INTERPRETING TOM WESSELMANN'S NUDES:

POP, PRURIENCE AND PRAGMATISM IN 1960s NEW YORK

Volume I of II

1559272

Submitted in part fulfilment
for the degree of PhD
in History of Art at the
University of Warwick **November 2022**

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

There are many people without whom this thesis would not have been possible and to those individuals I extend a heartfelt thank you.

I am most grateful to Brian Kenny, Monica Serra and Jeffrey Sturges at the Wesselmann Estate for making me welcome during my visit in 2018. Particular thanks go to Kate Wesselmann and Claire Wesselmann for the kindness shown to me during that time.

I would like to thank the Humanities Research Centre whose award made it possible for me to travel to the Estate in New York.

Heartfelt thanks go to my supervisor Professor Michael Hatt for his sage advice and support, as well as providing me with the inspiration and enthusiasm for art history back when I was an undergraduate.

I would also like extend thanks to all the staff within the History of Art department who have offered support. A huge thank you goes to Dr Sarah Walford who has helped me hugely as a fledgling tutor and has become a valued friend.

On a more personal note, I would not have entertained the idea of undertaking this without two very important people – my partner Chris and my best friend and academic feminist Kate. Their support has meant the world.

My final word of thanks goes to my immediate family. Thank you to my father who has given both financial and emotional support and shown unwavering pride in my achievement. Whilst my mother did not get to see me complete my thesis, I have no doubt that she would have been equally proud. A final word is reserved for my brother Kevin – Dr Towler #1. Much of what has driven me to undertake a PhD has been good old-fashioned sibling rivalry.

Abstract

Discussions of Tom Wesselmann's series of one hundred *Great American Nudes* have remained unchanged, and unchallenged, since the artist emerged on the New York art scene in the early 1960s. Whilst general descriptions allude to the sexual liberation of the era, Wesselmann is considered in terms of his assertion that he was a formalist whose primary interest was the solving of pictorial problems - something he detailed when he published his monograph in 1980. Contextualising erotic content as relating to his relationship with his wife and model, Wesselmann was adamant that his nudes bore no relation to the social environment in which they were created. However, an interview undertaken in 1984, sees Wesselmann provide evidence to the contrary, as he talked about the female body in ways which focused attention on its sexual characteristics and described body parts by using surprisingly vulgar language.

Approaching these two resources as presenting a dialogue between Wesselmann's public artistic persona and one which suggested a 'locker room' attitude towards women, I examine the *Great American Nudes* in the context of the social and political environment of sixties America, highlighting the complexity of contemporary gender debates. I suggest what shaped his approach to the erotic female body during the decade and how it was indicative of the widespread mass media sexualisation of women and argue that this increased in correlation to changes made to American obscenity laws. This combines a re-evaluation of Matisse's influence - not only artistically but in terms of how the artist established himself as the epitome of domestic heteronormativity; a consideration of how Wesselmann's nudes provided visual equivalents of Henry Miller's prose and the purpose this served; and an exploration of John Dewey's pragmatist theory, which emphasised the importance of everyday experience and explore whether an aesthetics of the erotic offers a more nuanced way of approaching Wesselmann's nudes than is afforded by adopting a male gaze.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Introduction

Chapter 1

Introduction

> I was only interested in visual or literal things. I was involved with a visual form and not a literary form. I had no bones about that. So when people began to talk all the time about Coca-Cola or the Campbell soup cans and all that sort of stuff, I began to get very uneasy because that was subject-matter talk, and I was involved in important, aesthetic matters, I felt, not subject matter.[1]

As one of the group of artists to be included within the 'Pop' rubric in 1960s New York, Tom Wesselmann became most widely known for painting the female nude. Operating within an artistic tradition which saw him working from the live model, his early pieces were intimate and often personal images of women in domestic interiors which owed much to his European predecessors. However, as the sixties progressed, Wesselmann's nudes became increasingly erotic – a development which has been generally seen as typifying an era of sexual liberation.

Since Wesselmann first emerged on the art scene, he was primarily characterised as a formalist whose work was driven by an interest in solving pictorial problems. In 1962, Brian O'Doherty indicated in the *New York Times* that Wesselmann had written to the critic in response to a previous article which had been published. The artist sought to establish that 'he had no interest in social comment or pop art' reinforcing that 'The esthetic aspect was primary, and he wished to be

[1] Oral history interview with Tom Wesselmann, 1984 January 3-February 8, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Conducted by Irving Sandler. The transcript of the interview has been used throughout. This is an unpaginated document which is available online at https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-tom-wesselmann-12439 accessed 2 November 2022.

judged by that.[2] This was further established when, in 1980, Wesselmann published his book which provided detailed accounts of his creative process and experiments with materials. This publication has provided the basis for subsequent critical examinations of Wesselmann's work, with focus remaining on the artist's formalist intentions whilst far less attention has been given to the nude figure's increasing eroticism. This is despite the sixties being a decade during which the complex debates taking place regarding civil rights and gender roles inspired the subsequent formation of feminist academicism in the early 1970s.

An examination of Wesselmann's nudes which recognises their importance as subject matter is not only long overdue, it demonstrates the extent to which the female nudes cannot be separated from the historical, social, moral and political environment in which they were produced. If Wesselmann's nudes are to be understood as capturing the spirit of sixties America, particularly in relation to the era's sexual liberation, the reasons why this might be the case need to be clarified Is it the case that Wesselmann's nudes captured the liberalisation, sexual or otherwise, of the lived female experience, or did they serve to endorse a heteronormative male one?

Slim Stealingworth

In 1980, Wesselmann published a monograph under the pseudonym Slim Stealingworth. The book established the artist's approach to the creative process and provided detailed accounts of his ongoing experiments with a variety of materials, some of which were used within commercial, manufacturing processes. Whilst initially drawn to the abstract expressionism of the 1950s, Wesselmann recalled

[2] Brian O'Doherty, ''Pop' Show by Tom Wesselmann Is Revisited', *New York Times*, 28 November 1962, p. 36.

finding himself more suited to figurative work, yet he maintained something of his immediate predecessors' impetus to successfully incorporate all of the composite elements in order to produce an overall visual effect. Whilst he began working within what he called the 'traditional situations of painting' – still lifes, interiors and nudes, - Wesselmann claimed to be unconcerned with subject matter. Instead, he worked with what he described as 'concrete literal elements' which provided him with a 'specific and literal framework' within which he could experiment and manipulate the painting's various elements in order to achieve the desired effect.[3]

Establishing his formalist intentions, Wesselmann identified Henri Matisse as being the artist he most admired, not so much due to the way he painted the female nude, but because of the way he found resolutions to visual problems. He attributed Matisse with being the artist who most successfully made 'full use of all the components of a painting – color, shape, line, texture, etc.' in order to 'offer(ing) the most promise of realizing fully the visual intensity of the elements while at the same time keeping some sense of the reality of the situation depicted'.[4] As such, Wesselmann explained how he sought to achieve similar by reinforcing the intensity of a subject or object via 'context; relationship to other elements; isolation; cropping; and through reinforcing intense, non-literary color.'[5]

When it came to describing a more direct relationship to the female nude, Wesselmann contextualised this as being largely autobiographical. Wesselmann recounted meeting Claire Selley whilst they were both studying art at The Cooper Union in New York. Initially, Claire agreed to model for him before becoming his girlfriend and, in 1963, his wife. The artist has described her not only as being the

[3] Slim Stealingworth, *Tom Wesselmann* (New York: Abbeville Press Inc., 1980), p. 15.
[4] Stealingworth (1980), p. 17.
[5] Stealingworth (1980), p. 17-18.

model for his *Great American Nudes*, the series of one hundred works he created over the course of the decade, but as being *the* Great American Nude.

Around 1961 – 1962, and as the relationship developed, Wesselmann admitted to becoming more aware of the nudes' 'erotic aspects' and moved even further away from abstraction towards exploring more realistic ways of portraying the figure.[6] As the decade progressed, the sexual content of Wesselmann's nudes increased, yet the artist did not waver from describing this in terms of the intimate relationship he shared with his wife.

Wesselmann purported not to be interested in producing art which reflected the contemporary social or political environment of 1960s New York and reported paying little attention to either. However, he did make it clear that he was aware of a prevailing prudishness towards the female body existing in the decade's early years. Describing nudity in the early part of the sixties as being 'rare and demure', Wesselmann said that it was not until mid-decade that he saw anything more explicit in a girlie magazine, and even then, he considered it to be fairly innocuous.[7] However, Wesselmann was keen to point out that he was not influenced by such material. Certainly, what was in general circulation remained relatively inoffensive until the early seventies, with full-frontal nudity remaining censored and the majority of the figures posing topless. In contrast, Wesselmann's nudes, the parts of the body that he showed and the manner in which he depicted them, were more explicit than anything that was published in the popular girlie magazines, and could still be categorised as continuing a fine art tradition.

[6] Stealingworth (1980), p. 23.
[7] Ibid.

By 1969, Wesselmann described nudity as becoming commonplace in America and described it as 'a publicized theatrical and movie phenomenon'.[8] Whilst he had been interested in developing a project which included a live, naked model in the earlier part of the decade, he had been told by a lawyer that this would result in him being charged with obscenity. Wesselmann said that he subsequently lost interest in it and did not want to be accused of following what appeared to be a trend for public nudity.

Whilst Wesselmann's book has been described as a somewhat embittered reaction to the 'lack of attention paid to him by art institutions up until that time', it set the standard for subsequent publications about the artist.[9] Serving as an important primary resource, Wesselmann's detailed explanation of his method of working and 'the intellectual development underpinning it', was praised by the curator of the artist's 2012 retrospective, Stéphane Aquin, as being 'an essential reference for any study concerning Tom Wesselmann'.[10] However, the extent to which this has served as a template for discussing Wesselmann's work has also meant that few have attempted to deviate from it or offer alternative interpretations.

In 1994, Sam Hunter published the first major book since Wesselmann's own monograph. Referencing Stealingworth throughout and adhering to the precedent set by the artist of primarily discussing methods and materials rather than subject matter or image content, Hunter made vague allusions to Wesselmann's works from the

[8] Stealingworth (1980), p. 61.
[9] Stéphane Aquin, 'Tom Wesselmann: The World's Most Famous Unknown Artist', in *Tom Wesselmann* (exhibition catalogue, *Beyond Pop:* A *Tom Wesselmann Retrospective,* The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal,18 May 2012 – 7 October 2012, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, 6 April 2013 – 25 July 2013, Denver Art Museum, Denver 13 July 2014 – 14 September 2014 and Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati 31 October 2014 – January 18 2015) ed. Stéphane Aquin (Munich: Montreal Museum of Art and DelMonico Books for Prestel, 2012), p. 18.
[10] Ibid.

1960s as capturing the spirit of their age.[11] Adopting Wesselmann's own form of rhetoric, Hunter attempted to define any of the figures' erotic elements as serving a strictly formal purpose in order to make the art 'more confrontational'.[12] In essence, whilst the book covered a further ten years of Wesselmann's artistic output, there was little which built upon what had already been written about the artist, by the artist.

John Wilmerding published the next notable book on Wesselmann in 2008. In it he defined the Stealingworth publication as affording the artist an important opportunity 'to set straight… the assumptions he felt were being perpetuated about his *Great American Nude* series'.[13] Without clarifying exactly what these assumptions were, how they had evolved or why Wesselmann might have felt the need to set the record straight, Wilmerding proposed that the book operated as a vehicle for the artist to demonstrate how 'his formal concerns' needed to be viewed 'independently of their commercial sources.'[14]

An art historian and curator who has continued to contribute to the existing Wesselmann scholarship is Marco Livingstone. In 2012 he wrote that it was clear from reading the artist's private journals that his 'thoughts were always directed to solving formal and technical problems in order to enhance the intensity of the visual'.[15] However, whilst continuing to reinforce Wesselmann's formalist credentials and providing hard evidence to substantiate this claim, Livingstone, like Hunter and Wilmerding before him, credited the nudes' inherent eroticism with being autobiographical in nature.

---

[11] Sam Hunter, *Tom Wesselmann* (New York, Rizzoli International Publications Inc., 1994).
[12] Hunter (1994), p. 20.
[13] John Wilmerding, *Tom Wesselmann: His Voice and Vision* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications Inc., 2008), p. 35.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Marco Livingstone, 'Man of Steel' in ed. Stéphane Aquin *Tom Wesselmann* (2012), p.43.

Wesselmann certainly made it clear that Claire had a major influence on his life and his work. A photograph of the couple stood either side of the in-progress *Great American Nude #37* (1962) identified the yellow-haired Claire as Wesselmann's model and muse (Fig. 1.1). Wesselmann described himself as being saved by Claire, and his art, at a point in time when he was feeling lost.[16] Discussing his early career and embarking upon the *Great American Nudes,* Wesselmann explained that they encapsulated his 'great excitement personally about (Claire), about sex, about being an adult, about being in New York City, about being an artist' – all of which directly impacted his work.[17] Livingstone reinforced this when he described the nudes as a reflection of how Wesselmann's relationship with Claire enabled the artist to express himself sexually as a young man within the liberating atmosphere of the 1960s, whilst not really identifying how this was demonstrated within the artworks.[18] Similarly, Wilmerding asserted that the 'frequent erotic sexuality' of Wesselmann's nudes had been by the artist's 'new marital intimacy and attendant sexual and emotional growth.'.[19]

Writing in 2013, Constance Glenn emphasised the importance of recognising that Claire *was* the *Great American Nude*. Quoting from Wesselmann's journal, Glenn noted that the artist had written that, when drawing a nude, he aimed to 'capture something significant of the beauty of the woman I was confronted with', to which she added 'his Claire, of course'.[20]

[16] Oral History Interview (1984), n. p.
[17] Ibid.
[18] On 10 February 2016, Marco Livingstone gave a talk at the Zwirner Gallery, London to accompany the exhibition *Tom Wesselmann: Collages 1959 – 1964* (29 January – 24 March 2016) during which time he stressed how important it was to understand Claire's impact on the artist's work.
[19] Wilmerding (2008), p. 35.
[20] Constance Glenn, 'Nudes in Context' in ed. Stéphane Aquin, *Tom Wesselmann* (2012), p. 29.

It was not just that Wesselmann's relationship with Claire impacted his work. According to Wilmerding, Wesselmann's nudes were 'raunchy and raucous creations of the sixties' sexual awakening' which indicated that they had to be seen in relation to the contemporary environment.[21] Glenn expanded slightly on this when she pointed out that Wesselmann gained recognition during an era of 'unprecedented sexual freedom' which was 'brought about by the newly available birth control pill, (and) the focus on women's and minorities' rights' creating an atmosphere of carefree optimism'.[22] However, whilst the sixties was irrefutably a decade in which debates around sex *and* liberation were prominent, Wesselmann did not see his work as necessarily being symbolic of this, continuing to describe himself as someone who was just dealing with nudity.

What was clearly established by Stealingworth and subsequently endorsed by Hunter, Wilmerding, Livingstone and Glenn was a very clear framework for how Wesselmann and his work were to be viewed. Wesselmann was to be characterised above all, as a formalist with similar interests to, and in, the art of Matisse. The erotic nature of his nudes was inspired by his relationship with his wife and subsequently morally and socially permissible. Yet even though this goes some way to establishing Wesselmann's relationship to the painted female nude, it proffers a somewhat limited and wholly one-sided approach to interpreting the works. Furthermore, on close examination, some of these assertions do not stand up to close scrutiny.

[21] Wilmerding (2008), p.80.
[22] Glenn (2012), p. 27.

Disseminating the 'Myth'

The nude in painting was welcomed back after a period in which non-figurative art had dominated. In 1962, the Museum of Modern Art in New York staged the exhibition *Recent Painting USA: The Figure*, describing it as an opportunity 'to explore recent directions in the painting of the figure by American artists' between 1958 and 1961. Amongst those works on show was Wesselmann's *Great American Nude #2* (1961).[23] In 1963, the critic John Canaday heralded the painted nude's fine art comeback with an article in *Horizon* magazine.[24] Describing it as having been 'locked out of the studio of the *avant garde* during the 1950s', Canaday reminded the reader that there were very simple reasons why the nude retained its appeal. Not only did it continue to serve a purpose as a vehicle for artistic expression, it was also the case that 'a handsome body is always mighty good to look at' and the nude's continued aesthetic appeal served as a reminder that sex was 'an enjoyable physical pastime' – a comment which hinted at society's move towards increasing open-mindedness.[25] Placing Wesselmann's *Great American Nude #39* (1962) next to François Boucher's *Miss O'Murphy* (1752), Canaday mused on the longevity of the subject matter and drew attention to the similarities in poses. He also pointed out that whilst techniques and materials had changed over the years, it had not necessarily resulted in better paintings. However, it did establish Wesselmann as one of the artists on the contemporary art scene with a firm interest in this established genre.

[23] Walter Bareiss and Anne K. Jones (exhibition catalogue, *Recent Painting USA: The Figure*, Museum of Modern Art, New York May 23 – September 4, 1962, Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts, 1 November – 29 November 1962, Colorado Springs Fine Arts Centre 30 January – 27 February 1963, Baltimore Museum of Art, 15 March – 26 April 1963, City Museum of St. Louis, 13 May – 10 June 1963, San Francisco Museum of Art, 18 August – 15 September 1963, Walker Art Centre, 1 October – 12 November 1963) ed. Walter Bareiss and Anne K Jones (New York: Plantin Press, 1961), p. 1.
[24] John Canaday, 'Back to the Nude', *Horizon* 5:7 (1963), p. 91.
[25] Ibid.

As one of the group of artists in sixties New York whose work included references to mass media, popular and consumer culture, Wesselmann came under the Pop label, being celebrated as one of its five most important exponents. His early collages saw him using cut-outs of every-day American consumer items, either as still lifes or forming part of the contemporary interiors in which he placed his female nudes. As the sixties progressed, he developed a highly polished, graphic style of painting which resembled glossy magazine advertisements and owed much to commercial art. Contemporary responses to Wesselmann's nudes were mostly positive, being somewhat dependent upon whether the critic was an advocate of this new artistic style or not. For example, in 1963, Peter Selz wrote a scathing attack on Pop for its 'blatant Americanism of subject matter', and he included the depiction of 'mammiferous nudes' among them.[26]

When it came to Wesselmann's treatment of the female nude, this was of secondary importance to his Pop style. Those critics who paid attention to the figure itself generally saw its appeal. In 1965, Gene Swenson praised what he called Wesselmann's 'honest' nudes and pronounced that they showed a refreshing lack of prudishness.[27] In an article which appeared in *House and Garden* magazine in the same year, Francine du Plessix Gray commented that the wife of prominent collector, Leo Kraushar, loved the Wesselmann nude her husband had purchased 'because it shows a woman looking the way women look here, today, in America, not fat and old-fashioned like Renoir's nudes'.[28] In 1966, J. A. Abramson applauded the artist's ability to capture the sexuality of the female figure in an abstract manner

[26] Peter Selz, 'Pop Goes the Artist', *Partisan Review* 30:2 (1963), p. 315.
[27] G. R. Swenson, 'Wesselmann: The Honest Nude', *Art and Artists* 1:2 (1966), pp 54 – 56.
[28] Francine du Plessix Gray, 'The House that Pop Art Built' in *House and Garden* (May 1965), p.159.

via 'meticulously generalized renderings of carnal attributes and trappings.'[29] Two years later, in 1968 and at a point when Wesselmann's work became even more erotic, despite Hilton Kramer referring to the artist producing 'a kind of Pop-pornographic dream of the female as an ideal sexual appliance' he did not seem averse to the notion of woman as a domestic apparatus for pleasure.[30]

The first publication to examine the work produced by this disparate group of artists was written by John Rublowsky with photographs by Ken Heyman. *Pop Art* was published in 1965 and it gave a cohesive identity to those individuals at the core of this art phenomenon. Not only had they already been widely discussed within the press, but they had also already attracted a number of the city's high-profile collectors. Within it, the five most prominent exponents were identified as Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenburg, James Rosenquist and Tom Wesselmann and each had chapters devoted to them and their work. Written by Rublowsky in a style which was not dissimilar to a *Life* magazine article, each of the artists was portrayed as having a personality which defined them as much as their Pop art styles. Wesselmann was described as 'the epitome of the middle-class American ethic.'[31] A man who enjoyed fishing and golf, and with a middle-class background, the reader was told that Wesselmann lived in an apartment in Greenwich Village with his wife, who was described as a 'gentle and beautiful girl who is sympathetic to the peculiar demands of the artist.'[32] Many of Heyman's accompanying photographs showed Wesselmann and Claire together, with Claire assuming a supplementary role (Fig. 1.2). With Wesselmann depicted as the

[29] J. A. Abramson, 'Tom Wesselmann and the Gates of Horn', in *Pop Art: A Critical History*, ed. Steven Henry Madoff (Berkeley and London: University of California Press,1997), p.352 (first publ. in *Arts* (May 1966), pp. 43 -48).
[30] Hilton Kramer, 'Form, Fantasy and the Nude', *New York Times*, 11 February 1968, Section D, p. 5.
[31] John Rublowsky, *Pop Art* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1965), p. 133.
[32] Rublowsky (1965), p.138.

hardworking husband, Claire was the loving and supportive wife, and so the couple exemplified the era's prescribed gender roles which dominated their contemporary society – something which might not have been expected of an artist who might have been considered to have a relatively 'bohemian' career or as someone who devoted so much time to painting female nudes. Wesselmann's work seemed as much a part of the couple's domestic existence as Claire's was tending the plants the couple were photographed alongside.

