

Galerie Gmurzynska St. Moritz presents: A Line to Greatness
TOM WESSELMANN'S Steel Drawings

Opening: Saturday, February 14th 2015. 6-8PM



Smoking Cigarette #1, Oil on wood and Masonite, formica base. 1980

Galerie Gmurzynska is pleased to present “A Line to Greatness”, a curated showcase of Tom Wesselmann’s signature steel drawings from the 1980s and 90s. Widely renowned for their technical and conceptual innovation, Wesselmann first experimented with transposing his vivid drawing practice onto the arguably cold and rigid medium of metal around 1983. Having time and again been at the forefront in reconfiguring the latest technologies to serve his own artistic goals, such as the vacuum-formed plastic paintings “American Nudes” from the 1960s, Wesselmann’s steel drawings were deemed by the artist to represent the decisive next chapter in his oeuvre. The continual refinement of this technique would therefore greatly occupy the artist for decades to come.

Wesselmann's excitement over exploring the hitherto unheard-of possibility to literally draw in metal clearly comes across in the first critical monograph on his oeuvre, authored by no other than the artist himself under his pseudonym Slim Stealingworth:

"Wesselmann's original idea, that began the cut-out works, was to preserve the process and immediacy of his drawings from life, complete with the false lines and errors, and realize them in steel. It was as though the lines had just been miraculously drawn in steel."

Slim Stealingworth, *Tom Wesselmann*, 1980

Galerie Gmurzynska has assembled a comprehensive overview of these exciting works, paying equal attention to Wesselmann's initial experiments in aluminum, which were in fact cut by hand, as well as the subsequent works in steel produced with the help of the then literally *cutting-edge* technique of laser cutting. This high-tech mode of fabrication notwithstanding, each steel drawing constitutes a unique work and a powerful manifestation of Wesselmann's gift as a draughtsman of the female nude.

As such the prototypical aluminum cutout "Bedroom Brunette Doodle" from 1984 can be viewed adjacent to one of the first works in steel such as "Nude with Bouquet and Stockings" from 1985, providing a rare insight into one of Wesselmann's most crucial, medium-specific transition periods marking his career. "A Line to Greatness" further comprises select steel drawings that depict one of Wesselmann's most cherished models, his studio assistant and friend Monica Serra. Rendered in a variety of odalisque poses, these metallic nudes transmit the sensual joy and casual erotic spark Wesselmann's entire body of work is suffused with. Seminal works of Wesselmann's Pop period proper will be on view in St. Moritz, notably his quintessential 1965 "Great American Nude" plastic work, while his typically painterly flat yet sculptural "Smoking Cigarette" from 1980 marks the assured conclusion of Wesselmann's highly individual take on Pop vernaculars. Another variant of this important work was therefore included in the most recent retrospective traveling North America, "Beyond Pop".

Last but not least this exhibition features Wesselmann's later homage to one of the artist's most influential forebears Henri Matisse, celebrated by Wesselmann through his "Blue Nude" series of cut aluminum drawings from the 1990s. For – despite their scale and steely material nature – Drawings these works would all definitely represent to Wesselmann. Thus, when asked by the Whitney Museum to specify how to properly categorize his metal works, Wesselmann responded in his lapidary fashion:

"It's a drawing because I drew the thing".

"A Line to Greatness" comes on the heels of the widely acclaimed Wesselmann retrospective "Beyond Pop" touring North America, from Montreal to Denver. Gallery Gmurzynska is therefore especially pleased to show Wesselmann in St. Moritz and to further announce the attendance of art historian and curator Marco Livingstone, who not only co-curated the most recent retrospective, but who realized the artist's first survey in 1993 in Japan.

A fully illustrated catalogue will include archival images such as the artist's installation for documenta 4, 1968 and previously unpublished personal snapshots by renowned photographer Bob Adelman alongside a new essay by Marco Livingstone who will give an introduction to Wesselmann's work on the opening night.



Monica Sitting by Wall (Rubbed). Enamel on laser-cut steel. 1989

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