

GAGOSIAN

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Inside Art

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A Pop Artist's Estate Gets a New Push For Fresh Exposure

Ever since the Sidney Janis Gallery closed in 2000, the work of the pop artist Tom Wesselmann, who died in 2004, has been without representation. "He wanted the latitude to continue working with whomever he wanted," said Lane Wesselmann, one of the artist's three children and a director of the estate. "He didn't want to be hemmed in."

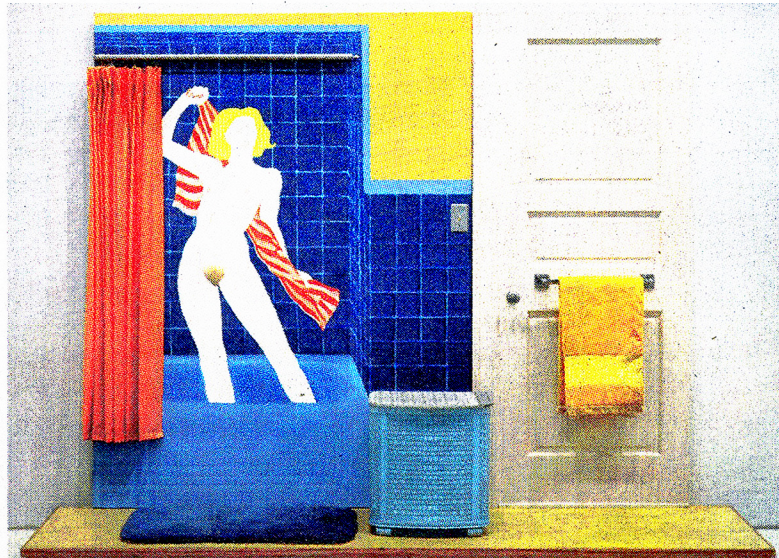
So in the interim, the family has mounted shows at various galleries, most recently at David Zwirner in London (Wesselmann's earliest collages), at Mitchell-Innes & Nash in New York (a retrospective) and at Almine Rech in Paris, where the Wesselmann historical exhibition "A Different Kind of Woman" is running through Dec. 21.

"Over the years, we have been approached a number of times," Mr. Wesselmann said, speaking of representation. "The fit has never seemed quite right."

Wesselmann, an artist known for his suggestive female images, belonged to a distinctive fraternity that included Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and Claes Oldenburg, and drew creative energy from untraditional areas like billboards, advertising and movies.

Recently, the family came to feel that it needed a dedicated gallery, particularly at auction, where prices for Wesselmann's work dropped after the economic downturn in 2008. "You want to have engaged dealers," Mr. Wesselmann said. "Not creating an artificial market, but they can motivate their client base and bid themselves. We had no one protecting the market for a number of years."

Now the estate has decided to be represented by two dealers, Ms. Rech and Larry Gagosian, who will also jointly publish the catalogue raisonné of Wessel-



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"Bathtub Collage No. 3" (1963) by Tom Wesselmann, whose estate is now represented by Almine Rech and Larry Gagosian.

mann's "Great American Nudes," to be completed in 2018.

"This is an artist who has a lot of room to grow in terms of curatorial development and also market development," Mr. Gagosian said.

"It's got an edge to it; to my eye, it seems very fresh — it hasn't been overexposed," he added of the work. "The way he deals with sexuality, the way he deals with feminism — there's a controversy to it that's very timely, very provocative. It hasn't been overly homogenized. It sets off sparks."

While Wesselmann had a touring museum retrospective two years ago, that exhibition did not come to New York. "We're hoping that by rebuilding the career, that sets the groundwork for a retrospective," Mr. Wesselmann said. "It's a very different world today, and I think you do need these big global galleries to compete to remain visible."