With Wesselmann's reputation firmly established by the mid-sixties, it was further reinforced in 1966 when Lucy Lippard identified him as one of 'The New York five'.[33] According to Lippard, there were only a small number of what she described as 'hard core Pop artists in New York' and only three who showed a commitment to using 'hard-edge, commercial techniques and colours to convey their unmistakably popular, representational images' – Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and Wesselmann.[34]

Whilst the erotic female body, nude or semi-clothed, was not a major feature of Pop art, Wesselmann continued to be one of only a small number of artists for whom it was a recurring motif. On the West Coast, Mel Ramos imbued his figures with the sort of girl-next-door sex appeal which had been popular in the 1940s (Fig. 1.3) incorporating them with recognisably American products which ranged from candy bars to cigarettes.[35] In the U.K., artist Allen Jones used the 'language of fetishism' often dressing his figures in tight rubber-look clothing and high-heeled

[33] Lucy Lippard, *Pop Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1966), p. 69.
[34] Ibid
[35] Donald Kuspit, *Mel Ramos: Pop Art Fantasies, the Complete Paintings* (New York: Watson-Guptill Publications, 2004) provides the most extensive overview of the artist described as having 'an ironical attitude toward women' (p. 28).

boots in order to enhance the body's physical and erotic characteristics, resulting in his women appearing as subjugated, sexual fantasies (Fig.1.4).[36]

It is true to say, then, that by the mid-sixties Wesselmann had established his status as one of the country's leading exponents of Pop, as well as being one of a number of artists continuing the tradition of the painted female nude whilst updating it for a 1960s audience. It was not just that Wesselmann was placing his nudes in thoroughly modern-day environments, he was also reflecting a more contemporary attitude towards sex and the naked female body. This effectively resulted in an idealised image of the expectation placed upon the modern housewife to assume the role of erotic object. However, this was not necessarily reflective of a society-wide, liberal attitude towards sex which impacted men and women equally. Instead, it was a male fantasy of what sexual liberation looked like imposed upon women's bodies.

Tom Wesselmann in Conversation

Contemporary critics helped establish Wesselmann's status in the early to mid-sixties and the Stealingworth publication had provided a first-hand account of the artist's creative process. However, there is a crucial resource dating from 1984 which has received less attention. Between January and February 1984, as part of the Smithsonian Oral History project, Wesselmann participated in a lengthy interview conducted by the art critic Irving Sandler. This is by no means completely overlooked by scholars, indeed both David McCarthy and Wilmerding quote from it,

[36] Laura Mulvey, 'Fears, Fanstasies and the Male Unconscious or 'You Don't Know What's Happening, Do You, Mr. Jones?'' in ed. Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures: Language, Discourse, Society* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), p.7 (first publ. in *Spare Rib*, 1973). Mulvey notes how the use of footwear, corsetry, and leather and rubber items showed 'the *sadistic* aspect of male fetishism' using objects with 'phallic significance' as well as frequently showing women as 'bound' and wearing items which might indicate discomfort.

but it has not received anywhere near the attention of the artist's monograph. [37] Despite this, Glenn noted how the interview and book have 'provided virtually all the public knows about (Wesselmann's) personal point of view'.[38]

The interview does cover much of the same ground as Wesselmann's autobiography and he frequently responded to Sandler's questions by noting that he had already provided adequate answers within the book. The established narrative regarding Wesselmann's interest in formalism and the contextualisation of the nudes' eroticism remained unchanged. However, there is a huge difference between the book and the interview to which no one refers, and that is the way in which Wesselmann discussed the female body in conversation. The language that he uses is a striking contrast to the received narratives.

The interview sees Wesselmann discussing his career with Sandler who, like himself, had been a part of the 1960s New York art scene. During the conversation Wesselmann uses four-letter words which suggest a highly sexualised and demeaning way of looking at women's bodies which is often referred to as 'locker-room talk'. It may be that Wesselmann felt comfortable using it in a man-to-man conversation, suggesting a sort of male bonhomie and perhaps indicating a lack of prudishness on his part, but these words are at odds with the persona with which he was associated who respected certain moral standards and who paid little attention to the sexual female body beyond his relationship with his wife.

Throughout the interview Wesselmann refers to 'cunts' – a word which continues to be considered as taboo as the body part to which it refers. Wesselmann

[37] Wilmerding (2008) p. 48. Wilmerding made a reference to Wesselmann's discussion of wanting to use a nude figure in a live exhibit, which the artist had already discussed within his book. McCarthy referred to Wesselmann saying in interview that Claire provided the stimulus for his nudes' eroticism, which had already been emphasised by Stealingworth.
[38] Glenn (2012) p. 28.

also refers to ‘beavers’, particularly in relation to seeing ‘beaver shots’ for the first time, something which related directly to pornography. The artist also discussed the paintings he produced in the 1970s which were close-ups of women’s faces. With their eyes shut and mouths open, Wesselmann admitted that this implied that the woman was having an orgasm, or as he put, having their ‘pussy eaten’.[39] Whilst the word ‘tits’ is not as shocking as some of the words that Wesselmann uses, it is still more vulgar than, for example, the term breasts.

In 1970, Wesselmann exhibited *Bedroom Tit Box* (1968 – 1970) (Fig. 1.5). This was a three-dimensional imagining of the *Bedroom Paintings*. Wesselmann described these as a ‘momentary glimpse of a possible situation’ in which the viewer might be in bed and look up to notice his partner’s breast in conjunction with other objects in the bedroom, presumably being inspired by something he had experienced with his wife. [40] *Tit Box* comprised a box containing plastic flowers and objects made by the artist including a perfume bottle and ‘lit’ cigarette. This would be installed behind a false wall and provide space for an unseen model to lay over the top of the installation and position one breast so that it hung down into the box below, subsequently becoming part of the tableau. Writing as Stealingworth, the artist described being inspired to undertake the piece after meeting a woman ‘whose breasts were just the right size and shape for what he had in mind’.[41] In conversation with Sandler, Wesselmann recalled an encounter with a woman ‘who had just the right tit’.[42] This demonstrates a difference in the way that the body part was described in writing and in conversation, as well as indicating that it was not always Claire’s body that provided the stimulus for his artwork.

[39] Oral History Interview (1984), n. p.
[40] Stealingworth (1980), p 56.
[41] Stealingworth (1980), p. 61.
[42] Oral History Interview (1984), n. p.

Yet despite this, Wesselmann continued to reinforce Claire's importance to his *Great American Nudes*. Wesselmann told Sandler that 'it was terribly important to me that it was Claire… she was the *Great American Nude'*.[43] Whilst Wesselmann went on to say, there were 'friends who popped in and out' he added 'but Claire was the model'.[44] It is clear to see how the common, if not somewhat romanticised belief that Claire was the only model to pose for this set of paintings has been perpetuated. However, even though it is true to say that she was the most frequently used model, she was by no means the only one and there is evidence which demonstrates that Wesselmann did not have her pose for his most explicit artworks. Subsequently, they cannot be contextualised in terms of the sexual relationship the artist shared with his model/wife. Yet once more, this is something which is not explored within the existing literature, highlighting the extent to which the established 'myth' does not always explain the artwork.

Something which has become a large part of the Wesselmann myth is the fraught relationship he had with feminists and the artist told Sandler that he hoped to address this within the interview. Indeed, Wesselmann stressed to Sandler that the only thing he had 'written down' in preparation was to remind himself 'to comment something about Women's Lib'.[45] Wesselmann spoke of receiving negative attention from feminists, stating 'I get attacked from time to time for obvious reasons, I suppose'.[46] He felt that he received unfair criticism and that this was partly due to Women's Libbers expecting art to have a social purpose or an 'ulterior motive'.[47] He accused feminists of looking for evidence of this in his work when he said that they

[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.

should recognise that the nude simply provided 'an excuse to make a terrific painting' before reiterating that 'art subject matter isn't the idea.'[48] Wesselmann accused feminists of failing to recognise his intentions, and he himself seemed unable to see any problem with his work or consider that it would predictably elicit a critical response from women who did not agree with the way he depicted female bodies. In order to make a point that he should be considered the injured party, Wesselmann tried to demonstrate how sympathetic he was to women when he commented that, unlike other artists, he included women in his work and that this should be enough to alleviate their complaints. This either shows a real naivety on Wesselmann's part or a determined failure not to see his work from any other viewpoint than his own and subsequently attempt to open any debates regarding alternative interpretations. Wesselmann even made a point of mentioning that when *Tit Box* was exhibited in New York, the live model who supplied the breast was a university student and he did not want her participation to impinge on her study time. He further stated, 'I didn't want to demean her as a feminist' – a comment which was perhaps more aimed at quelling possible criticism from the women's movement than acknowledging that not all women were feminists.[49] It is, however, suggestive of the uneasy relationship the artist felt he had with feminists and raises questions regarding the narratives via which he situated his work.

In summary, the interview sees Wesselmann adopting a language which differs from the one he used when writing as Stealingworth. In interview, Wesselmann's speech is full of the vulgar terminology associated with locker-room talk. This contrasts with the emphasis placed upon formalism within the written text. However, whether the female body is described in terms of its sexual characteristics,

[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.

or the components used to achieve a visual effect, the nude figure is reduced to an object. Therefore, both of these aspects need to be taken into consideration when looking at Wesselmann's nudes and examining the way in which the 'myth' became established and disseminated. The nudes should not only be seen in terms of the relationship Wesselmann had with Claire. The discourse needs to be expanded to include those instances when she was not the model and consideration given to whether this changes the narrative of how the artist related to their bodies.

Wesselmann's contention that he was unfairly treated by feminists also requires scrutiny. Was his career adversely effected as a direct result of focused criticism or was it more symptomatic of the more widespread, male-constructed perspective of contemporary womanhood that feminists were starting to challenge?

Challenging the 'Myth'

By the end of the sixties, Pop was starting to go out of favour, although it did not immediately disappear and in between July and September 1969, a major exhibition was held at London's Hayward Gallery which brought together British and American artists in a re-evaluation of the decade's most prominent stylistic innovation. However, of the original New York Five, only four were included, and whilst Wesselmann was one of these artists, his work did not feature as prominently as some of the others. Wesselmann exhibited five pieces, two of which were *Great American Nudes* (#44 and #48, both from 1963). By comparison, Warhol had eleven works on display, Lichtenstein had nine, Claes Oldenburg also contributed nine and James Rosenquist did not feature at all. There were substantial numbers of work on show by others who came to be included in the Pop canon – Jasper Johns exhibited nine, Ray Johnson ten and Ed Ruscha eight. Whilst both of Wesselmann's nudes

were reproduced in John Russell and Suzi Gablik's companion publication *Pop Art Redefined* (1969) along with *Interior No. 3* (1963) and *Still Life No. 54* (1965), *Bathtub Collage No. 1* (1963) was also included even though it did not appear in the exhibition. *Bedroom Painting No. 1* (1967), appeared in the exhibition, but was not reproduced in the publication.

Russell wrote to Wesselmann in December 1968 giving brief details about the exhibition and indicating that his work would 'play a very important part in the show'.[50] Wesselmann noted on the letter which works he considered lending, splitting his choices between the headings 'will show' and 'could add'. *Great American Nude #44* came under the former (next to which he wrote 'rather early') whilst *Great American Nude #91* under the latter. Beneath this he made a note of a number of works which might replace *Great American Nude #2*, all of which were more recent. Wesselmann appeared to favour showing work which had been produced between 1967 – 68 and three of these were amongst his most explicit images in which the figure was shown with her legs spread, exposing her genitals. Once more, Wesselmann included *Great American Nude #91*, possibly indicating the regard in which he held this piece, and he added *#87*, *#92*, *#99* to the list, demonstrating that he was keen for his later work to be included. However, Russell and Gablik were clearly not of the same opinion.

It does seem that critics were beginning to tire of Wesselmann's dedication to his primary motif when in 1970 the critic Peter Schjeldahl described the artist's latest work as 'monotonous and terribly shallow', suggesting that it might titillate its

[50] Letter from John Russell to Tom Wesselmann, sent 'care of' J. Johns dated 2 December 1968. Wesselmann Estate, New York, uncatalogued.

audience rather than deliver on any promise that it might shock. [51] He also seemed wary of how the works might be received in a contemporary climate which saw feminists challenging how society portrayed women. Italian collector, Peppino Agrati, turned down the option of purchasing a Wesselmann nude in 1971, describing it as 'too aggressive for my collection'.[52]

The increased prominence of the Women's Movement saw galleries becoming increasingly cautious regarding what they were exhibiting and the possible attention it might receive. In 1968 Wesselmann received correspondence from Jan der Marck, director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago advising that a proposal for the artist to undertake a mural had been turned down. This was not only due to possible financial concerns, but because the committee 'may also have been afraid about the Museum's association with a part of the female anatomy'.[53]

In 1969, and whilst on display in London, *Great American Nude #44* (Fig. 1.6) was slashed across the crotch with a knife. The Arts Council GB wrote to Wesselmann in November 1969, describing the damage as 'malicious'.[54] In a further letter sent in December, the damage was identified as a 'three inch vertical knife cut' and its position on the figure was deemed to be indicative of 'the slightly unsound temperament of the assailant'.[55] The event did not seem to attract any media attention and there is no reference to the artwork having been damaged in the

[51] Peter Schjeldahl, 'Pop Goes the Playmate's Sister', *New York Times*, 19 April 1970, Section D, p. 21.
[52] Letter from Peppino Agrati to Tom Wesselmann dated 1 February 1971. Wesselmann Estate, New York, uncatalogued.
[53] Letter from Jan van der Marck, director of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago dated 8 April 1968. Van der Marck also described it as a 'nefarious' act of 'lackluster spinelessness', which was how his curator David Katzive had written it down in the meeting's minutes.
[54] Letter from the Arts Council GB to Tom Wesselmann dated 25 November 1969 signed by Gabriel White, Director of Art. Wesselmann Estate, New York, uncatalogued.
[55] Letter from the Arts Council GB to Tom Wesselmann dated 10 December 1969. Wesselmann Estate, New York, uncatalogued.

existing literature or when it has come up for auction.[56] However, the Arts Council's letter implied that the position of the damage on the nude figure may have been indicative of the reasons for the attack, but it did not make clear whether it had been undertaken by a man or woman. However, it does bring to mind the notorious assault on the *Rokeby Venus* in 1906 by the suffragette Mary Richardson who acted in order to draw attention to women 'who are not only denied justice but who are ill-treated and tortured'.[57] However, the identity of the person who damaged the painting remains unknown. If it had been at the hands of a feminist, it would have provided direct evidence to support Wesselmann's claims that he received negative attention from members of the Women's Movement.

The extent to which Wesselmann was criticised by feminists has become a major, and unchallenged part of the Wesselmann 'myth'. Wilmerding wrote that the Women's Movement accused Wesselmann of producing work which was 'sexist and chauvinistic', and ignored the artist's claims to the contrary.[58] Glenn believed that Wesselmann's nudes were neither 'explicit nor confrontational', whilst noting that they attracted the attention of 'dissenting feminists'.[59] Livingstone revealed that Wesselmann was 'extremely hurt and upset when the feminists' criticism started', particularly when it was suggested that his work could be considered 'in some way as pornographic'.[60] He went on to defend the artist by saying that he knew him personally and that he 'was a real old-fashioned family man, devoted to his wife and

[56] *Great American Nude #44* was auctioned by Christie's in 2002 (lot 8, https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-3918119 accessed 29 October 2022) and Sotheby's in 2013 (lot 30 https://www.sothebys.cn/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2013/may-2013-contemporary-evening-n08991/lot.30.html accessed 29 October 2022. Whilst both note that the painting was exhibited at the Hayward Gallery there is no mention of any damage being caused or subsequent repair.
[57] 'The Slashed Venus', *Manchester Courier*, 13 March 1914, p. 9. The article reported on Mary Richardson's trial and subsequent sentencing. Richardson particularly wished to highlight the plight of Emmeline Pankhurst who had been arrested in Glasgow. It was noted within the article that the damage done to the painting prevented women, as well as men, from enjoying the artwork.
[58] Wilmerding (2008), p. 48.
[59] Glenn (2012), p. 26.
[60] Livingstone, Zwirner Gallery, February 2016.

kids' as though this was evidence that a happily married man would not possibly consider any other female body in sexual terms.[61]

As recently as February 2016, an article was published in *The Guardian* entitled: '*Great American Nudes* artist Tom Wesselmann was no sexist say the women in his life.'[62] Including comments from Claire, the artist's daughter Kate and model and studio assistant Monica Serra, the article appeared as a somewhat defensive characterisation of Wesselmann rather than a discussion of the exhibition which was taking place at the David Zwirner Gallery at that time.[63] This overwhelming defensive stance was also apparent in a *New York Times* article about Wesselmann's exhibition at the Almine Rech Gallery in Paris later that year in which the author not only described the artist as being underappreciated for decades but insinuated that his decline in popularity had somehow been the fault of feminist critics making 'Wesselmann the whipping boy for the male gaze'.[64]

There is certainly evidence to suggest that some female critics were beginning to question Wesselmann's portrayal of women's bodies during the sixties, predating the emergence of feminist critique and art historical discourse in the early 1970s. One of the first women critics to indicate they were uncomfortable with Wesselmann's nudes was Barbara Rose. Writing in *Artforum* in 1965, Rose identified a form of 'perverse eroticism' inherent in pop art, although she also noted that this might be expected in 'the social context of more liberal attitudes towards

---

[61] Ibid.
[62] Hermione Hoby, 'Great American Nudes artist Tom Wesselmann was no sexist, say the women in his life', *Guardian*, 19 January 2016 online edition https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/jan/19/great-american-nudes-artist-tom-wesselmann-not-sexist-daughter-wife-model-interview accessed 2 November 2011
[63] Ibid.
[64] Kevin Conley, 'The Most Famous Pop Artist You Don't Know', *New York Times* Style Magazine 22 August 2016, online edition https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/22/t-magazine/art/tom-wesselmann-pop-artist-profile.html?searchResultPosition=2 accessed 13 July 22.

sexuality.'[65] Whilst not opposed to this being a feature of contemporary art, she was unsure of Wesselmann's 'fetishistic obsession' with genitalia, which she considered gave the figure an *objectlike* status.[66] In 1967, Lucy Lippard pronounced that Wesselmann's painting *Seascape #17 (Two Tits)* (1966) was 'cooly anti-sensuous' and that it represented the 'esthetics of nastiness'.[67] However, it was not until Wesselmann's *Tit Box* was exhibited at the Janis Gallery in 1970, that the artist's work was mentioned in direct relation to the Women's Movement. In an article for the *New York Times*, Peter Schjeldahl commented on the installation which included a live model's breast and wondered what 'the girls in Women's Liberation would make of it' before 'concluding 'plenty'.[68] Whilst this showed a growing awareness of the contemporary issues being impacted by the fight for women's rights, the comment seemed to be more of a jibe aimed at feminists than at Wesselmann.

