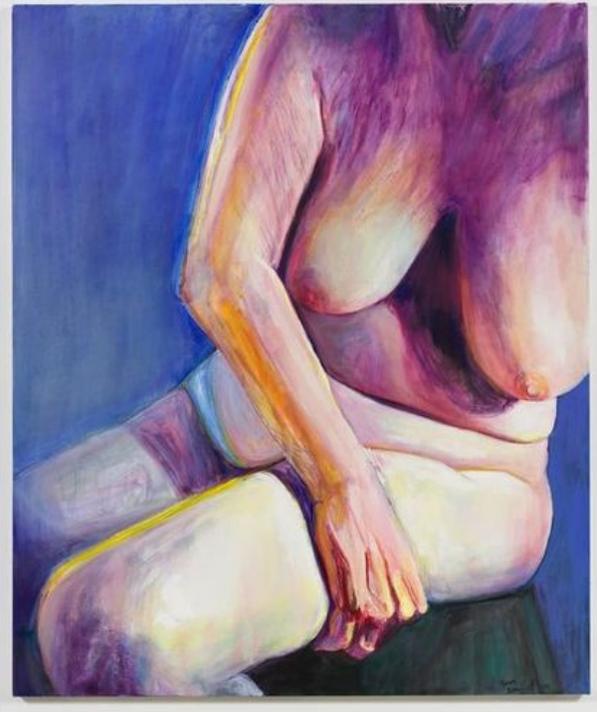
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A philosophy graduate interested in theory, politics and art. Alias of Jelena Martinović.

Centering her painting practice around issues of the body, from desire to aging, as well as those of identity and cultural imprinting, **Joan Semmel** has been subverting the historically passive role of the female subject. Through her practice, she highlights the possibility of female autonomy through the body.

The artist often investigates **the nude self-portrait**, interested in the possibility of a female self-articulation. The upcoming exhibition at **Alexander Gray Associates** will bring together a series of these works the artist has created in the past two years. Titled *A Necessary Elaboration*, the exhibition features a series of large-scale canvases featuring **the artist's body** as volumetric subject realized through expressive brushwork and brilliant color.



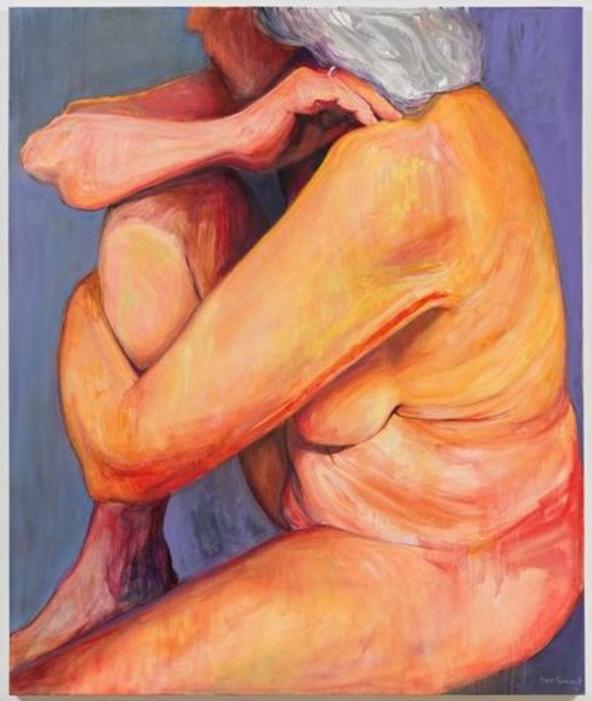
Left: Joan Semmel – Crossed Arms, 2018. Oil on canvas, 72 x 60 in (182.88 x 152.40 cm) / **Right:** Joan Semmel – Fleshed Out, 2018. Oil on canvas, 72 x 60 in (182.88 x 152.40 cm). Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates, New York
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A Necessary Elaboration

A towering figure in the second-wave feminist movement, Joan Semmel started out as an abstract painter but became celebrated for her radical figurative paintings of female bodies she has been creating since the 1970s. Placing the issues of the body at the core of her concerns, Semmel wrote in 2015:

The carnal nature of paint has seemed to me a perfect metaphor, the specifics of image, a necessary elaboration.

This latest body of work is rendered in **highly saturated tones**, evoking the paintings Semmel was creating in the early 1970s. After first starting to explore her own body in painting, self-portraiture has remained a steady theme throughout her career in the four decades since. While positioning these paintings in direct relation to her well-known works of the 1970s and 80s, the artist explains that in the new body of work, *“the colors are the seduction.”*

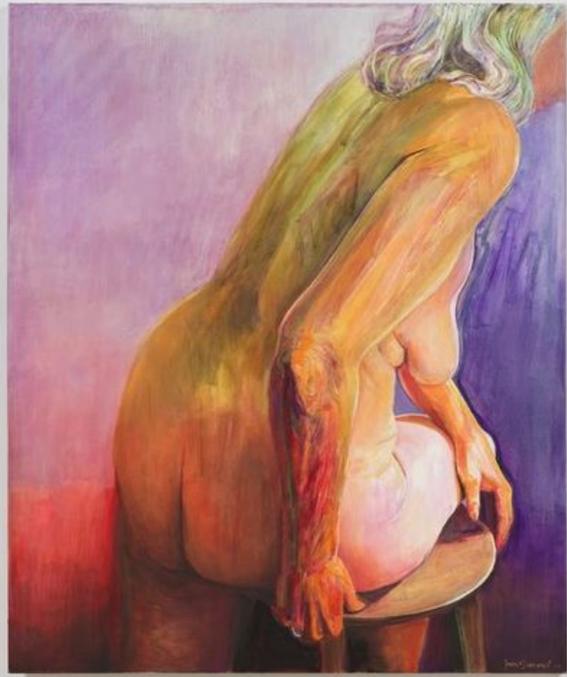


Left: Joan Semmel – *In the Green*, 2017. Oil on canvas, 72 x 60 in (182.88 x 152.40 cm) / **Right:** Joan Semmel – *Knee Up*, 2017. Oil on canvas, 72 x 60 in (182.88 x 152.40 cm). Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates, New York © Joan Semmel/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Exhibition Highlights

Semmel's works are created based on the photographs she created of herself. *Knee Up* and *Fleshed Out* show the midsection of the body which moves toward abstraction through an emphasis on lines and curves, while in *In the Green*, the artist's limbs map a division of the picture plane into areas illuminated by blocks of vibrant background hues.

Evidence of the confidence in color and form, these paintings serve as varied geographies comprised of a range of painting techniques, including smoother and more textured strokes, as well as washes, and drips.



Left: Joan Semmel – My Saskia, 2018. Oil on canvas, 72 x 60 in (182.88 x 152.40 cm) / **Right:** Joan Semmel – Turning, 2018. Oil on canvas, 72 x 60 in (182.88 x 152.40 cm). Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates, New York © Joan Semmel/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Joan Semmel Exhibition at Alexander Gray Associates

These new Joan Semmel paintings invoke **a variety of allusions and moods**, often enmeshed within a single work, revealing a remarkable degree of technical and emotional depth.

The exhibition *A Necessary Elaboration* will be on view at [Alexander Gray Associates](#) in New York **from January 10th until February 16th, 2019**.

Featured images: Joan Semmel – A Necessary Elaboration, installation view, Alexander Gray Associates (2019). All images courtesy of the gallery.