There appears to be more evidence in support of Wesselmann's claim that he was 'sympathetic to women' amongst female, even feminist-oriented, art historians, than there are anti-Wesselmann critiques.[69] In 1996, Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker published an essay which examined Wesselmann's 'woman repertoire' and determined that the *Great American Nudes* were 'advertisements for a sexuality conducted on the surface of the bodies of women'.[70] Referring to John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972) and Laura Mulvey's discourse on visual pleasure in cinema (1975), she considered Wesselmann's work in relation to the male gaze and how the

[65] Barbara Rose, 'Filthy Pictures' in ed. Barbara Rose, *Autocritique: Essays on Art and Anti-art* (New York: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1988), p.23 (first publ. in *Artforum*, May 1965).
[66] Rose (1988), p. 24.
[67] Lucy Lippard, 'Eros Presumptive', *The Hudson Review*, 20:1 (1967), p. 97.
[68] Schjeldahl (1970), p. 21.
[69] Oral History Interview (1984), n.p.
[70] Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker, 'The Great American Nude' in *Tom Wesselmann: 1959 – 1993*, eds. Thomas Buchsteiner & Otto Letze (Cantz: Ostfildern, 1996), p. 17.

passivity of his figures affected the female spectator.[71] Whilst Birnie Danzker suggested that the female viewer could not share Wesselmann's 'devotional' gaze, describing women as 'tourists in the landscape of his desire' this did not prevent her from concluding that ultimately, everyone who viewed the works would 'stand before the spectacle of the *Great American Nude* in (non-gendered) wonderment'. [72] Birnie Danzker defined Wesselmann's work as 'a powerful critique of commodity sex, of alienation and the fractured, female body' and whilst a female spectator might find this problematic, they should recognise that that the artist was drawing attention to 'the numbing power' of those images of women as commodities which circulated within society and understand that he engaged with these in an 'innocent and telling way.'[73]

More recent discussions of Wesselmann's nudes have suggested that his figures should be seen as women delighting in their own erotic bodies and celebrating their sexual selves – something which a feminist stance should support. In 2012, Nathalie Bondil questioned why, in the twenty-first century, society was seemingly 'still too prudish to accept' Wesselmann's depictions of 'wide open lips, erect nipples, explicit orgasms and sexually charged close-ups'.[74] An article published in 2016 by Sabrina Tarasoff suggested that the women in Wesselmann's paintings 'partake in a process of desire' and 'take responsibility for her pleasure and the lust it elicits, whilst allowing herself to be the subject of someone's sexuality',

[71] Birnie Danzker (1996), p. 18.
[72] Birnie Danzker (1996), p. 20. This adheres to Wesselmann's own preference for discussing his work.
[73] Birnie Danzker (1996), p. 20.
[74] Nathalie Bondil, Tom Wesselmann's Bombshells' in ed. Stéphane Aquin, *Tom Wesselmann* (2012), p. 17.

seeing Wesselmann's work as a positive endorsement of female sexual liberation and power.[75]

Whilst Wesselmann has continued to feature in publications devoted to Pop art as well as exhibiting in major shows, such as the Royal Academy's *Pop Art* held in London 1991 and *The Pop Object* exhibition, curated by Wilmerding and staged at the Acquavella Gallery in New York in 2013, his status within the group has become less prominent. When Steven Madoff published his major overview of Pop in 1997, the number of artists who he identified as making the greatest contribution was reduced to four, whilst Wesselmann appeared in the section entitled *From Center to Periphery: Other Figures*.[76] When included in general overviews of American art, it is not unusual to see Wesselmann summed up as being a painter of 'anonymous female sex objects on display in tableaux accented by images of consumer products' or simply as an artist whose work was 'bluntly erotic'.[77] Whilst he has by no means been excluded from the Pop canon, it does not reinforce Wesselmann's importance in the art scene in the early sixties and implies that his nudes were little more than painted versions of what could be seen in the pages of *Playboy*.

There is little evidence to substantiate the myth that Wesselmann received direct and damaging attention from feminist factions other than via personal interactions. Wesselmann's nudes were symptomatic of how objectifying the female

[75] Sabrina Tarasoff, 'Tom Wesselmann at Almine Rech, Paris' in *Mousse Magazine*, December 2016 https://www.moussemagazine.it/magazine/tom-wesselmann-at-almine-rech-paris accessed 07 April 2022

[76] Steven Henry Madoff, 'Wham! Blam! How Pop Art Stormed the High-Art Citadel and What the Critics Said', *Pop Art: A Critical History*, ed. Steven Madoff (Berkeley & London: University of California Press, 1997), p. vii.

[77] Carter Ratcliff, 'The Body Electric: The Erotic Dimension in American Art', *American Art in the 20th Century: Painting and Sculpture 1913 - 1993*, (exhibition catalogue, Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin, 8 May – 25 July 1993 and Royal Academy of Arts and the Saatchi Gallery, London, 16 September – 12 December 1993), in eds. Christos M. Joachimides and Norman Rosenthal (London & Berlin, Prestel-Verlag & Royal Academy of Arts: 1993), p. 168.

body had become an acceptable feature which pervaded everything from advertising, cinema and television to the more obvious girlie magazines, as well as leading to a reassessment of some fine art nudes. Therefore, the extent to which Wesselmann's paintings were a part of this more widespread attitude towards defining women needs to be contextualised within a more general understanding of the social and political environment of mid-to-late sixties America and the subsequent rise of active feminist groups. Wesselmann's nudes not only provide an insightful vehicle for exploring these issues, they simply cannot be separated from them, and they raise questions regarding the complicated and changing definitions of masculinity and femininity which were being debated at the time. Ultimately, Wesselmann's nudes raise the question of why the naked female body, and particularly sexualised versions of it, came to symbolise 1960s sexual liberation and from whose viewpoint.

New York in the 1960s

There are a number of misconceptions regarding how liberal 1960s America was, and these need to be clarified in order to provide an accurate context for looking at Wesselmann's nudes. The sixties did not become the sixties overnight and it took some years to shake off the post-war expectations and stereotypes of the 1950s, particularly that of the American housewife. It is true that the sex lives of American citizens had become a talking point since Alfred Kinsey published his reports on the sexual behaviour of men and women in 1948 and 1953.[78] This did not directly lead

[78] Alfred Kinsey, who founded the Institute for Sex Research at Indiana University in 1947 published *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male* in 1948 and *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female* in 1953. Both books, published by W. B Saunders, Philadelphia, attracted media attention and became bestsellers, appealing to both the scientific community and the general public.

to a more liberal social attitude towards sex, or suggest promiscuity, but it did shed some light on what went on in the private lives of white, middle-class couples.[79]

In the early sixties sex outside of marriage, or a serious relationship which would lead to it, was still frowned upon. As Wesselmann recounted, when Claire's mother attended one of his shows in 1963 and 'realized what was happening between her daughter and me' he 'got hell from her' as they were not married at this point.[80] In reality, the debates regarding sexual liberation were initially more conservative than might be expected and whilst there were more open discussions about sex it was rarely outside of marital relationships and firmly 'within a heterosexual framework of long-term, monogamous relationships.'[81] It was not until the late sixties that the hippie counter-culture espoused 'free love' between heterosexual and homosexual partners and proposed the idea of what would become dubbed the sexual revolution. The young American singles who were moving to large towns and cities for work and becoming economically independent, were also becoming recognised as a social group who were adopting more liberal attitudes towards sex and relationships.

However, female sexual liberation and autonomy remained a complicated area. The notion of women having their own physical desires and the possibility that they might place excessive pressure on men to satiate these, was still generally

[79] John D'Emilio and Estelle B Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), p. 270. The authors noted that Kinsey's research 'may tell us more about the ideology of sexual liberalism than about the actual meanings of marital sex' and that certain assumptions were behind the data represented, such as women wanting less sex than men causing problems within marriages. This implied that any sexual difficulties encountered within the marital relationship were the fault of women.
[80] Oral History Interview (1984), n. p.
[81] D'Emilio and Friedman (1988), p. 300.

regarded as somewhat unnatural, if not unfeminine and this was not helped by female anatomy remaining largely misunderstood.[82]

Socially prescribed gender roles had been subverted during World War II as women took on men's jobs. When it concluded, women were expected to return to the home and having children was even presented as a patriotic duty. It was still generally frowned upon for women to try to establish careers for themselves as this might upset the gendered order of things, as was any expectation that men should help out with household chores or with childcare. Concerns that there might be any breaching of the gender divide led to some social commentators in the late 1950s identifying a 'crisis of masculinity' which was said to be affecting American men. In 1958, Arthur Schlesinger published an article in the magazine *Esquire,* which examined a growing belief that men were being feminised by overbearing wives and mothers.[83] Fears were expressed that any expectation that men should share domestic tasks or that women could enter male-dominated workplaces could lead to emasculation. *The Decline of the American Male,* also published in 1958, went as far as to blame women for everything from male impotency to homosexuality. This text places women in a double bind between being pathologized if they either tried to break free from the domestic environment or acquire power within it .[84] J. Robert Moskin, one of the co-authors of *The Decline of the American Male*, warned that 'as

[82] D'Emilio and Freedman (1988), pp. 312-313. The authors highlighted that the emphasis previously placed on the Freudian notion that women reached orgasm through vaginal penetration was challenged, first by Kinsey and subsequently by research published by William Masters and Virginia Johnson in *Human Sexual Response* (1966). This posited that women reached orgasm through clitoral stimulation and as Anne Koedt subsequently wrote in *The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm* (1969) much of what had been disseminated regarding female sexual pleasure had been 'the creation of male sexual preferences.' Whilst this allowed for a greater understanding of female sexual anatomy, it also suggested that men, and most notably, the penis, might not provide the main source of women's pleasure.

[83] Arthur Schlesinger, 'The Crisis of American Masculinity' in *Esquire*, 50:5, (November 1958), pp. 62-65.

[84] William Attwood, George B. Leonard Jr., and J Robert Moskin, *The Decline of the American Male* (New York: Random House, 1958).

women grow even more numerous and more dominant, we will have to invent new meanings and myths for maleness in America'.[85] In contrast to this, Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 in which she drew attention to the thousands of disaffected housewives across America who had been led to believe that their domestic roles were somehow biologically determined and that aspiring to be anything other than a wife and mother would fail to satisfy their preordained womanly needs.[86] One of the key feminist texts of the sixties, this foreshadowed the many factions of the Woman's Movement who came to challenge the stifling inequality of a patriarchal system and subsequently saw the fight for women's rights emerge alongside racial and civil ones.[87]

New meanings of masculinity were indeed invented, and these became established in novels and within the pages of *Playboy*. The action hero gave way to the sexually active male, and the suave, virile version of this was epitomised on the big screen in the shape of James Bond. This 'new' hero of heteronormative masculinity was not necessarily defined by physically demanding feats of derring-do, but through the satiating of his libido.[88] However, this filtered down into the

[85] J Robert Moskin, 'Why do Women Dominate Him?', eds. Attwood, Leonard and Moskin (1958), p. 24.
[86] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Penguin Books, 1992, first edn. New York: Norton, 1963).
[87] In 1963 Civil Rights demonstrations took place in Birmingham, Alabama and Washington D.C. and race riots started in New York State in 1964, becoming more widespread and frequent in the following years. 1964 saw students initiate the Berkeley Free Speech Movement and anti-Vietnam war demonstrations took place the following year. NOW (National Organisation for Women) was started in 1966 at the Third National Conference of the State Commissions on Women held in Washington D. C. and had its first national conference the following year. It drew up a Bill of Rights calling for an Equal Rights Constitutional Amendment, anti-sex discrimination legislation, maternity benefits and tax assistance for working parents, childcare provision, equal education and job training rights and women's right to control their own reproductive lives. (Douglas Tallack, *Twentieth-Century America: The Intellectual and Cultural Context* (London and New York: Longman, 1996 third edn.) p. 291 and pp. 358 – 360.
[88] Schlesinger (1958), p. 63. The author identified the 'frontiersmen' of James Fenimore Cooper and the 'heroes of Dreiser, of Fitzgerald and Hemingway' as being 'men', whilst the mid-twentieth century notion of masculinity was less identifiable. Friedan (1992) noted how contemporary writers were increasingly demonstrating their protagonists' masculinity in terms of their sexual virility and also a tendency towards sexual violence. Friedan identified Irwin Shaw as writing about 'sex and

social sphere not necessarily by an increase in male sexual activity. Men need only establish their virile, heterosexual credentials by being seen to look at women's bodies and discussing it with their heterosexual male buddies. This was encouraged by *Playboy*, which positioned itself as 'a pleasure-primer styled to the masculine taste' of the sophisticated and professional city-slicker.[89]

One of the most iconic cinematic scenes from the decade exemplified the shared experience of adopting the erotic male gaze for pleasure. Epitomising the *Playboy* lifestyle, when James Bond was given his first outing in American movie theatres in 1963, the audience observed the fully clothed 007 watching Ursula Andress's bikini-clad body emerge from the sea as an erotic spectacle (Fig. 1.7). When Andress's character enquired somewhat naively whether, like her, Bond was looking for shells, he replied 'no, I'm just looking' and in doing so he afforded the audience the opportunity to participate in the same activity, not only in the movie theatre but elsewhere. A slightly different cinematic approach was taken in 1968's *Barbarella* with Jane Fonda as the titular character in the sci-fi sex romp. She is 'tortured' in the Excessive Machine, a device which is played like a musical instrument and delivers unbearable amounts of erotic pleasure. When a moaning Barbarella subsequently breaks the machine, indicating the power of her own sex drive, she is chastised. Durand-Durand, the character who is inflicting the torture exclaims 'What kind of girl are you? Have you no shame?... Shame… shame on you'.[90] So whilst female sexual pleasure is presented as a spectacle for the viewer's enjoyment, Barbarella herself is shamed for having any erotic response of her own.

---

adultery', whilst Norman Mailer and 'the young beatnik writers defined their revolutionary spirit to sex and kicks and drugs and advertising themselves in four-letter words.' (p. 164).

[89] *Playboy*,1:1, December 1953, p. 3.

[90] Taken from IMDb's selection of quotes from Barbarella https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0062711/characters/nm0000404 accessed 9 November 2022

New York City itself provided an environment for the sexual to be seen as part of the everyday environment, and this was not limited to billboards or other forms of mass media. The sex industry had its epicentre around Times Square and 42nd Street where women, their bodies and their services were advertised as a saleable commodity. As the popularity of stag movies declined during the sixties, the short films showing sex acts were replaced by sexploitation films which are described by Gorfinkel as mapping 'a transition from "productivist" to "consumerist" models of sexuality, while visually exploiting the widening panorama of sexual practices, identities, and orientations.'[91] Cheap peep shows also became popular and widely available. Adult bookstores displayed girlie magazines in their windows and so the threshold of these establishments did not have to be crossed in order to see what was on offer (Fig. 1.8). In 1961, it was so problematic that city officials began calling for a clamp down on what Monsignor Joseph A McCaffrey, pastor of the Church of the Holy Cross in New York, called 'the greatest retail market of pornography in America' but the area did not undergo a complete clean-up until the early 1990s.[92] The posters that are visible in the store-front window are of particular note. In 1962, Wesselmann was photographed in his studio standing next to a copy of the poster which appears on the right-hand side of the window (Fig. 1.9). With the poster being almost life-size, the blonde model appears as a substitute for Claire. This is further reinforced when Wesselmann used the same image as a collage element in *Great American Nude #36* (Fig. 1.10) and *#38* (Fig. 1.11).

[91] Elena Gorfinkel, *Lewd Looks: American Sexploitation Cinema in the 1960s* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Scholarship Online, 2018), n. p. https://doi.org/10.5749/minnesota/9781517900175.003.0003 accessed 9 November 2022

[92]This was how Monsignor Joseph A McCaffrey described the area in a speech given to the West Side Association of Commerce in 1961, during which Judge Owen McGivern, Chief Justice of the New York Supreme Court, presented Monsignor McCaffrey with a Certificate of Distinguished Service. It can be heard in its entirety https://www.wnyc.org/story/remembering-cheap-tawdry-downright-immoral-times-square/ and is provided by NYC Municipal Archives, WNYC Collection. Accessed 02 November 2021.

Furthermore, this establishes that Wesselmann not only referenced girlie magazine material in his work, he took it directly from its original source. Similar references can also be seen in *Little Great American Nude #24* (1966) in which Wesselmann once again incorporated part of an image taken from a girlie magazine (1.12).[93]

There was a gradual relaxation of obscenity laws throughout the decade, but the porn industry remained subject to restrictions on the grounds that its *purpose* was to appeal to prurient interest. Yet the visual arts and literature benefited from the ground-breaking changes to censorship laws which took place during the sixties, sparked by the American publication of Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* – a novel which had been written in 1930s France. The Supreme Court ruled that if something had no redeeming features other than inciting prurient interest, then it would be classed as obscene and subsequently banned. However, if it could be demonstrated that it had any social importance, which art and literature were deemed as having, then it was afforded more protection under the First Amendment. This had a huge impact on the arts as it became increasingly difficult to categorise obscenity and subsequently censor works by artists and writers, leading to more freedom of artistic expression.

Wesselmann may have professed to not wanting to make any social comment, but his art did reflect aspects of the contemporary environment and everyday American life. There is little doubt that his nudes became more erotic in parallel with changes to obscenity laws but there is also evidence that he was making changes to his figures which coincided, for example, with the development of the porn industry. Wesselmann and critics' insistence on removing his work from this

[93] Whilst I have been unable to identify the actual sources of *Great American Nudes #36* and *#38* and the figure used in *Little Great American Nude #24*, the latter does resemble the poster on the left-hand side of the store-front and whilst it does not appear to be identical, it does look as though it may have been part of a series of pictures from the same photo-shoot.

context in order to focus on the formal aspect of his images does not fully explain the meaning of the sexual content of his work's sexual content which becomes increasingly explicit in the latter part of the decade. It also highlights how the prevailing Wesselmann myth, which may have been applicable to interpreting his earlier pieces, does not adequately explain his approach to the later nudes. There is a duality which is identifiable in Wesselmann's work. On the one hand, there is the 'normal' family man who exemplifies traditional masculine values and who celebrates the fulfilling relationship he has with his wife by depicting her as a sensual figure in a domestic interior. On the other, is an artist whose wife did not feature in his most explicit nudes, used demeaning and sexualised language to refer to female body parts and identified Henry Miller as affording him the opportunity to deal visually with his sexual preoccupations. As such, Wesselmann exemplifies the tensions inherent in 'new' masculinity of 1960s America. He evidences his own heterosexual virility via the sexualisation of the female nude and invites the implied male viewer to do the same.

In order to examine this, and challenge the Wesselmann myth, I consider two primary sources – the Stealingworth publication and the Wesselmann interview. Seeing these as providing a dialogue between the established Wesselmann mythology and a side to the artist which is less acknowledged, I explore whether these two aspects can be reconciled in order to provide a broader understanding of his approach to the female nude. I consider the contradictions which apparently exist between a public persona rooted in established morals and gender roles and the more complex issues which were emerging regarding sexual ethics and liberation in 1960s America.

Thesis Outline

The aim of this thesis is to place the development of Wesselmann's nudes during the 1960s within the context of artistic, historical, social and political developments during that decade and consider how this impacted his portrayal of the sexualised female body. His work is examined in relation to concurrent debates around masculinity and femininity, and an exploration of how gender roles were being challenged and redefined in the decades following World War II. I will analyse Wesselmann's nudes by examining contemporary American texts and critiques, artistic and literary precedents, and contemporary aesthetic theory. I dispute Wesselmann's claim that he was not influenced by 'girlie' magazines by identifying the sources for the collage figures he used in *Great American Nudes #36* and *#38* (both from 1962) and *Little Great American Nude #24* (1966) (1.12). I also demonstrate that the open-leg posed he had his models adopt appears at the same time this became a feature within the porn industry.

I have classified Wesselmann's work as broadly undergoing three distinct developmental phases throughout the sixties, during which the figures became increasingly erotic. To explain why this occurred, and the art world's reactions to these changes, I consider these phases in relation to contemporaneous historical and environmental factors. I also explore what may have impacted Wesselmann's way of portraying the nude by examining influences which were identified by the artist but have never been considered in relation to his work. This offers an original contribution to the existing scholarship and provides analyses of his work which emphasises how he transformed the female body over a ten-year period and how it related to contemporary gender debates and popular culture.

My research is presented in three chapters which provide an in-depth study of Wesselmann's nudes and broaden the existing scholarship on his work. The first chapter revisits the relationship between Wesselmann and Henri Matisse and relates to the work being undertaken between 1960–1964. During this period Wesselmann adopted a fairly traditional approach to the female nude, influenced by European precedents, and drawing upon intimate portrayals of figures within an interior setting. Contemporary critics immediately started to draw comparisons between Wesselmann and Matisse's nudes, on the basis of little more than both artists' use of the same motif discussed in relation to a shared interest in formalism, whilst effectively minimising the erotic nature of the figure. This comparison also overlooked how the sexualisation of the domestic female body became a characteristic of national identity. I also demonstrate that whilst Matisse may have provided a template for painting the female body, his greater impact may have been in providing a model for demonstrating an artist's normative, domestic, hetero-masculinity. I analyse similarities in how Wesselmann and Matisse's public personae were established and disseminated, and the extent to which their depictions of women as sexual objects were excused as displays of heteronormativity.

The next phase encompasses 1964–1966, during which time Wesselmann developed his distinctive graphic style which placed increased emphasis on simplifying the female body and focusing on its sexual characteristics. I examine this in conjunction with the American Supreme Court's landmark changes to obscenity laws in 1964 and consider how this afforded Wesselmann the opportunity to push the boundaries in relation to what parts of the body could be depicted whilst evading censorship.

Given that the first major changes to the obscenity laws were a result of the American publication of Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, and that Wesselmann stated that it was this author who specifically allowed him 'to acknowledge his sexual life' and 'assess and visualize his own sexuality', I reflect upon how Miller may have impacted Wesselmann's treatment of the female body.[94] I ascertain that there are similarities in the ways that both men characterised women's bodies as a sum of its sexual parts, and explore how this fragments the individual and negates its holistic existence.

I suggest that, in seeking to find visual equivalents to Miller's literary descriptions, Wesselmann invoked the author's use of a male vernacular which defined a specific attitude towards the female body and aimed to shock. This is also explored in relation to an increase in artists of the sixties pursuing their right to freedom of artistic expression and place this in conjunction with a more widespread social fight for freedom of speech.

In my final chapter, I study the work that Wesselmann created between 1967-1970 and consider the extent to which he was impacted by the pragmatist philosopher, John Dewey, who emphasised the importance of looking to the everyday, and the experiences therein, for aesthetic stimuli[95] , and whom the artist credited with making him think more 'rationally'.

The latter years of the decade, during which Wesselmann produced his most explicit work was also a time when further changes were being made to American obscenity laws. The case of Redrup v New York, referred to by the *New York Times* with the headline 'High Court Rules 10 'Girlie' Magazines Not Lewd', indicated that

[94] Stealingworth (1980), p. 13.
[95] Ibid.

the censoring of mass media images might become as relaxed as those which had already impacted art and literature.[96] Wesselmann interpreted this as the Supreme Court endorsing nudity, and it is during this period that some of his images began to veer more towards the pornographic, with his nudes adopting poses which seemed more geared towards satisfying the viewer's prurient interest than any aesthetic one.[97]

The existing scholarship does not make any distinction between these later, overtly erotic images and the ones which Wesselmann produced in the early sixties. In particular, there is no differentiation between the earlier, more intimate images which featured Claire and the later ones, where it becomes evident that Wesselmann was using different models. Wesselmann remained adamant that the eroticism inherent in his work was underpinned by the highly personal way that he experienced Claire's body, and this also meant that, somehow, he could not be accused of objectifying the female nude. However, he did concur that he became frustrated when it became evident that his work was being compared to magazine pin-ups. Wesselmann admitted that he was caught between wanting to make his nudes 'be a pin-up and yet take it out of the realm of being a pin-up', subsequently he concluded that this was not only difficult, but something he was not sure he ever properly achieved.[98] With these points in mind, I consider how Wesselmann's nudes might represent his everyday experience of the female body – both in terms of its personal, sexual nature and as a reaction to a more widespread, socially-influenced one.

---

[96] Fred P Graham, 'High Court Voids Obscenity Charge in 3 Test Cases; Rules 10 'Girlie' Magazines Are Not Lewd – Decision Includes Two Books' in *The New York Times*, (9 May 1967), pp 1 and 22.
[97] Oral History Interview (1984), n. p. Wesselmann opined that 'even the Supreme Court has said that nudity is all right'.
[98] Oral History Interview (1984), n. p.

I demonstrate how Wesselmann encountered Dewey and investigate how the philosopher's key text on aesthetics, *Art as Experience* (1934), can be examined in relation to the development of the *Great American Nudes*. Dewey proposed a theoretical approach to art which is predominantly based upon the individual's aesthetic responses being shaped by personal experiences occurring within the lived environment, and I look at how this might be evidenced within Wesselmann's work. As sex became part of the commonplace, being discussed more openly as well as becoming more of a feature in advertising and other forms of mass media communication, I consider what provided the impetus for an intimate aesthetic experience. I also look at the erotic everyday in relation to the social environment of sixties New York and how it afforded men the opportunity to signal their heterosexual virility. This presents a move away from individual experience towards a shared one in which it was important to be seen to actively engage in looking at women's bodies.

My research sees something of a dialogue taking place between the Stealingworth publication and the Oral History Interview and attempts to reconcile these two sides of Wesselmann – the formal and the sexual. Whilst the book represents Wesselmann's public persona as an artist with formalist intentions, inspired by his relationship with his wife, the Oral History interview gives an insight into a man responding more directly to the sexual aspects of a woman's body. Bringing the two together identifies the discrepancies which exist between the presented facts, and how they actually relate to Wesselmann's nudes, and suggests that if the predominant narrative continues to go unquestioned, it will result in a very limited interpretation of the artist's contribution to art history.

Access to material held by the artist's Estate in New York allowed me to asses correspondence received by Wesselmann, affording me the opportunity to see how he related to contemporary artists, galleries, collectors, academics, critics, peers and friends. It also provided an insight into where he stood in relation to some of the contemporary social and political issues of the day. It clarified that Wesselmann was an artist who did not like to provide explanations of his work's subject matter as well as indicating that towards the end of the decade he was attracting increased attention for its erotic content. Amongst the correspondence, is possible evidence that Wesselmann subscribed to *Playboy*, and letters received from Jan Cremer, a Dutch author and artist who became known for his highly erotic, semi-autobiographical novels, who reportedly developed a friendship with Wesselmann.[99]

Wesselmann's work cannot simply be explained as being a product of an era of sexual liberation without clarifying what this means and from which viewpoint this may have been developed. There were too many conflicting and complex debates relating to sex and gender dynamics during the 1960s to simply refer to the era as one of sexual liberation. It impacted men and women differently as well as challenging existing social definitions of masculinity and femininity. However, it has remained a broad enough categorisation to uphold the continuation of the Wesselmann 'myth' without it being subject to further scrutiny. Therefore, this thesis re-evaluates the artist's work by identifying and challenging the Wesselmann story, considering its purpose and reconciling the incongruities which exist between Stealingworth and Wesselmann – the myth and the painted reality.

[99] Jan Cremer became infamous for his sexually explicit novel *I, Jan Cremer* which was published in the U.S.A in 1965. He moved to New York for a period in the mid-sixties and worked as a photographer on *Nugget* magazine for a while. As a painter, he adopted a Pop style and mixed with artists active on the New York scene. Cremer is described on his website http://www.jancremer.com/ by Freddy De Vree as having 'frequent contact with Tom Wesselmann' whilst on the same website, W.A.L. Beeren claims in his article *The Muse of Jan Cremer* that Cremer influenced Wesselmann's *Great American Nudes*.

CHAPTER 1

Tom Wesselmann and Henri Matisse: Domestic Identities and Gendered Normativity

> One's ideas of (Matisse) and of his work are entirely opposed to each other: The latter abnormal to the last degree, and the man as ordinary, healthy individual, such as one meets by the dozen every day. [1]

> Wesselmann lives in a combination studio and apartment in Greenwich Village… He is married to a gentle and beautiful girl who is sympathetic to the peculiar demands of the artist. He still enjoys fishing and golf whenever time permits.[2]

From early in his career, Tom Wesselmann's images of female nudes drew comparisons with the work of Henri Matisse. Whilst this was, in part, due to Wesselmann identifying the Frenchman as being the artist he most admired, it is often predicated upon what appears to be little more than a shared interest in depicting the female nude in an interior setting and the occasional use of similar poses.

Whilst Matisse's work veered towards the decorative, Wesselmann described an early desire for colours to compete and the interaction of 'positive and negative shapes or space'. [3] Yet whilst there were differences in their approach, both artists described themselves as formalists with only a passing interest in subject matter.

---

[1] Clara T MacChesney, 'A Talk with Matisse, Leader of the Post-Impressionists', *New York Times*, 9 March 1913, Section M, p. 12.
[2] John Rublowsky, *Pop Art* (Basic Books, Inc. New York, 1965), p.138.
[3] Slim Stealingworth, *Tom Wesselmann* (Abbeville Press, New York: 1980), pp. 18-20.

However, despite Wesselmann and Matisse both showing a preference for using the female body as a vehicle for formal experimentation, they also made the painted female nude increasingly erotic. However, their devotion to discussing the specifics of image-making as an intellectual process diverted attention away from content, the effect of which was to make their increasingly sexualised nudes palatable to the general public, and specifically, an American audience.

The American media played a part in normalising the artists' predilection for the erotic by emphasising the personal characteristics of both men, often presenting them to the public as 'normal', wholesome men whose interest in the nude was the continuation of an artistic tradition. As the nudes became increasingly sexualised, examples of the artists' normative domestic masculinity were offered in an attempt to counter any suggestion that either Matisse or Wesselmann expressed an 'unhealthy' interest in the female body. The notion of domestic normality did not only relate to the artists' marital relationships and home lives, it also pertained to notions of 'homeland' and both Matisse and Wesselmann used the female body to portray national identity. Whilst it was not uncommon for allegorical female figures to symbolise a nation, what was notable in the paintings of Wesselmann and Matisse was the establishing of a patriotic eroticism by using the sexualised female body to allude to national identity.

Comparing Wesselmann's nudes from the 1960s with the work undertaken by Matisse during the 1920s, in this chapter I explore how the erotic elements of their paintings were sanctioned by the media and contextualised the artists as conforming to established masculine ideals rather than suggesting they demonstrated particularly liberal attitudes towards sex and women. I examine how formalist critique is used to construct an implied male viewpoint and also to surreptitiously

imbue elements such as the application of paint, colour, shape and line with attributes which related directly to sexualising the nude itself. I consider how some female critiques indicated an unease with how Wesselmann represented women's bodies and how these may be seen as forerunners to the feminist theoretical approach to art history which emerged in the early 1970s.

Tom Wesselmann – A bit 'Matissey'?

Throughout his career, Tom Wesselmann was fascinated by the female form. From his early collages to the steel 'drawings' that he worked on towards the end of his career, the nude figure was a recurring motif. It is perhaps no surprise to find that two of the artists for whom Wesselmann expressed the most admiration, Willem de Kooning and Henri Matisse, not only produced images of the female figure but did so in ways which broke from the ideals of classical beauty that had traditionally been associated with the genre.

As a student in his third year at The Cooper Union School of Art in New York, Wesselmann described himself as being 'oriented' towards de Kooning and spoke of the Dutch-American's 'woman' paintings as being '*the* example of the most full-blown use of all the exciting ideas of the time' primarily in reference to the painterly techniques used as well as the creation of an overall pictorial effect.[4] However, it is Matisse who Wesselmann identified as being the artist he most admired and often spoke of the Frenchman when discussing his own work. During the lengthy Oral History interview conducted by Irving Sandler in 1984, Wesselmann described Matisse's work as 'stunningly beautiful', stating 'You

[4] Stealingworth (1980), pp. 12-13.

couldn't look at a Matisse without feeling some kind of excitement…".[5] Whilst in 1975 Wesselmann added; 'I can't talk about Matisse without talking about myself… He is the painter I most idolized and still do' but he also went on to say that he did not see any more connection between his nudes and the Frenchman's than he did with any other artist.[6] Wesselmann also explained that he collected reproductions of various artists' work to use as collage and that their inclusion in his paintings was not about setting up a particular dialogue, it was simply a matter of choosing which ones fitted best with the overall image.

Wesselmann frequently discussed how fascinated he was by Matisse's work and how he would examine reproductions of it in order to understand how he solved pictorial problems. In 1965, Wesselmann was featured in *Pop Art*, the first book to examine the newest of artistic phenomena and in it he paid homage to the Frenchman when he said; 'I remember spending hours studying reproductions of (Matisse's) paintings. I would challenge him in imaginary conversations to tell me why he did each thing the way he did.'[7] Yet he explained that he did this in order to help him find his own way of solving pictorial problems and he was encouraged to do so by his painting tutor at Cooper Union, Nicholas Marsicano, who insisted 'You can't do what Matisse did', but Wesselmann could learn from him.[8]

In 1961 *Esquire* magazine printed a copy of Wesselmann's *Great American Nude #6* (Fig. 2.1), which was described as 'a rippling nude à la Matisse' albeit with the inclusion of 'kitschy clippings' taken from magazines.[9] It is easy to see why the

[5]Oral history interview with Tom Wesselmann, 1984 January 3-February 8, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Conducted by Irving Sandler.
[6] Jean-Claude Lebensztejn, 'Eight Statements on Henri Matisse', *Art in America*, 63: 4 (July/August 1975), p.70.
[7] John Rublowsky (1965), p.32.
[8]Oral History Interview (1984), n. p.
[9] 'A Search for the Vanishing Lady', *Esquire*, (July 1962), p. 46. The front cover of the edition had no illustration but simply comprised the text 'The American Woman: A New Point of View'.

comparison was made on this occasion as the figure's pose resembles Matisse's *Blue Nude (Souvenir of Biskra)* (1907). In the same year, a review of his exhibition at the Tanager Gallery also saw Wesselmann's figures referred to as 'if anything, rather Matissey' although there were no further reasons given for the comparison.[10]

For a period during 1961 Wesselmann produced a number of *Great American Nudes* which appeared more influenced by Marsicano than by anything created by Matisse, although it has remained the latter with whom comparisons have been made. These figures were increasingly devoid of detail, appearing as amorphous, flesh-coloured masses contained within strong outlines. Writing as Slim Stealingworth, the artist paid tribute to this teacher, stating, 'Marsicano was instrumental in introducing him to higher levels of painting, levels more abstract and sometimes incomprehensible, but which raised his consciousness'.[11] Marsicano's emphasis on the importance of drawing and the direction he gave to his student to 'find your own way of doing everything' remained with Wesselmann throughout his career.[12]

Noting how Marsicano 'caught his figures in a heavy, dark line', Wesselmann described doing similar with his *Great American Nude #12* (Fig. 2.2). Wesselmann explained that the painting was the first of his 'pink shape nudes' and he created it by 'draw(ing) the figure very roughly with this wide red line, then paint(ing) the completely blank skin over part of it, leaving only part as a strong line and part as a barely sensed line.'[13] His preceding *Great American Nude* also saw him

[10] Wesselmann Estate, New York, uncatalogued. The clipping was included amongst a number of magazines and newspapers articles referring to exhibitions taking place in New York during November and December 1961. The original source is unclear but the reviewer is identified as 'VR'. It is most likely that this can be attributed to Vivien Raynor, who supplied gallery reviews for *Arts Magazine* during this time.
[11] Stealingworth (1980), pp. 12-13.
[12] Oral History Interview (1984), n. p.
[13] Stealingworth (1980), p.24.

adopting a similar approach and it is with these paintings that Wesselmann can be already seen to break away from Matisse's influence. Whilst the first ten *Great American Nudes* owe something to Matisse's female figures within interiors, the next fourteen share much more in common with Marsicano. Indeed, examining *Great American Nudes #11* (1961) through *#25* (1962), sees the figure depicted, to a greater or lesser degree, as a pink shape which invokes the presence of the female nude, rather than being a depiction of it.

Looking at Marsicano's approach to painting indicates that there were other elements of his working practice which may have impacted Wesselmann. Dore Ashton described Marsicano's nudes as 'not dwelling on anatomical detail, but nevertheless emphatically suggesting the physical presence of bodies.'[14] The invocation of the human form through minimal detail was also something with which Wesselmann experimented. Even when he developed his own reductive, graphic way of describing the female figure he retained scant detail, whilst still emphasising the body's sexual characteristics. For Wesselmann, who was initially attracted to abstract expressionism before finding himself more suited to figurative work, Marsicano's paintings bridged the gap between the two and both artists maintained an interest in painting the female nude throughout their respective careers. In 1961, Marsicano's *Women of the Green Ways* (1960) (Fig. 2.3) was included in the Whitney Museum of American Art's annual exhibition of contemporary American painting. The following year Marsicano and Wesselmann were both included in the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition *Recent Painting USA: The Figure* which saw the former exhibit a painting entitled *Daydream* (1961) (Fig. 2.4) and the latter showing *Great American Nude #11* (1961) (Fig. 2.5).

[14] Dore Ashton, 'Art: The Human Figure', *New York Times*, 22 October 1957, p. 30.

In a 1974 New York Public Radio interview Marsicano discussed his relationship to the painted nude. The artist stated, 'I can't imagine what anyone would have to say about such an exposed situation as the nude concept of the figure. In that sense you've really got to do it and take your filthy hands out, is the way I put it.'[15] He was aware that painting the female figure could prove problematic and conceded that the nude was a 'ticklish subject', which it certainly had become in the early seventies, before acknowledging that he could 'understand the extent to which a man *might* dwell upon it and take it off into his own, let's say, needs or desires.'[16] However Marsicano remained adamant that if the viewer chose to perceive his nudes in a sexual way it was due to their own proclivities and not as a result of the way he depicted them. 'In other words', Marsicano continued when considering how his nudes might provoke a sexual response, 'if (the viewer) is going to do that he has got to do that within the world that I create in my painting, he's not going to take her outside of that world into his world, and I'm very conscious of that.'[17] The extent to which Marsicano's art influenced his student remains largely unexplored, but teaching Wesselmann that he could break free from the traditions of European painting and produce work which was more pertinent to his own situation as a young American artist had an unmistakable impact.

A connection between Wesselmann and Matisse has remained a prominent part of much of the existing scholarship. 'For Wesselmann,' David McCarthy wrote, 'the attraction to Matisse was both formal and thematic. He responded to Matisse's use of color, line, and shape, while also finding a useful source for placing a female

[15] Ruth Gurin Bowman, *Views on Art*, 10 April 1973. Gurin Bowman interviewed Nicholas Marsicano as part of her series on WNYC Radio. This is now part the NYPR Archive Collections. WNYC archives id 8859 available at https://www.wnyc.org/story/nicholas-marsicano/. Accessed 12 October 2022.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.

nude within a richly decorated, domestic interior.'[18] Yet I would argue that, as Wesselmann moved away from using collage, his use of colour, line and shape had less in common with Matisse.

In 1959, Wesselmann produced the collage, *After Matisse* (Fig. 2.6) in which he reinterpreted Matisse's *Artist and Model* (1919) (Fig. 2.7) in more abstract terms as an exploration of simplified forms rendered in cut out paper and pastels. He continued to pay homage to Matisse throughout his career, including reproductions of the Frenchman's work as part of the interior décor inhabited by his *Great American Nudes*. For example, *Great American Nude #26* (1962) (Fig. 2.8) sprawls beneath a copy of Matisse's *Romanian Blouse* (1940). Even though Wesselmann incorporated images by other artists into his *Great American Nudes*, including Leonardo, Modigliani and Van Gogh, the focus on Matisse's influence dominates discussions of Wesselmann's artistic development.

Magazines such as *House and Garden* set precedents for discussing how artworks added to a room's décor, something which might have influenced Wesselmann's choice of adding well-known paintings to his interiors. In 1952, an article appeared which looked at the home of New York investment banker and art collector, Donald Stralem. The article included a photograph of the living room, in which Matisse's painting *The Hindu Pose* (1923) was hung. Beneath the photograph was a description of the room which concluded that 'Lime green and mauve cushions pick up the tones of the Matisse odalisque on the wall above the sofa'.[19] In her analysis of this, Marcia Brennan commented that there was an 'ambivalent use of Matisse's nudes in 1950s visual culture' and made comparisons between what the

[18] David McCarthy, 'Tom Wesselmann and the Americanization of the Nude', *Smithsonian Studies in American Art*, 4:3 (Summer/Autumn 1990), p110.
[19]Marcia Brennan, *Modernism's Masculine Subjects: Matisse: The New York School and Post Painterly Abstraction* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2004), p. 3.

painting depicted and how it operated within the image of the modern interior.[20] Whilst the semi-nakedness of the figure is not mentioned, Brennan noted how the curves of the woman's body are echoed in the form of the painted vase which is positioned alongside her and suggests that there is 'a sense of interwovenness between the alluring presence of the odalisque and the highly stylized patterns of the environment she inhabits'.[21] Similarly, when seen as an object within the photograph of Stralem's living room, Brennan comments on how the 'sublimated eroticism of the seminude odalisque' is subsequently 'blended seamlessly with accompanying representations of haut bourgeois domesticity.'[22] According to Brennan, in doing this *House and Garden* placed the viewer in a 'socially elevated aesthetic *and* libidinal field' which alluded to the erotic aspects of the painting whilst placing them within the realm of high-art visual pleasure.

Whilst this image showcased Matisse's original work, the magazine also gave examples of how décor could be enhanced by hanging reproductions. In their March 1953 edition *House and Garden* published as part of the feature *Color is the Key to a Bright New World*. Extolling the delights of using varying tones of mustard in a small dining room, the magazine demonstrated how the overall colour scheme worked in conjunction with other items in the dining room, including the reproduction of Matisse's *The Romanian Blouse*, which 're-emphasize(d) the accent colors in the white of the blouse' and its 'bold black lines'. [23] So, whilst the choice of works that Wesselmann used to decorate the interiors inhabited by his nudes has been discussed in terms of the artist aligning himself with, or paying homage to, his

[20] Brennan (2004), p. 3.
[21] Brennan (2004), p.4.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Richard de Menocal, 'Color is the Key to a Bright New World', in *House and Garden*, 103:3 (March 1953), p.96.

predecessors, there was a precedent for famous paintings being used in contemporary interior decoration. Moreover, Matisse's work appeared to be particularly popular.

Towards the end of his career, Wesselmann returned to incorporating representations of Matisse's work in his own paintings. There was an underlying suggestion that Wesselmann, if not American figure painters in general, had superseded their European forerunners.[24] In 2002 Wesselmann painted *Sunset Nude with Matisse, Romanian Blouse* (Fig. 2.9), which was a somewhat nostalgic reworking of his *Great American Nude* paintings. Yet the Matisse painting no longer appeared as a reproduction that had been added onto the canvas, it had been re-interpreted and painted by Wesselmann in his own style. At this point it becomes even more apparent that, as Wesselmann stated, he 'never felt like copying a Matisse' but he did re-imagine them.[25] Wesselmann's description of these later works as a reassessment of what 'defined him historically as an artist', makes the connection between the two artists even more apparent, but in many respects, this has done the artist himself a disservice.[26] As a result, all-too easy comparisons were made between the two artists based on what appears to be little more than them both painting female figures in interiors. As McCarthy notes, an assessment of the two artists' work clarifies the differences between the two, particularly when it came to erotic content and the way in which Wesselmann's nudes became 'more aggressive in (their) sexual ability'.[27]

---

[24] Andrew Goldstein, 'Reinventing the Nude', *Gagosian Quarterly*, Summer 2017 edition https://gagosian.com/quarterly/2017/05/01/reinventing-nude/ accessed 12 August 2021. Goldstein was in interview with Jeffrey Sturges, Director of Exhibitions at the Wesselmann Estate, and curator Gail Stavitsky.
[25] Oral History Interview (1984), n. p.
[26] Goldstein (2017).
[27] David McCarthy, *The Nude in American Painting 1950 – 1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp.94-95.

The Decorative Image

In 1908 Matisse wrote, 'For me, the subject of a picture and its background have the same value, or, to put it more clearly, there is no principal feature, only the pattern is important.'[28] This is clear in an image such as *Harmony in Red* (1908) (Fig. 2.10) in which the artist creates an overall ornamental effect reinforced by the use of rich colours. Wesselmann achieved similar in his early *Portrait Collages* such as *Portrait Collage #7* (1959) (Fig. 2.11) by using patterned fabric and paper. The overall effect of these images is decorative and this enhances the flatness of the canvas surface, making no attempt at suggesting perspective. In particular, Matisse makes no clear distinction between the tablecloth and the wall, allowing for the same decorative pattern to flow over both areas and give a sense of spatial disorientation.

Wesselmann continued to use collage to represent areas of patterned wallpaper, carpet and bedding, as in *Great American Nude* #14 (1961) (Fig. 2.12) once again sharing with Matisse's work the inclusion of highly decorative, flat areas with an oddly tilted sense of perspective. However, unlike Matisse, Wesselmann maintains more of a distinction between the various areas of the painting and less of a sense of fluidity or spaces merging together. The figure also maintains a separateness from the interior, as a presence which exists within, but remains separate from her setting whilst Matisse often suggests that the female figure is an integral part of its surroundings which is a feature of the interiors' decorative scheme.

Describing his approach to the early collages, Wesselmann said that his aesthetic aim was to create 'a taut, shallow space', to work right up to the edges of the paintings and cram elements 'hard against them' (which was something he had

[28] Henri Matisse, 'Notes of a Painter' (1908) ed. Jack D Flam *Matisse on Art* (New York: Phaidon Press Ltd, 1973 repr. New York: E P Dutton, 1978), p 72.

noticed de Kooning did in his work) and use strong colours, so as to invoke a sense of 'all parts of the painting compet(ing)' rather than working in harmony.[29] At this point, the curving lines he used to draw the nude were often reminiscent of Matisse's way of defining the figure. However, Wesselmann's main interest was the interaction of positive and negative shapes created by the use of 'generously undulating curves' which he believed prevented either the body, or its surrounding area, to dominate the image but resulted in a picture within which 'shapes break free of each other'.[30]

Matisse imbued his odalisques with a sumptuous, decorative appeal which reflected the environments in which they were placed and the costumes they wore. This was inspired by the North African textiles, costumes and objects he collected on his travels which he used to provide carefully staged, theatrical settings in which to place his models, which at times provided an indistinct space which enveloped the figure. In contrast, Wesselmann's early works saw the figure situated within a recognisable interior surrounded by a selection of contemporary consumer objects, which he incorporated into the picture. This resulted in scenes which in some ways was more utilitarian than decorative, a feature which became further emphasised when Wesselmann began to paint the entire canvas and not include collaged cut-outs, as at this point he began to simplify the objects into generic, hard-edged objects. This can be demonstrated by Wesselmann's use of oranges. They first appeared alongside the nude to form part of a still-life, having been cut from magazines. By 1964, they were represented as simplified orange forms with the inclusion of the pedicel – the part where the fruit attaches to its stem. Increasingly,

[29] Stealingworth (1980), p. 18.
[30] Stealingworth (1980), p. 20.

Wesselmann juxtaposed the orange with nude's breasts whilst the pedicel alluded to the nipple, becoming a particular feature of his *Bedroom Paintings* in 1968.

Jack Flam suggested that what impacted the decorativeness of Matisse's work was his attendance at the École des Arts Décoratifs in the 1890s and his possible knowledge of Henry Havard's book *Les arts de l'ameublement – La décoration* first published in Paris in 1900. Flam considers this as imbuing Matisse's work with an innate 'Frenchness' whilst the use of contemporary consumer items instilled Wesselmann's work with a sense of Americanness. Matisse seemed to heed Havard's advice that the decorative artist should not 'provoke an intense emotion… but simply… adorn' which resonates with the painter expressing his own desire to produce 'an art of balance, of purity and serenity, devoid of depressing subject matter' which would have 'a soothing, calming effect on the mind'.[31] Once more, this contrasts with Wesselmann stating that he wished to make elements 'strain against each other' in a way that would make them 'static, locked up tight, unable to breathe' or his later desire to include physical details which he considered as having aggressive formal qualities.[32] Wesselmann seemed intent to use his art to provoke an intense response from the viewer whilst Matisse suggested a desire to invoke an altogether more passive interaction between his painting and the observer, and this is apparent in their respective approaches to the female figure.

Matisse's *Decorative Figure on an Ornamental Ground* (1925) (Fig. 2.13) sees the nude as one of a number of elements which contributes to the overall patterned effect achieved within the painting and she is no more a dominant feature than the carefully painted wallpaper, carpet or potted plant. John Elderfield

[31] Matisse in ed. Flam *Matisse on Art* (1978), p. 21 & p. 38.
[32] Stealingworth (1980), p.17.

suggested that Matisse's use of decoration prevented the viewer from concentrating on any one object as the eye actively moved around the canvas, unable to settle on a single point of focus.[33] Similarly, Barr commented that Matisse's use of overall decorativeness afforded the eye 'no security even in the repetition of ornamental motif.'[34] This appears to support Matisse's assertion that he did not afford the figure any more importance than any of the other items he painted. Yet by affording the naked female body no more importance than the bowl of fruit or plant pot that is situated beside it, he denies the figure any sense of identity or corporeality and reduces its status to that of an object.

If Matisse fused his figures with their painted surroundings, then Wesselmann developed a way of incorporating the nude with its actual environment when he began his 'drop-out' pieces, and in the process, he made the female body virtually invisible. *Seascape #19* (1967) (Fig. 2.14) is typical of his experiments with shaped canvases which often saw the female body represented by little more than a painted nipple. With the outline of the remainder of the breast being indicated by the shaped edge of the canvas, the female body's presence is implied, only becoming apparent when the painting is seen against a wall. Whilst this might appear to share something in common with the way in which Wesselmann, like Marsicano, implied the presence of a body by suggesting its shape, in these works he alludes to a woman's existence whilst depicting minimal details. He called these 'negative shapes'.[35] *Seascape #23* (Fig. 2.15), also produced in 1967, sees the shape of the canvas forming the outline of a breast, the figure's torso, right arm and leg, which is

[33] John Elderfield, *Pleasuring Painting: Matisse's Feminine Representations*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), pp.18-19.
[34] Alfred H. Barr, *Matisse: His Art and His Public* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1959, repr. London: Secker & Warburg, 1975), p. 214.
[35] Stealingworth (1980), p. 53.

configured in such a way that it provides a frame through which the viewer looks to see the painted sea, sky and clouds beyond it. It is this simplified seascape which appears as the subject or focal point, whilst the viewer looks beyond the implied presence of the female nude. Wesselmann described being inspired to produce the drop-outs after laying next to a woman on a beach. Looking across to her, the visual effect caused by the bright sunlight made the flesh appear as though it dropped away whilst the 'sunlit background' remained visible.[36] For Wesselmann, the interplay between what could be seen clearly and what could not, resulted in 'a compelling vividness in evoking the rest of the implied figure' as well as showing the artist's continued interest in the interaction of positive and negative shapes.[37] However, whilst this resulted in a striking visual effect, the entirety of the female body is not only treated as a negative shape, it has all but ceased to exist. Subsequently, there is a stark, hard-edged feel to these images which plays with the absence of the nude and differs from Matisse's method of describing the figure by using the colour and texture of paint to infuse the image, and the body, with a decorative and sensual appeal.

Formalism, Feminism and the Figurative

When Wesselmann and Matisse discussed their art, they both prioritised the work's formal properties over subject matter. Wesselmann wrote, 'I consider myself, now and always, a formalist – less concerned about the image and more concerned about how it is formed.'[38] His wife, Claire, said that this attitude was shared by Wesselmann's contemporaries and noted that 'when pop artists got together, they

[36] Stealingworth (1980), p. 56.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Marco Livingstone, 'Tom Wesselmann, Man of Steel' in ed. Aquin *Beyond Pop* (2012), p. 44

talked about how long it took them to produce the work and not about subject/content.'[39]

Writing in his *Notes of a Painter* in 1908, Matisse pronounced that the aim of composition was expression 'modified accordingly to the surface to be covered'.[40] Matisse explained that 'every part will be visible and will play its appointed role, whether it be principal or secondary' and the overall effect should be one of harmony.[41] When painting a female figure, Matisse described how he would 'condense the meaning of this body by seeking its essential lines' and that whilst he might imbue the figure with 'grace and charm' it was not until it was seen in the context of the whole images that it would have a 'broader meaning, one more fully human.'[42] Although he placed emphasis on understanding the underlying structure of the body when drawing from the model, Matisse said that he found himself unable to undertake a *copy* of a woman. Instead, his work was 'tempered by demands of atmosphere, harmony of the background and model, and unity in the sculptural quality of the model.'[43] Matisse described how 'The entire arrangement of my picture is expressive: the place occupied by the figures, the empty spaces around them, the proportions, all of that has its share.'[44]

In a manner which echoed Matisse's creative approach, Wesselmann described himself as seeking an aesthetic which 'could develop out of the whole picture, with no aspect of the painting dominating'[45] Looking to fully utilise 'all the

[39] Danielle Stephens in conversation with Claire Wesselmann and Jeffrey Sturges at the Denver Art Museum, 9 July 2014. Electronic copy of the interview provided by Danielle St Peter on behalf of the Denver Art Museum after permission was obtained from the Wesselmann Estate, 1 December 2016.
[40] Matisse in ed. Flam, *Matisse on Art* (1978), p.36.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43]Sarah Stein, 'Sarah Stein's Notes, 1908' in ed. Jack D Flam *Matisse on Art* (1978), p. 45. Stein studied at Matisse's school of art in 1908 and also helped with its organisation, taking extensive notes of his advice to students.
[44] Matisse in ed. Flam (1978), p.36.
[45] Stealingworth (1980), p. 17.

components of a painting', Wesselmann aimed to 'realiz(e) the visual intensity of the elements while at the same time keeping some sense of the realness of the situation depicted', and it cannot be ignored that a large part of that reality was the figure's increasing eroticism.[46] When Wesselmann moved to painting the whole canvas in simplified areas of flat, bright colour, all of the components were rendered in a pristine, plastic, artificial manner, whether it was skin, orange peel, flowers or telephones and the non-corporeality of flesh became a noticeable feature. Whilst this further added to the effect of no one area of the canvas appearing to dominate the other, it is impossible not to single out body parts, particularly the breasts which often dominated the *Bedroom Paintings* or the genitals displayed by a spread-legged nude, not because of how they were executed but simply because of what they were.

As his images grew larger, Wesselmann admitted that he 'became more interested in the erotic aspects of the nude' yet he continued to discuss this in terms of it being a tangible, formal element.[47] He claimed that his use of erotically charged features made his work both 'aggressive' and 'visually compelling' and described how painting his early nudes, such as *Great American Nude #2* (1961) (Fig. 2.16), with 'shaved vaginas' helped him to achieve the same 'vividness and immediacy as a strong red' might produce.[48] Yet there is something problematic about considering the depiction of women's sexual characteristics as being inherently aggressive as well as attempting to couch this in the language of faux-formalism. Once again, whilst Wesselmann intimated that the resulting impact was somehow a result of his formalist preoccupation, the shock this might elicit in the viewer would more likely be due to the reality of what was being depicted. It was not merely that Wesselmann showed parts of the female body which society characterised as taboo, it was the way

[46] Stealingworth (1980), p. 17
[47] Stealingworth (1980), p. 23
[48] Ibid.

in which Wesselmann had the figure display this part of the body specifically for the viewer's gaze. Even so, when questioned about the sexual aspect of his art, Wesselmann countered; 'It was not the point of the work, because my work has always been more formal, more composed, than to be that involved with making something erotic.'[49] However, this does not mean that composition negates any sense of eroticism, but that Wesselmann used one to emphasise the other.

It is true to say that when Wesselmann emerged onto the New York art scene, formalism was still the dominant form of American art criticism, with Clement Greenberg being its most prominent advocate. With formalist critique evaluating an artwork's physical qualities rather than its 'ideational content', it has been suggested that this mode of discussion reflected a desire for both artists and critics to be seen as 'protectors and upholders of high aesthetic standards.'[50] When Greenberg wrote about the Modernist painters who were active in the early twentieth century, he suggested that, like God, they sought to produce something which was 'valid solely on its own terms', which is to say that they were not copyists but creators of original objects.[51] Greenberg described the most notable exponents of modernism, which included Matisse, as being inspired by 'the medium they worked in' with paintings becoming increasingly abstract experiments in the 'arrangement of spaces, surfaces, shapes, colors etc.' and an emphasis on the flatness of the canvas surface.[52] For Greenberg, such works fulfilled the aesthetic needs of the cultural and intellectual elite, whilst the multitudes would be satisfied by popular, lowbrow offerings such as commercially made and mass produced art. Subsequently, if Greenberg credited

[49] Marco Livingstone, 'Telling It Like It Is' eds. Thomas Buchsteiner and Otto Letze, *Tom Wesselmann* (Ostfildern: Cantz, 1996), p.12.
[50] Deniz Tekiner, 'Formalist Art Criticism and the Politics of Meaning' in *Social Justice*, 33:2 (2006), p. 31.
[51] Clement Greenberg, 'Avant Garde and Kitsch' in *Partisan Review, 6:5* (1939), p. 36.
[52]Greenberg (1939), p. 37

Abstract Expressionism as representing the very best that American art could offer, then Pop, with its easily recognisable references to those banal objects which could be seen in everyday life, was the worst.

Despite Wesselmann identifying himself as a formalist, his artistic intentions seem at odds with the Greenbergian definition of formalism and its purity of aesthetic values. Certainly, Wesselmann explored numerous techniques and materials throughout his career, yet he did so in order to present his most widely used motif – the female nude – in a variety of mediums, including some which were used in the manufacturing of advertising signage, such as moulded plastic. This was not an investigation of the intrinsic properties of the chosen medium for its own artistic ends, but as a way to further enhance the commercialisation of the female body. Even though Wesselmann described using positive and negative shapes for visual impact or positioned elements in a way that constricted space, there is more of a sense that these were general compositional decisions relating directly to the display of the nude for maximum impact. Furthermore, Wesselmann's reliance on what might be discerned as artistic 'technical' jargon, or the 'how' of making the art object, might be seen as a deliberate attempt to detract from the 'what' of the image. This was not just in terms of the erotic content but Wesselmann's assertion that his art was not impacted by what was happening elsewhere within contemporary society or any of the cultural or political debates occurring therein.

Deniz Tekiner describes how the removal of any social or political context from an artwork certified 'the worthiness of art objects for markets' as well as 'facilitating processes of the reception of artworks as commodities.'[53] Tekiner identified the move away from formalist art criticism which occurred towards the

[53] Tekiner (2006), p. 31.

end of the 1960s as being a product of the prevailing social and political environment. Arguing that art should not be seen as 'hermetic', Tekiner subsequently observed that it should be 'openly responsive to the historical situation' and that critical analyses 'should take into account the historical context in which art is created.'[54] Indeed, Barbara Rose's article *The Politics of Art, Part I* (1968), saw the writer describing an art criticism which relied upon 'exclusively formal issues to be 'obnoxious' due to it 'purg(ing) art of all social and political meaning'.[55] Whilst a formalist approach had served a purpose in the discussion of non-figurative art, when it came to looking at works which referenced an identifiable reality or objects, such as the female body, it becomes more difficult to discuss them without acknowledging image content or relating it to actual experience. Indeed, the politicisation of women's bodies which became debated in the late sixties and early seventies, meant that it would be increasingly challenging to expect the viewer to ignore how it was being portrayed within popular culture or by fine artists, and particularly when the latter were reflecting the former, and not to attach some social significance to it.

When it comes to discussions of art and formalist critiques, Greenberg's influence cannot be overstated. In 1947, Greenberg claimed that Matisse was the greatest painter of the time, and he is credited with doing much to affect the artist's popularity in the United States. As part of *The Pocket Library of Great Art* series, Greenberg produced a compact book on Matisse in 1953.[56] Wesselmann owned a copy of the publication, even including a part of it in his collage *Little Still Life #32* (Fig. 2.17a & 2.17b) (1964). The book included a limited selection of the

[54] Tekiner (2006), p. 39.
[55] Barbara Rose, The Politics of Art, Part I' in *Artforum*, 6:6 (1968), p. 32.
[56] Clement Greenberg, *Matisse* (New York: Harry N Abrams, Inc. in association with Pocket Books, Inc., 1953).

Frenchman's work and Greenberg provided the accompanying text including brief descriptions of the artworks which pointed out pictorial elements such as line, colour, application of paint and how their arrangement on the canvas helped the artist to achieve overall visual unity. Two years earlier, Alfred Barr had published a more detailed monograph, *Matisse: His Art and His Public*, in which he favoured a similar method of describing the artworks. A comparison of how Greenberg and Barr discussed Matisse's paintings of women, and particularly the odalisques, illustrates how they both used the language of formalism to allude to characteristics of the female body often by imbuing line, shape, colour or painterly technique with physical or erotic characteristics which might be used to describe the female body itself.

Barr believed that the success of Matisse's Moroccan-inspired images was attributable to the artist capturing a certain traditionalism and charm. His description of *The Hindu Pose* (1923) sees him reflecting on the artist's 'daring… composition and color', whilst pointing out that the figure was 'less voluptuous' than the artist's other painted nudes. It is difficult to know whether he is referring to the figure's physical characteristics or elements pertaining to how the painting has been carried out.[57] In his account of *Odalisque with Magnolias* (1924) (Fig. 2.18) Barr's discussion of colour and the use of space, diverts the viewer's attention away from image content. Yet whilst Barr was aware of which elements of the painting might have conveyed 'explicit eroticism' he counters this by describing how it is subsequently 'diffused into a luxurious, generalized sensuality, intimate yet objective'.[58] Whilst the descriptive language evokes a sense of the image's appeal to the senses, it also indicates the sensuality and erotic allure of the figure itself. Barr

[57] Barr (1975), p.211.
[58] Barr (1975), p.212.

was quick to reinforce how Matisse remained suitably 'detached' when faced with a live model, explaining that the artist 'has affirmed that before the most voluptuous models his attitude is no different from what it is before a plant, a vase or some other object' and once again the rhetoric of formalism minimises the possibility that the artist might be interested in the naked female body beyond rendering it in paint on canvas..[59]

Greenberg's more populist account of Matisse's work sees the critic accusing the artist of occasionally 'condescending' to eroticism, something which the critic obviously feels should not drive the painter's purpose, but reinforces that it still should *not* detract from the 'frequent loftiness of the results'.[60] Discussing *The Artist and His Model* (1919), the same image that Wesselmann reinterpreted early in his career, Greenberg described Matisse as a 'connoisseur of feminine flesh', although notably, he did not make the distinction between a woman's actual skin and its reproduction in paint.[61] As with Barr before him, Greenberg pointed out that the artist's approach to the female figure was one of detachment which allowed him to 'view the female body as a consumer's article'.[62] However, when Matisse produced *Tabac Royal* (1943) which featured a clothed figure, Greenberg commented that the 'picture is uneasy, unreconciled with itself' and that this was evident in the way that the artist had continued 'treating the human model as but one more in a collection of inert objects.'.[63] This comment appears slightly contradictory as Greenberg had previously commended Matisse for giving his figures no more status than any of the other painted elements.

[59] Barr (1975), p. 211.
[60] Greenberg (1953), n. p. This appears in the introductory essay on the fifth page of text.
[61] Greenberg, (1953), n. p., text accompanies plate 20.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Greenberg (1953), n. p., text accompanies plate 25.

It appears that whilst a formalist critique continued to focus the attention away from erotic content, it conveniently provided a language to discuss the sexualisation of the body, albeit in a veiled manner. In 1962, and in his capacity as Director of Museum Collections at the Museum of Modern Art, Barr wrote the introduction to the catalogue which accompanied the exhibition *Recent Painting USA: The Figure* which included Wesselmann's Great American Nude #2 (1961). In it, Barr claimed that an element of traditionalism had returned to contemporary art in the guise of figurative painting. Accepting that the 'latent content' could be seen as problematic due to it being likely to lead to artists including some sort of 'personal symbolism', Barr questioned 'whether a painting in the 1960s can or cannot, should or should not, live by paint alone', and indicated that formalism may have outlived its purpose as the most relevant way of critiquing art.[64]

Writing a review of the *New Realists* exhibition in the *New York Times* in 1962, Brian O'Doherty commented that the work being produced by these artists illustrated that 'subject matter cannot be unconsidered' and that they were increasingly dealing with 'the petty coinage of our daily lives', which included the female body.[65] O'Doherty accused Wesselmann of expecting viewers 'to perform a highly interesting trick' when the artist complained that he wanted his work to be considered in terms of 'the forms of transposed banality, but not their content' and further questioned how reasonable it was to suggest that the primary objective of these works was that they should be judged by their 'esthetic aspect'.[66] O'Doherty

[64] Museum of Modern Art, New York, press release no 61, Wednesday, 23 May 1962.
[65] Brian O'Doherty, ''Pop' Show by Tom Wesselmann is Revisited', *New York Times,* 28 November 1962, p. 36.
[66] O'Doherty (1962), p 36.

was disparaging of Wesselmann and any other artist who believed that 'the critic should play the game by their mysterious rules, not by the rules his eye tells him.' [67]

Wesselmann presented as an artist who was largely unwilling to discuss his work in terms of image content or subject matter, despite disliking it if an interpretation was suggested with which he disagreed. Correspondence received by the artist shows that there were numerous requests from schools, students, universities and publishers inviting him to shed light on his work. In March 1968 Constance M Perkins, professor of art at Occidental College in Los Angeles contacted Wesselmann regarding him being included in an exhibition that she was organising for the Smithsonian Institute, *The New Vein: The Human Figure 1963-1968*. Whilst Wesselmann's *Great American Nude #60* (1965) and *Seascape #6* (1965) featured in the exhibition, at the point in the letter where Perkins asked for a 'statement for the catalogue which will provide insight into the interpretation of your work, your philosophy or your present involvement' he wrote 'no' next to it.[68]

Formalist critiques focused attention on the way in which a work of art had been created rather than providing narratives which interpreted subject matter. However, when it came to the eroticism inherent in the female nude, this was often subtly alluded to within the descriptions of line, colour or handling of paint. For instance, writing in the New York Times in April 1970, Peter Schjeldahl described the voluptuousness of Wesselmann's figures and the artist's use of 'sensuous' lines whilst describing 'every curve and color' as being 'made virtually to vibrate with exaggerated sensuality,' a 'trick' which Schjeldahl concluded the artist had learned from Matisse.[69]

---

[67] O'Doherty (1962), p.36.
[68] Letter from Constance M Perkins, Professor of Art, Occidental College, Los Angeles to Tom Wesselmann. Wesselmann Estate, New York, uncatalogued.
[69] Peter Schjeldahl, 'Pop Goes the Playmate's Sister', *New York Times*, 19 April 1970, p. 109.

Writing about the way in which art criticism 'has systematically reinforced the attitudes towards the female body and aesthetics that dominate patriarchy', Lynda Nead examined how metaphor has often been used as a descriptive feature.[70] As Nead demonstrates, 'art criticism writes sex into descriptions of paint, surface and forms' which adhered to socially constructed notions of the erotic female.[71] Descriptions, such as 'light caresses form, shapes become voluptuous and colour is sensuous' may well indicate something of the aesthetic effect of a painting, but it is also full of sexual connotations.[72] According to Nead, this way of writing about art establishes a power dynamic in which the male gaze is both aestheticised and intellectualised and affords the opportunity for the viewer's eye to freely 'wander over the forms of the female body in the image, exacting judgements that play out a sexualized narrative without disturbing corporeal integrity' and this has remained the case with discussions of Wesselmann's work.[73]

During the early 1960s, there is evidence that some female critics were unhappy with the way that Wesselmann treated the painted nude and these concerns were not dependent upon whether the writer assumed a pro- or anti-Pop stance. As early as 1961, Natalie Edgar wrote a short review of the *Great American Nudes* on show at the Tanager Gallery, which at this point were nowhere near as sexualised as the later pieces, in which she described one of the figures being 'curtailed and sliced by the frame so that the body loses its identity and turns into a piece of meat'.[74]

In Barbara Rose's 1965 article *Filthy Pictures*, which appeared in *Artforum*, she wrote about 'perverse eroticism', something which she believed was inherent in

[70] Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity & Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.58.
[71] Nead (1992), p. 59.
[72] Nead (1992), p. 56.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Natalie Edgar, 'Tom Wesselmann', *ArtNews*, 60:8, (December 1961), p. 56.

some ‘contemporary attitudes toward the body.’[75] According to Rose, these were nudes which did not induce sexual desire, but resulted in ‘antisexual responses of repugnance or distaste.’[76] Rose wrote that this was particularly the case when ‘flesh was rendered as a material other than flesh’ and the body was treated as ‘an inanimate, inorganic object among objects’ which was stripped of any sense of corporeality – a concept which Wesselmann, like Matisse, had been keen to demonstrate in his work.[77] Noting that this, along with a predilection for explicitness was a feature of Pop, Rose went on to single out Wesselmann for exhibiting ‘a fetishistic obsession with genitalia’ which went ‘beyond the merely frank,’ and she accused the artist of ‘(reducing) the human figure to an objectlike status.’[78] With reference to *Great American Nude #55* (1964) (Fig. 2.19) Rose was particularly critical of Wesselmann for ‘failing to differentiate between the appliquéd texture of the leopard-skin couch and the appliquéd pubic hair of the nude reclining on it’ which she felt suggested that the nude’s eroticism was to be seen as animalistic. [79] Rose concluded that unlike Matisse’s ‘luxuriating odalisques, this *Great American Nude* was ‘a repulsive symbol of a commercialized sexuality’ and accused Wesselmann of making his figure ‘intentionally unappealing’, which she subsequently suggested was a critique of contemporary society.[80] However, Wesselmann’s treatment of the nude’s pubic hair, represented in collage material, was perhaps less shocking than his overall depiction of the female genital area. It was not just the mass of hair which represented the corporeal reality of an adult

[75] Barbara Rose, ‘Filthy Pictures: Some Chapters in the History of Taste’, ed. Barbara Rose, *Autocritique: Essays on Art and Anti-art, 1963-1987* (New York: Weidenfield & Nicolson, 1988), p. 21 (first publ. in *Artforum*, May 1965).
[76] Rose (1988), p.21.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Rose (1988), p.24.
[79] Rose (1965), p.24.
[80] Ibid.

woman, it was the suggestion of what lay within it that was even more surprising. Wesselmann was not only subverting the traditional idealisations of the female nude, which had dominated the artistic genre, he was providing images of women's bodies which were far more explicit than anything that could be seen in contemporary girlie magazines.

Rose was neither anti-Wesselmann nor pro-feminist, this being an era which predated the emergence of a feminist art history, and she recognised that 'confusions about the nature of eroticism, sexuality, perversion, pornography, and obscenity may be an inevitable stage in the evolution of less puritanical attitude toward the body'.[81] As such, Rose was not averse to eroticism in art, but she was aware that what might follow might be a 'strange abuse' of the body which reflected 'the collective fantasies of a sexually obsessed American society' – a society which she concluded had become 'so erotically charged that sexuality seems to invest the commonest objects from automobiles to vacuum cleaners', which was certainly the case with contemporary advertising.[82]

In 1967, Lucy Lippard published the article *Eros Presumptive*. Commenting on the *Erotic Art Show* which took place in New York that year, she noted how it had attracted a non-art crowd. Lippard bemoaned the fact that the 'mere representation of genitalia, breasts, thighs, sado-masochistic paraphernalia, new positions, have little erotic or even pornographic force in an era of topless nightclubs and girlie advertising' but had proven appealing to an audience who were perhaps looking for titillation.[83] Unimpressed by the lack of genuine erotica, Lippard argued that 'Figurative art is at a great disadvantage in the erotic arena when TV commercials, lascivious girdle ads, Hollywood movies, girlie and nudist and fetish

[81] Rose (1965) p.26.
[82] Rose (1965) p. 24.
[83] Lucy Lippard, 'Eros Presumptive' in *The Hudson Review*, 20:1 (Spring 1967), p.91.

magazines are available to any American with a couple of dollars in his pocket.'[84] It was Lippard's opinion that 'life has literally outstripped art' and subsequently, for art to differentiate itself from what was already on view within American society, it had decided to shock.[85]

With reference to Wesselmann exhibiting *Seascape #17 (Two Tits)* (1966), Lippard described the image as 'cooly anti-sensuous' and exhibiting the 'esthetics of nastiness', which she believed was 'typical of a certain perversity'.[86] She identified such aesthetics as comprising 'dissonant color, tasteless garish patterns, wild combinations of visceral form and tactile effects which Lippard considered 'offensive'.[87] However, what Lippard objected to the most was the way in which Wesselmann had focused exclusively on the breasts. She branded such images as typical of the sort of art which was being produced to attract a non-art crowd which was more interested in voyeurism than art itself.

Whilst Rose and Lippard found Wesselmann's treatment of the female body problematic, they did not launch any more specific attacks on his work. Other female critics and art historians, such as Constance Glenn, were highly supportive of Wesselmann's nudes. Glenn recalled feeling no need to apologise for 'endorsing the male gaze' and described the 'cavorting Wesselmann babes' which adorned the walls of her family home as neither explicit nor confrontational, but simply of their

[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid. The reference to the 'esthetics of nastiness' appears to relate to Kurt von Meier's discussion of the art which was being produced in America's West Coast. In a public lecture entitled *The 'Funk' Esthetics of Nastiness* given at the Pasadena Art Museum, von Meier noted that the notion of 'funk' in art was a 'difficult notion to verbalize… but it suggests a certain mean, strange quality, often sexually suggestive, something dirty or nasty.' The quote was included in an article by Ray Duncan who reported on the lecture for *The Los Angeles Times*. The newspaper cutting which appears on the website https://www.kurtvonmeier.com/ (accessed 23 February 2022) is not dated, but von Meier gave these public lectures whilst lecturing at UCLA between 1966 – 1967. In 1965, he published an article *Funksville: The West Coast Scene* with Carl Belz in *Art and Australia*, 11:8, December 1965. Subsequently I would suggest that the article is from 1966. *The LA Times* article linked together funk-art, along with junk-art and pop-art and concluded with a quote from von Meier 'suggest(ing) that there may be art all around us, and if we open our eyes we'll have a lot more fun.'
[87] Lippard (1967), p.97.

time.[88] Glenn explained, 'It was precisely the art, hardly the subject matter, we all championed', a comment which supports Wesselmann's formalist intentions and possibly illustrates Tekiner's assertion that drawing attention away from what was depicted within a painting could be beneficial for the art market.[89] In Glenn's opinion, Wesselmann was continuing the tradition of 'beautifully painted women… through his view of the thoroughly modern woman of the post-war American scene' and she did not believe that his work objectified the female body.[90] Yet Glenn's comment not only endorsed the unquestioning acceptance of an imposed male gaze as being the established mode for contemplating art, it also equated Wesselmann's contemporary, pop art style with representations of modern femininity, failing to separate how the painting looked from what it was depicting.

In 2012, Nathalie Bondil referred to Wesselmann's nudes as 'goddesses of love' and 'bombshells' who were celebrating their own sexuality and '(confounding) puritanical and feminist critique'.[91] Assuming a vocabulary full of masculine hyperbole, Bondil suggested that debates concerning the male gaze and objectification were outdated as attitudes had moved on since the 1960s.[92] Whilst acknowledging that even 'a formal approach cannot sap the strength from the subject', Bondil subsequently suggested that Wesselmann's subject matter was not simply the nude, but the history of art.[93] As such, Bondil reminded the viewer that art was littered with 'licentious' and shocking images which have subsequently become standards of female beauty'. [94] Bondil's argument fails to acknowledge or

[88] Constance Glenn, 'Nudes in Perspective', in ed. Aquin *Beyond Pop* (2012), p. 26.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Nathalie Bondil, 'Tom Wesselmann's Bombshells: An Art Named Desire', in ed. Aquin *Beyond Pop* (2012), p. 16.
[92] Bondil (2012), p.17.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.

engage with the ease with which the continued sexualisation of the female body has become normalised, and allowed for a male idealisation of feminine beauty to be constructed and imposed onto women. Bondil continued by suggesting that Wesselmann had a far more honest approach to the way he presented the female body as a sexual object than preceding artists who had 'draped (it) in mythology for the benefit of male voyeurism'.[95] It is true that by this point in history the naked female body no longer needed to be given a mythological disguise in order to be portrayed as a creature of heterosexual male desire. Bringing the erotic into the everyday, domestic environment afforded the artist a certain amount of authenticity, but it also demonstrated the extent to which *all* women's bodies were subjected to the male gaze.

In her essay *Virility and Domination in Early 20th Century Vanguard Painting* (1973), Carol Duncan explored how young, European *avant garde* artists used the painted female body as a way of asserting their own 'virile, vigorous and uninhibited sexual appetite(s)' by depicting women as subjugated and powerless.[96] Duncan posited that this characterised a particular 'situation of the middle-class male struggling against the strictures of modern, bourgeois society'.[97] Whilst looking at the work of artists including Kirchner, Munch, Picasso and Matisse, Duncan noted how they expressed sexual dominance by the use of certain techniques and the treatment of specific features. Noting how artists paid particular attention to breasts and buttocks, often by having their models adopt contorted poses, Duncan also identified how less attention was paid to the figure's extremities than the torso and that garish colours were often used for emphasis. In doing so, Duncan suggested the

[95] Ibid.
[96] Carol Duncan, 'Virility and Domination in Early 20th Century Vanguard Painting' in eds. Norma Broude and Mary D Garrard, *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany* (New York: Routledge, 1982), p. 293 (first publ. in *Artforum*, 12:4, December 1973, pp. 30-39).
[97] Duncan (1982), p. 295.

artist's desire to 'filter out everything irrelevant to the most basic genital urge'.[98] Wesselmann's description of minimising the body's details so as not to 'interfere with the bluntness of the *fact* of the nude' and including only those features that were 'important to erotic simplification', resonates with the way of approaching the female body that Duncan identified.[99] Wesselmann frequently had the model's arms and legs extending beyond the canvas and increasingly focused on the body's sexual characteristics, with nipples painted in bright pink and lips highlighted in vivid reds.

When it came to Matisse, Duncan noted that the works he produced pre-WWI were less obvious in their 'assertion of virility' than some of his contemporaries. Unlike the other artists she examined, Duncan identified Matisse's 'sublimated' figures as metamorphosing 'into a demonstration of artistic control'.[100] By comparison, his post war paintings, and particularly the odalisques, went further; it was not simply that Matisse was asserting male virility or even artistic control onto the body of the nude – he was implying colonial subjugation. Whilst it was not unusual for national identity to be represented by allegorical female figures, often in varying states of undress, Matisse's odalisques had far more problematic undertones as he used the sexualised body to portray political power and domination. I will explore this, and how Wesselmann used the sexual female body as a symbol of national identity later in this chapter.

Revealing, Concealing and Visual Metaphor

Wesselmann and Matisse used various pictorial devices in order to heighten their work's eroticism, whilst supposedly favouring a detached attitude towards the naked figure. As McCarthy discusses with reference to *Great American Nude #4* (Fig.

[98] Duncan (1982) p. 296.
[99] Stealingworth (1980), p. 24.
[100] Duncan (1982), p. 301.

2.20), Wesselmann makes the figure 'visually dynamic in her splayed availability' as the reclining nude's limbs stretch across the picture plane.[101] Whilst the figure's slightly twisted body suggests a diagonal movement from the lower left towards the upper right of the image, a horizontal line can be drawn from roughly the elbow of the left arm and along to the knee of the right leg, which is approximately at the image's half-way point. Along this axis, and in the middle of the painting, is the figure's shaved pubic area. Even if the eye travels along the upward thrust of the left leg and away from this area, the bend at the knee, redirects the viewer back towards the genitals.

Similar is evident in *Great American Nude #6* (1961) in which the body is twisted in a way which emphasises the figure's left buttock which is roughly positioned at the centre of the image. Also, by extending the body beyond the outer edges of the image, Wesselmann brings the viewer closer to the naked figure, and in particular, its torso. In *Great American Nude #34* (1962) (Fig. 2.21) the standing figure's breasts are situated at the image's centre, and as the nude has no eyes, these seem to take their place and engage with the viewer's gaze.

The objects which Wesselmann included alongside his nudes worked to either emphasise the nude's physical characteristics or suggest a narrative. A packet of cigarettes and a man's hat placed on a bedside table indicated a possible male presence whilst oranges echoed the shape of the figure's breasts. Wesselmann also appeared to make visual puns, something which has been attributed to an early desire to be a gag cartoonist.[102] Yet whilst Wesselmann told Sandler that it was 'easy to

[101] McCarthy (1990), p113.
[102] David McCarthy referred to Wesselmann's cartoons, some of which were published in magazines, as not leaving a 'noticeable trace' on his nudes, but that his use of the title for his *Great American Nudes* demonstrated his 'interest in humor'. McCarthy noted that the critic Brian O'Doherty 'responded to the implicit humor of the title' when he described Wesselmann's work as 'wildly witty'. McCarthy (1990), p. 106. Michael Lobel's essay 'Another Wesselmann' provides a more in-

make a joke in collage' or juxtapose objects for 'implied humor', he tried to avoid making jokes as it 'would be intrusive to the work if I acknowledged it or even tried to use it.'[103] However, the kitten which appears to stare at the nude reclining in the foreground of *Great American Nude #6,* as well as the inclusion of cats in *Great American Nudes #18, #20, #26, #28* & *#45* may well be a visual pun on the word 'pussy'. The inclusion of a joint of smoked ham next to a pale pink, amorphous nude in *Great American Nude #22* implies that both might be described as 'a piece of meat'. More obvious visual jokes appear in *Great American Nudes #24, #27* and *#55* (1965) in which single or double mounds of a cherry-topped desert mimic the figures' breasts and nipples.

Wesselmann praised the gag cartoonist Sam Cobean, who he called his 'idol'.[104] Cobean's work appeared in the *New Yorker* and *Saturday Evening Post* during the 1940s and in 1952 the pocketbook collection of his work *Cobean's Naked Eye* was published. Cobean was recognised for his use of the 'thought bubble' - a visual device to explain what his characters were really thinking. This is illustrated perfectly by the cartoon which appeared on the front cover of *The Naked Eye* (Fig. 2.22) which shows a man and a woman walking towards each other at the beach. The man is looking at the bikini-clad woman, who is unaware of his attention or the thought-bubble above his head which shows him imagining her naked. Cobean emphasises the paler areas of the body which have been covered by the bikini by contrasting them with the darker, tanned areas of skin. This plays with the notion of

---

depth look at the links between the artist's cartoons and paintings. Lobel pointed out numerous 'sight gag(s)' which appeared in Wesselmann's work including the juxtaposition of a skyscraper with two oranges, resembling an erect penis, in *Still Life #30* (1963) or the two stars in *Great American Nude #21* (1961) that bring to mind the 'pasties' that strippers place over their nipples. Michael Lobel, 'Another Wesselmann' in *Tom Wesselmann* (exhibition catalogue, Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York, 21 April – 28 May 2016) (New York: Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 2016), p. 118

[103] Oral History Interview (1984), n. p.

[104] Stealingworth (1980), p.1.

the naked and the clothed and draws specific attention to the breasts and pubic area. Wesselmann started to include tan-lines on his nude figures in 1962, and this feature appears for the first time in *Great American Nude #35*. However, something of its evolution is more apparent when looking at *Great American Nudes #36* (Fig. 1.11) and *#38* (Fig. 1.12), also from 1962. Comparing the two paintings, they operate in the same way as Cobean's figure on the beach with nude *#38* being comparable to the figure in the thought-bubble as Wesselmann changes the white bikini from covering the body to suggesting its imprint left on the naked torso. Blocking out the bikini top and bottom with white paint, Wesselmann added on nipples and pubic hair and the clothed figure becomes naked. As Wesselmann played with the notion of denuding the figure, he placed the viewer in the same role as Cobean's beach voyeur. That the poster Wesselmann used in both pictures was taken from a girlie magazine, as evidenced by the photograph of it on display in the window of an adult bookshop (Fig. 1.9), reinforces the image's original purpose, which was to offer the viewer the opportunity to look at a near-naked woman's body as an erotic spectacle and contemplate what was beneath the barely covered areas.

Wesselmann's use of tan-lines operates as an effective visual device, splitting the body into areas of light and dark skin and emphasising the breasts and genital region. It also alludes to the body as a site of leisure and pleasure, both visual and physical, something which was explored in *Playboy's* June 1962 edition entitled *A Toast to Bikinis*. (Fig. 2.23). Wearing a bikini was the closest that a woman could be seen to being undressed in public and whilst sunbathing allowed her to indulge in an act of personal, physical pleasure, it also positioned her as a passive spectacle to be viewed with impunity. In the image on *Playboy's* cover, the focus is on the sunbathing model's black bikini bottoms. It is clear from her tan that she has

previously sunbathed in a larger pair of bikini bottoms and the smaller ones are positioned on an area of visibly lighter skin. This suggests a gradual uncovering of the model's body, almost like a slow striptease, with the final outcome being a state of complete undress, as Wesselmann's images so clearly depict.

Matisse also used methods which revealed and concealed the female body's sexual characteristics, but he did this in ways which differed greatly from Wesselmann's more obvious ways of exposing the nude. Dressing his models in exotic costumes comprising gauzy materials or fabrics which fell in folds at their crotch, he also suggested what lay beneath the clothing, but did not depict them. In both *Odalisque in Red Culottes* (1921) (Fig. 2.24) and *Odalisque with Magnolias* (1923) (Fig. 2.18) the reclining figures adopt similar poses whereby their diaphanous tops fall open to reveal the woman's breasts. In contrast, the bottom half of the figure remains covered and there is a distinction between the revealed, upper part of the body and the concealed lower part. Both semi-supine figures have their knees bent and legs falling apart. The voluminous harem pants gather in folds at the crotch and form an exaggerated 'v' shape between the figure's legs, suggestive of the folds of the labia beneath. This is more pronounced in *Odalisque in Red Culottes*, whereby the apex of the 'v' created by the fabric points directly to the vagina. Marilyn Lincoln Board also identified this characteristic of Matisse's *odalisques* as the artist using the culottes to create 'contour lines… point(ing) to the concealed entrance (of) the model's body'.[105] With *Odalisque in Red Culottes,* Matisse situates the viewer at the reclining figure's feet and as their eyes are led up the body the first part of the body they encounter are suggested by these folds of fabric prior to the gaze continuing upwards to the uncovered breasts before finally reaching a blank,

[105] Marilyn Lincoln Board, 'Constructing Myths and Ideologies in Matisse's Odalisques', in *Gender,* Issue 5, (Summer 1989), p. 38.

expressionless face. Wesselmann used a similar pose for his explicit painting *Great American Nude #92* (1967) (Fig. 2.25). With the viewer almost placed between the figure's open legs the model's displayed pubic region is positioned at the centre of the composition.

Matisse, like Wesselmann, referenced contemporary, erotic images of women which were in general circulation. He was known to work from photographic magazines, including *L'Humanité feminine*, *Mes modèles* and *L'Étude académique*, all of which presented the female figure as 'an erotic spectacle' even if disguised as instructional or educational.[106] Such publications were described by Patricia Briggs as frequently offering 'photographs of partially dressed women posing as odalisques beside editorial commentary devoted to the sexual mores of women from around the world', and there were occasional articles which argued that 'modern clothing constrained women's bodies…. (and) that woman was more beautiful and chaste when shown nude or lightly or partially covered' – a narrative which seemed directed at the implied male consumers of these magazines.[107] Whilst the journals considered themselves as serving a purpose for artists, offering the nude in a variety of poses, it was clear that this was not the only, or even main reason that they were produced. Serving as the forerunners of girlie magazines, they frequently included non-European women and hinted at them being more sexually available and less prudish than their more restrained French counterparts. In a similar vein, and a particular favourite with French travellers to North Africa, was the colonial postcard. The popular photographs offered a glimpse into a constructed ideal of local women's lifestyles and their bodies were often shown unhindered by their customary dress. Many of the photographs were variants on a theme with breasts often shown as

[106] Patricia Briggs, 'Matisse's Odalisques and the Photographic Académie' in *History of Photography*, 31:40 (January 2008), p. 367.
[107] Briggs (2008), p. 372.

unconstrained by gauzy clothing or completely free from coverings and the figures were not only subjected to a male gaze, they were also exposed to a colonial one. However, if the eroticised, decorative odalisque came to indicate French national identity, Wesselmann characterised America, or at least, its women, as explicitly sexual and brash.

A Nude by Any Other Name - The Problematic Odalisque

Sam Hunter opened his 1994 Wesselmann biography by claiming that the *Great American Nudes* can be seen as a combination of 'the classic odalisque and openly erotic pinup girls.'[108] In 2012 Annabelle Ténèze placed Wesselmann alongside the European painters who she believed 'made the odalisque a manifesto'.[109] Glenn suggested that Wesselmann had 'the odalisques of Titian, Goya, Manet and, most importantly, Matisse' looking over his shoulder when he painted his female nudes.[110] Whilst Livingstone suggested that Wesselmann referenced European genres in order to demonstrate the extent to which he was moving away from these precedents, he indicated that the artist achieved this whilst continuing the tradition of the odalisque.[111] Yet whilst this serves to secure Wesselmann's place within an ongoing art history, and further forge a connection between him and Matisse, who was one of the most well-known exponents of the painted odalisque, the appropriateness of imposing the term onto the American nudes is debatable.

The term 'odalisque' has become interchangeable with the phrase 'female nude' yet this belies the implied colonialism which underpins the word *and* its artistic guise. The etymology of the word identifies it as coming from the Turkish *odalik*, which primarily meant chambermaid or slave, but has also been used to refer

[108] Sam Hunter, *Tom Wesselmann*, (New York: Rizzoli Publishing, 1994), p.5.
[109] Annabelle Ténèze, 'Tom Wesselmann's Challenge: Painting Along with the History of Art', ed. Aquin, *Beyond Pop* (2012), p.17.
[110] Glenn (2012), p.25.
[111] Livingstone at the Zwirner Gallery, 2016.

to the concubines which lived within the polygamous households of sultans. Depictions of odalisques were popular in nineteenth-century France, as is famously the case with Ingres *Turkish Bath* (1852-1859). Such images were European imaginings of the segregated living spaces of the harem or the *hamam* – the Turkish baths which men and women attended separately. Such fictionalised representations of these settings provided an ideal opportunity for artists to paint nudes, and in the case of the *Turkish Bath*, the multiple naked figures in a women-only environment presented an extra frisson of eroticism.

Matisse was clear about why he painted them when he stated, 'I do odalisques in order to do nudes.'[112] Implying that an odalisque provided a realistic example of a woman living within a social environment in a state of undress, he substantiated this by saying 'I know that they exist. I was in Morocco. I have seen them'.[113] However, it is closer to the truth to say that Matisse was aware of odalisques through the images of them constructed for French tourists and that he would never have encountered a semi-nude or naked Algerian or Moroccan woman during his travels. Even though he visited Algiers and Morocco, as Jo Anna Isaak points out, as a wealthy male tourist he would not have gained access to a harem. Instead, Isaak argues that what Matisse would have come across were the mass-produced 'colonial postcards', photographs whose popularity reached its peak in 1930 as a 'celebration of the centennial of the French conquest of Algeria'.[114] The images were as fabricated as the settings Matisse created for his models when he adorned his studio with the highly decorative textiles and items he brought back from his travels. In the publication *The Colonial Harem*, Malek Alloula examines

[112] Flam (1978), p. 59.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Jo Anne Isaak, *Feminism & Contemporary Art: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), p.59.

the postcards of Algerian women which were produced and sold at the beginning of the twentieth century. Images such as those of *Belle Fatma* (Fig. 2.26) included many of the props that Matisse subsequently placed alongside his models in order to create an exotic setting for his models and included, for example, Moorish patterns on brightly coloured fabrics and rugs, *guéridons* (small painted tables) and Ottoman braziers which appealed to his enjoyment of the decorative. This provided as much an idea of how to use items to create a desired interior décor as the use of the artist's own paintings did in editions of *House and Garden*.

Alloula categorised a number of these photographs as 'suberotic', describing them as 'an anthology of breasts' from which emerged 'a sort of half-aesthetic concept: the Moorish bosom.'[115] Identifying three 'variants' of erotic images which were popularised by the colonial postcards, it is interesting to note that none of these portrayed the figure as naked and few of Matisse's odalisques are completely unclothed, unlike Wesselmann's figures. Indeed, it is the use of costume which primarily sees his European models assume a North African identity. The first variant classified by Alloula sees the model's bare breasts covered in see-through fabric and is described as 'artistic'.[116] The second category is labelled 'roguish distraction' and is applied to those pictures in which one or both breasts are freed from the restraints of clothing.[117] Alloula calls the third variant 'display' and in such examples the woman is usually topless.[118] Matisse produced paintings which copied all three categories of display, and if *Hindu Pose* (1923) (Fig. 2.27) is compared with the postcard captioned *Ah! Qu'il fait donc chaud*! (*Oh! Is it ever hot!)* (Fig. 2.28) the similarities are clear, including the necklace falling between the breasts in order to

[115] Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 105.
[116] Alloula (1986), p. 106.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid.

accentuate the sense of physical display and ornamentation. This reinforces the extent to which Matisse's odalisques not only appropriated and eroticised an ideal of the semi-naked North African woman but did so to celebrate French colonialism. As Marilynn Lincoln Board went on to note, it has become increasingly problematic to discuss Matisse's odalisques in '(isolation) from their political and historical surroundings' or to see them only in terms of the artist's 'own formalist statements of intention'.[119] Subsequently, it seems even more inappropriate to bestow this term upon Wesselmann's American nudes at is appears that the artist never referred to his painted figures as odalisques.

According to Jeffrey Sturges, Exhibitions Director for the artist's estate, 'the French-American contrast' between Matisse and Wesselmann is 'significant'.[120] Sturges relates this to Wesselmann branding the works of the European artists who participated in the 1962 *New Realists* exhibition 'too subtle' in comparison to the work of their American counterparts.[121] Certainly, American art had been breaking away from the shadow of its European predecessors since the beginning of the twentieth century when, according to Wanda M Corn, artists sought to find 'a usable past' which would make their art identifiably American.[122] Corn suggested that many of the early twentieth century American modernists were keener to identify a 'usable present', which resulted in Georgia O'Keeffe, Stuart Davis, Arthur Dove and Charles Demuth turning their attention to the physical development of modern New York

[119] Board (1989), p. 23.
[120] Goldstein (2017).
[121] Ibid.
[122] The term 'a usable past' was coined by Van Wyck Brooks in 1918. A literary critic and historian he believed that there were traditions inherent to America's cultural past which could provide inspiration. Joel Pfister in his article 'A Usable American Literature' (*American Literary History*, 20: 3. Summer 2008, pp. 579-588) states that what Brooks advocated was a 'to give modern American artists and critical spirits a sense of solidarity with undervalued (or buried) creative and dissenting authors; to galvanise civic discussion of what America and its "cultural economy was, is, and can be; to engage critic and reader in a self-critical self-historicizing.', p.580).

City with its emerging industrial landscape.[123] Corn pointed out how the use of red, white and blue became a 'concrete' way of representing Americanness which was visible in some of the artists' work and how it often featured in the work of European artists who spent time living in New York, such as Fernand Léger and Albert Gleizes.[124] The use of red, white and blue as a symbol of Americanness is something which Wesselmann recounted as directing his *Great American Nudes*. He described having a dream in 1959 or 1960 which featured the words red, white and blue, and he attributed subsequently incorporating these colours into his work as providing a particularly American context for his paintings.[125] This allusion to the American flag also led to him introducing stars and stripes into his pictures whilst giving his series of works the title *Great American Nude* also alluded to the American Dream and the Great American Novel, the latter of which Wesselmann described as being a 'standard humor topic' at the time.[126]

In an essay written by John William DeForest in 1868 the concept of 'The Great American Novel' was first mooted. According to DeForest if such a work of literary merit were possible, it would capture a 'picture of the ordinary emotions and manners of American existence'.[127] Characterising America as an infant society comprising many provincial areas, DeForest questioned whether a single American identity could be established at that point in time, whilst the country was still developing. By the time Wesselmann created his *Great American Nudes* there was certainly a sense that the country had ascertained that a large part of its cultural identity was as a consumer society. Indeed, in a post-war boom era, the proliferation

[123] Wanda M Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915 – 1935* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1999) p. xv.
[124] Corn (1999), p. xv.
[125] Stealingworth (1980), p. 20.
[126] Ibid.
[127] John William DeForest, 'The Great American Novel' in *The Nation*, 6:132, New York, (9 January 1868), p. 27.

and purchase of American goods was not only a symbol of a democracy, it was virtually a patriotic duty. However, this also incorporated the endorsement of goods through the ever-present and increasingly sexualised idealisation of American domestic femininity which became almost as much a symbol of the country's prosperity and identity as its branded consumer items.

A Return to (Gendered) Order

Writing in 1987, Kenneth E Silver suggested that for Matisse the painted odalisque indicated a 'return to order' by fulfilling 'a public expectation for art' to eschew modernism in favour of something more traditional and altogether more decorative.[128] Silver considers Matisse's development of a more representational way of painting during the 1920s as being a concerted effort to leave behind the abstraction which seemed indicative of pre-war, social unrest. Suggesting that the 'female inactivity' which Matisse captured in his odalisques characterised a period of 'reconstruction', Silver also points out that the small size and decorativeness of these paintings made them more appealing to prospective customers. [129] Indeed, as their inclusion in *House and Garden* went on to demonstrate, the overall decorativeness of Matisse's paintings made them immediately visually pleasing to middle-class collectors who were happy to hang them in their homes. The passive languor of the figures and implied erotic appeal was a secondary effect which might add to the overall ambience of a room.

According to Board, the odalisques exemplified 're-feminised' womanhood after a period when first wave feminism had emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century. 'Despite their exotic veneer' wrote Board, '(Matisse's) paintings clearly participated in the concerted nationwide campaign during the postwar period

[128] Kenneth E Silver, 'Retour l'ordre' in *Art in America*, 75:6, June 1987, p. 111.
[129] Ibid.

to redefine women's place in French culture in domestic terms'. This was equally applicable to the paintings themselves or their use as interior décor. Board also identified a tendency within Matisse's paintings to represent women as 'emblems of leisure and security', something which she noted was also a feature of the work of other artists Léger and Picasso.[130]

In the post-war period of the 1950s and early 1960s, there had been a similar expectation in the US for women to resume a life of domesticity after a period of taking on 'men's' work. In 1963, Betty Friedan noted how the outbreak of war had occurred just prior to the notion of the 'feminine mystique' taking hold – the social expectation that women were truly fulfilled by becoming wives, mother and home-makers, irrespective of their educational achievements or dreams of ever having a career. Friedan commented that whilst women had filled the 'male' roles during the war, any who wished to continue in a similar vein after its cessation 'were confronted with that polite but impenetrable curtain of hostility', which meant that 'women went home again'.[131]

The implementation of the post-Second World War GI Bill provided men returning to the home-front with the monetary means to marry without having to establish themselves in the workplace first. Financially supported by the government, an American couple's patriotic duty was to marry, have children and adhere to their socially prescribed gender roles. By the end of the 1950s women were entering into marriage at an increasingly young age. Friedan identified that during this period fourteen million girls had become engaged by the age of 17 and were

[130] Board (1992), p. 367.
[131] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963; repr. London: Penguin Books, 1992), p.p. 164-165.

giving up education to become wives and mothers.[132] Friedan also noted that during the interwar years of the 1920s, 47% of women attended college but by 1958 this had dropped to 35%.[133] Education, as well as a desire for careers, was viewed by some factions of society as de-feminising women and going against their 'natural' roles.[134]

When Friedan's book was published in 1963, she suggested that the modern housewife had become little more than a domestic slave. Increasingly. these young women were beginning to feel trapped within the marital home, and Friedan likened their existence to that of prisoners in 'comfortable concentration camp(s).'[135] Ensconced in their contemporary domestic settings and stripped of both clothing and identity, many of Wesselmann's pieces undertaken between 1961 and 1964 seem to operate as portrayals of *The Great American Feminine Mystique*. Furthermore, if one considers the original meaning of the word 'odalisque' as describing a domestic slave, the application of this term onto Wesselmann's nudes might be deemed appropriate.

In the year that *The Feminine Mystique* appeared in the US, Wesselmann created *Great American Nude #48* (Fig. 2.29) – an assemblage which included a real radiator, table and window frame. Wesselmann wrote that he was interested in placing together items which had an 'official reality', such as actual objects or photographic representations of something familiar, alongside painted ones in order

[132] Tom Wesselmann met his future wife, Claire Selley, whilst they were both art students at Cooper Union. He told Irving Sandler that he thought she was the 'best female painter in the school'. However, he continued 'when she graduated – maybe because of my presence – she simply didn't paint.' It may have been due to the existing social norms during the 1960s that Claire stepped away from following her own artistic career in favour of being a home-maker, but in 1980 she oversaw the design layout of her husband's monograph.
[133] Friedan (1992), p.14.
[134] Friedan (1992), p 37. Friedan points to magazines, such as *Ladies Home Journal*, running articles in 1949 which referred to Marynia F Farnham and Ferdinand Lundberg's *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* (1942) and played a part in the re-domestication of women. A psychiatrist and a sociologist, the pair contended that education and careers resulted in the 'masculinization of women with enormously dangerous consequences in the home, the children dependent upon it and the ability of woman, as well as her husband, to obtain sexual gratification.'
[135] Friedan (1992), p.p. 267-268.

to suggest a 'variety of realities.'[136] Within this artwork, the bringing together of realities is reinforced by the piece being effectively split into two halves, with the left-hand side containing the real objects which form a constructed interior, including a photographic cityscape which acts as a view through the window, and the right-hand side containing mostly painted areas, including the female figure. As such, she appears as the least 'real' object within the artwork and fulfils a predominantly aesthetic role – her naked body is to be looked at and she serves no other purpose beyond that.

For Wesselmann, this juxtaposition of flat and three-dimensional, real and painted components was not an attempt to create an environment or suggest that the observer and art object should interact, despite a carpet stretching from the front of the piece into the same space inhabited by the viewer. It was still meant to be viewed frontally and considered in the same way as a two-dimensional painting. Wesselmann took a similar approach with *Great American Nude #44* (1963) in which he places a standing figure on the flattened, left-hand side of the image whilst a real telephone, radiator and door is situated on the right. This time, however, there is no window onto the outside world, but the boundary between interior and exterior space is alluded to by the door, upon which hangs a real ladies' coat. Wesselmann's use of space and real objects may have served a formal purpose, but they also resonate with the reality that Friedan defined as the 'feminine mystique'. There are clear demarcations between the interior and exterior, or domestic and public spaces, with the faceless figure confined to the former, appearing less real than a table or telephone. She has no identity other than her sex, and her displayed nakedness suggests the figure is in a sense of anticipation, as though she is waiting for

[136] Stealingworth (1980), p. 25.

something to make her feel 'real', which according to Friedan, was how many housewives described themselves.

Friedan wrote, 'Sex is the only frontier open to women who have always lived within the confines of the feminine mystique. In the past fifteen years, the sexual frontier has been forced to expand perhaps beyond the limits of possibility, to fill the time available, to fill the vacuum created by denial of larger goals and purposes for American women.'[137] She continued by saying, 'sex in the America of the feminine mystique is becoming a strangely joyless national compulsion, if not a contemptuous mockery.'[138] Citing the rise of what she described as a media representation of the 'sex-hunger of American women', or the fulfilment of sexual fantasies, more than doubling in the ten years between 1950 and 1960, Friedan noted a particular rise in 'preoccupation with specific female sex organs' appearing in men's magazines and detailed descriptions appearing in modern novels.[139] The emergence of what Friedan dubbed 'sex-seekers' in novels, plays and films was an image of 'mindless over- or under-dressed sex creatures' who found no real sexual satisfaction.[140] Constrained by their domesticity and with no achievable social goal other than being 'a desirable sex object' or 'sexually successful wife and mother' Friedan contended that these women inhabited 'a world of objects, unable to touch in others the individual identity she lacks herself.'[141] Whilst Wesselmann did not give his nudes facial features because he 'didn't want a person there', this way of anonymising and dehumanising his figures was not dissimilar to how many women felt in their socially imposed domestic role.[142] This lack of individuality was echoed

[137] Friedan (1992), p. 228.
[138] Friedan (1992), p. 229.
[139] Friedan (1992), pp.229-230.
[140] Friedan (1992), pp 231-232.
[141] Friedan (1992), pp 232-233.
[142] Oral History Interview (1984), n. p.

by a young housewife Friedan interviewed who opined 'I begin to feel I have no personality' as she discussed the growing discontent that she experienced as a homemaker, wife and mother.[143] For Friedan, the suburban housewife who traded in her 'self' for the security of marriage, became 'after all, an American woman, an irreversible product of a culture that stops just short of giving her a separate identity.'[144]

Freidan's research indicated the problematic relationship that early 1960s housewives in the US had with sex. She found that those women who said they enjoyed sex the most were the ones who developed their own sense of identity and emancipation. The less she was seen as a sexual *object*, 'the more sex became an act of human intercourse… and the more women were able to love men, rather than submit, in passive distaste, to their sexual desire.'[145] It was subsequently suggested that a move towards gender equality would benefit the sexual relationships of women and men whilst the prevailing inequality, Friedan warned, which saw women remain defined by their domestic roles, meant that they had less chance of reaching either personal or sexual fulfilment.[146]

Despite Wesselmann working in an artistic style which appeared increasingly fresh and modern, the references he makes to the contemporary domestic environment and its consumer products alongside the figures' heightened erotic features, mean that the *Great American Nudes* can be seen as being as much about a return to gendered order as Matisse's odalisques. Whilst the return to figurative work after periods in which painterly abstraction had dominated might have been indicative of a need to establish a sense of normality, the sexual objectification of the

[143] Friedan (1992), p.19.
[144] Friedan (1992), p. 180.
[145] Friedan (1992), p. 286.
[146] Friedan (1993), p.289.

female nude and her implied domestic status also resonated with the re-establishment of imposed, patriarchal social roles.

Female Domesticity as a Symbol of Masculine Normalcy

In the first half of the twentieth century, Alfred Barr, the first director of the New York Museum of Modern Art and Albert C Barnes, founder of the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia, became high-profile American advocates of Matisse. The artist's popularity and influence in the States grew with collectors such as Claribel and Etta Cone, society sisters from Baltimore, being among his most voracious and well-heeled patrons. Amassing around 500 pieces of art by Matisse, now owned by the Baltimore Museum of Art, it is the world's largest collection of work by the Frenchman. In 1927, Matisse won the Carnegie Prize, an international award given by the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh, and subsequently became a jury member for the competition. In 1931 Matisse's youngest son and art dealer Pierre, opened a gallery in New York which promoted the work of the European modernists, including that of his father. According to John O'Brian, by the middle of the twentieth century 'American journalists proclaimed Matisse the greatest living artist'.[147] It is perhaps Matisse, rather than any American artist, that many young, homegrown painters wished to emulate.

Whilst Matisse became something of an artistic superstar in the United States, O'Brian points out that Americans were initially perturbed by both the modernist style and erotic nature of some of Matisse's paintings. O'Brian comments that even though the artist was operating within 'an expanding consumerist ethos that traded on sensual pleasure for commercial ends', Matisse was careful to make

[147] John O' Brian, *Ruthless Hedonism; The American Reception of Matisse* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), p.15.

public his interest in the 'seductiveness' of paint, and not of his models.[148] However, cloaking his images within the language of formalism was not the only way that the public were diverted away from any concerns regarding subject matter. Journalists and critics frequently focused attention on the artist's personal credentials. Whilst the Cone sisters showed an initial unease when introduced to Matisse's painting, they warmed to the man himself. In an interview which aired on National Public Radio in 2011, Karen Levitov, associate curator of the Jewish Museum in New York, and Katy Rothkopf, curator at the Baltimore Museum of Art, discussed the Cone sisters and their collection. Despite the sisters' initial shock when they saw his work and unconventional approach to painting, they were attracted to Matisse, who they considered a 'proper gentleman.'[149] According to Rothkopf, the Cones felt that Matisse was one of 'their kind of people' and his personal, somewhat bougeois credentials further supported this.[150] s a man, he was 'married with a family, wore three-piece suits, was very clean and well put together' which appealed to the well-heeled sisters, unlike Picasso, of whose private life they disapproved.[151]

When Matisse was included in the 1913 Armory Show, many critics found the European modernism on display was at odds with the sensibility of American art and his paintings were treated with suspicion. The *New York Times* asked the American artist Kenyon Cox for an honest appraisal of the show and he subsequently called Matisse's *Blue Nude: Souvenir of Biskra* (1907) 'indecent to the point of shocking' not because it was an image of a naked woman, but due to a flouting of

[148] O'Brian (1999), p. 3.
[149] Susan Stamberg, 'A Tale of Two Sisters and their Serious Eye for Art' interview with Karen Levitov from the New York Jewish Museum and Katy Rothkopf from the Baltimore Museum of Art, 25 June 2011. Part of the Weekend Edition Sunday broadcast by National Public Radio regarding the exhibition *Collecting Matisse and Modern Masters* (New York Jewish Museum 6 May – 25 September 2011 and Vancouver Art Gallery 2 June – 23 September 2012) https://www.npr.org/2011/06/26/137368938/a-tale-of-two-sisters-and-their-serious-eye-for-art accessed 25 September 2019.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.

conventional ideals of physical, feminine beauty.[152] Cox also levelled an attack on the critics who praised Matisse's work, commenting that they formed part of 'the modern engine of publicity.'[153]

Cox was not the only critic who saw nothing worth endorsing in Matisse's art. An article published seven days earlier in the *New York Times* by Clara T MacChesney saw her also struggling to come to terms with Matisse's manner of painting and the non-Western sources which inspired him. Having visited the artist's home in France to conduct the interview, MacChesney admitted that she failed to see any beauty in Matisse's work, considering it 'abnormal to the last degree.'[154] However, by way of a contrast, she informed readers that Matisse was 'an ordinary, healthy individual, such as one meets by the dozen every day.'[155] Matisse, who was seemingly perturbed by his interviewer's obvious concerns over his work, subsequently implored that MacChesney 'do tell the American people that I am a normal man; that I am a devoted husband and father, that I have three fine children, that I go to the theatre, ride horseback, have a comfortable home, a fine garden that I love, flowers, &c., just like any man.'[156] MacChesney, in line with Matisse's request, included this in her article as well as reporting that the artist had shown her around his 'normal house' and 'invited me to call again like a perfectly normal gentleman'.[157]

[152] Kenyon Cox, 'Cubists and Futurists are Making Insanity Pay', *New York Times* Magazine, 16 March 1913, Section 6, p.1.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Clara T MacChesney, 'A Talk with Matisse, Leader of Post-Impressionists', *New York Times*, 9 March 1913, Magazine Section, Part 7, p.12.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid.
[157] Ibid.

When the Detroit Institute of the Arts became the first American museum to purchase one of Matisse's paintings, *La Fenêtre* (1916) in 1922, they announced the acquisition by issuing the following as part of their statement:

> His home is ordered, immaculate and attractive. He, himself, is the model head of a family, wholesome and systematic. He admires the great paintings of the past… Surely a man… who in his own life is wholesome, human, sane and well ordered must be sincere and have good reason for painting as he does.[158]

This aspect of Matisse's career, particularly in respect of the growth of his popularity in the USA, has been well-documented by O'Brian, who identified the American press's predisposition for countering any assaults on the artist's work, or any *ad hominem* attacks on the individual, by giving examples of how his lifestyle, character and indeed, normative masculinity, were exemplary.[159] If his modernist paintings or sensual odalisques were at odds with American aesthetics or puritanism, his reputation as a bourgeois French gentleman made him, and his art, increasingly acceptable. As Marcia Brennan has pointed out, the attention given to the artist's middle-class credentials during the 1950s further assisted in forming an identity whereby the 'potential impropriety of Matisse's more risqué imagery (was defused) by locating his artworks within a framework of social respectability'.[160] Matisse's acceptance by both the public and the American art world can be said to have been

[158] Catherine Bock-Weiss, *Henri Matisse: Modernist Against the Grain*, (University Park, PA.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), p.23.
[159] O'Brian (1999), p.19.
[160] Marcia Brennan, (2004), p.33. Brennan also points out that 'such a deliberate fashioning of private bourgeois identity is also evident in the biographical profile of Alfred C. Kinsey that *Time* magazine published in its review of the second Kinsey report, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953). Placing an emphasis on Kinsey's home life, including his avid interests in music and botany, his marriage to his wife of thirty-two years, and his lifelong devotion to scientific research, *Time* presented an elaborate bourgeois portrait of "Dr. Kinsey of Bloomington."' Furthermore, Brennan noted that this 'bourgeois respectability and fleshly sensualism also threads through a contemporary feature article on the illustrious art collector Chester Dale that was published in *Artnews* in December 1953.

achieved, in no small part, by the artist's middle-class status and domestic normalcy becoming widely reported.

Jack Flam noted that Matisse exerted control over his private life and took care to 'reveal to the public only what he wanted the public to know' as well as 'rarely comment(ing) on the meaning or symbolism of his pictures, even when interviewers pressed him to do so.'[161] Whilst Flam alludes to evidence which suggests Matisse successfully kept any improprieties private, he attributes much of what was disseminated about the artist's public image to Barr's 1951 publication. Flam noted how Barr relied to a great extent on information he obtained from the artist's estranged wife and daughter, and concluded that 'the book strongly emphasizes Matisse's bourgeois respectability' which was reinforced by the inclusion of photographs which included the artist on horseback (Fig. 2.30), rowing a single scull during a stay in Nice (Fig. 2.31) and seated at a table with his wife, all of which helped to maintain an appearance of middle-class decorum and an interest in suitably masculine outdoor pursuits.[162]

Around half a century after MacChesney reassured the American public that Matisse was an ordinary and healthy individual, Wesselmann was presented in a similar manner. Whilst Sidney Tillim wrote in *Artforum* that Rublowsky and Heyman's *Pop Art: Images of the American Dream* turned the Romantic image of the 'suffering' artist into that of the 'great American success story,' he also dismissed the book as little more than a 'razz to riches account' of 'simple, stouthearted and poignantly middle class but always "sensitive" men struggling

[161] Jack Flam, *Matisse: The Man and His Art 1869 – 1918* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press: 1986), p.12.
[162] Flam (1986), p.13.

against great odds.'[163] These men, as identified by Rublowsky, were the five major exponents of Pop consisting of Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, James Rosennquist, Andy Warhol and Wesselmann. Rublowsky devoted a chapter to each of them and his writing style was reminiscent of the articles which appeared in *Life* or *House and Garden*. Rublowsky provided a broad overview of each artist's career and their individual developments towards a style which would become collectively known as Pop. Characterising Pop as the product of a 'democratic and commercially developed' country, Rublowsky continued by stating that it went 'beyond mere nationalism to reflect a universal aspiration', demonstrating the USA's 'new social and economic reality.'[164] A chapter was also devoted to Pop's collectors who had been integral to its quick success. Not only were they celebrated as the arbiters of contemporary taste, not unlike the artists they supported, many of them were also self-made men who epitomised what it meant to live the American Dream. However, whilst the ordinary American consumer might only be able to purchase the goods that were immortalised as the icons of Pop art, the collectors' appetites buying the art might be seen as a further example of a booming economy.

The biographical information given on each artist, with the possible exception of Warhol, presented their individual characteristics as embodying particular, 'admirable', aspects of homely, American masculinity. Lichtenstein was introduced as the father of two boys, as well as, to some extent, Pop. Oldenburg is described as 'a big man who projects an impression of strength'.[165] Rosenquist is defined as physically active with images of him toiling on his uncle's farm and standing precariously on a platform high above a New York street as he had done

[163] Sidney Tillim, 'Further Observations on the Pop Phenomenon' in ed. Madoff, *Pop Art* (1997), p.138 (first publ. in *Artforum*, November 1965 pp. 17 – 19).
[164] Rublowsky (1965), p. 7.
[165] Rublowsky (1965), p.70.

when painting billboards for a living. Warhol stood out as an enigmatic, 'complex' and 'sensitive', individual who was also described as an 'oracle' and 'visionary' but whilst he was attributed with something of a mythological status, his intellect was carefully presented as being a masculine trait.[166]

Wesselmann's biographical information sees him described as craftsman-like and the accompanying photographs show the artist in his studio alongside tools which reinforce this (Fig. 2.32). Amongst them are a hammer, saw and pliers – tools which might as easily be used for carrying out repairs around the home, adding to the sense of Wesselmann's domestic normality. The artist, the reader is informed, exhibited 'simple, wholesome virtues (which) have become unfashionable topics' before being informed that these characteristics 'are part of the man … They represent the epitome of the middle-class American ethic – a tradition in which Tom Wesselmann grew up.' Rublowsky continues by informing the reader that whilst he was a student; 'young Wesselmann… joined a fraternity; participated in the school's athletic programs; and… was committed to ordinary middle-class pursuits.'[167]

Heyman's accompanying photographs clearly define the artist in terms of his relationship with his wife, Claire. The connection between Claire, the Wesselmann's domestic life and the artwork is made clear in the context of the book, with a photograph of Claire perched on the edge of the bath in the couple's apartment juxtaposed with a reproduction of *Bathtub Collage #3* (1963) (Fig. 2.33). Other photographs are more representative of the closeness of the couple's relationship, including one of Claire resting her head on her husband's shoulder (Fig. 2.34) and her seated on the floor of Wesselmann's studio, gazing up at her husband who is sat

[166] Rublowsky (1965), p.116.
[167] Rublowsky (1965), p.133.

on a chair (Fig. 1.2). Both of these place Claire in a supportive, if not deferential role. Whilst Claire looks lovingly at her husband in some of these photographs, Wesselmann does not directly interact with his wife until a final photograph of the couple shows them outside, caught in a moment of tender domesticity as Claire reaches up to kiss her husband on his cheek. She is stood next to a selection of plants and empty pots holding a garden tool, which reinforces her role as nurturer and homemaker (Fig. 2.35). Whilst the photographs clearly capture the comfortable, domestic reality of the couple's relationship, they also reinforce Wesselmann's normative credentials, acting as the visual equivalents of Matisse's request that MacChesney tells the American public that he is an ordinary, married man.

The focus on Wesselmann's personal disposition has continued to be such an integral feature of any discussions relating to his art, that it sometimes threatens to overtake any direct attention placed on the works themselves. When an exhibition of the artist's early collages took place in 2016 at the David Zwirner Gallery in London, *The Guardian* printed an article entitled *Great American Nudes artist Tom Wesselmann was no sexist, say the women in his life*.[168] Within the piece, Kate Wesselmann, Tom's daughter, complained that her father's work was 'misconstrued as sexist' when 'it was completely the opposite of who he was and how he treated women in real life', something which his model, Monica Serra also upheld.[169] For Kate, her father's work reflected her parents' longstanding and loving relationship and should continue to be viewed in those terms.

When Livingstone conducted a walkthrough at the same Zwirner exhibition, he made a point of saying how the artist became 'hurt and upset' when criticised by

[168] Hermione Hoby, 'Great American nudes artist Tom Wesselmann was no sexist, say the women in his life' , *Guardian* ,19 January 2016 online edition https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/jan/19/great-american-nudes-artist-tom-wesselmann-not-sexist-daughter-wife-model-interview accessed 31 May 2017.
[169] Ibid.

feminists who saw his work 'as objectifying women or in some way as pornographic.'[170] In defence of the artist, Livingstone proclaimed 'that wasn't his intention at all' before adding 'I know what he was like as a human being and he wasn't that kind of man. He was a real old-fashioned family man devoted to his wife and his kids' as though defending him from allegations that his artwork suggested otherwise. [171]

With Wesselmann, persona and artistic intent have become inseparable which in some ways have clouded discussions of his work and closed down debates which do not keep his personal attributes at their centre. As Livingstone conceded, the artist was aware that he had his models adopt provocative poses but 'he just had to live with that misinterpretation'.[172] But were these images misinterpreted or was it more that the public refused to separate the artist from what he painted? According to Livingstone, Wesselmann aimed to make 'sexy pictures' that 'spoke of his own life' and it has become a part of the artist's mythology that as long as these works continue to be contextualised as the works of a perfectly ordinary, married man they cannot be seen as examples of objectification. However, there seems to be something both unresolved and contradictory existing between Wesselmann's assertion that his primary interest was solving formalist problems and a continued insistence that the nude, and particularly its eroticism, related to his personal life and as such, reinforced his heteronormative characteristics. What appears to be at the root of this dichotomy was the extent to which even in the supposedly liberal environment of 1960s New York, the prevailing moral atmosphere was for the sexual to remain situated within marriage if it were to become a more socially acceptable topic of debate.

[170] Livingstone at the Zwirner Gallery (2016).
[171] Ibid.
[172] Ibid.

Conclusion

Within the existing literature, despite Wesselmann's work being described as capturing the sexual liberation of the era, it seems as though his early success and popularity was founded on it becoming known that he was working within established moral and artistic traditions more than he was challenging them. That is not to say that he did not develop an innovative approach to image-making. This began with him cutting objects directly from printed sources and adding them alongside his painted nudes to create a contemporary environment before adopting a more graphic, mature style which resembled commercial art.

The first four years of the 1960s, during which Wesselmann gained both critical and commercial success, saw him going through what might be described as the most 'Matissey' stage of his career. As Wesselmann progressed as an artist, this initial influence became less apparent, and his treatment of the nude diversified from the way that Matisse painted the female figure. As such, Wesselmann's work saw him breaking away from the influence of European art and Americanising his nudes. This saw his images share more in common with contemporary American popular cultures' definitions of womanhood and in particular, the domestic feminine, than with French tradition.

Whilst Wesselmann contextualised the sexual aspects of his nudes in terms of his personal relationship with Claire, it actually served to demonstrate the artist's all-American, heteronormative, masculinity. It did not represent female sexual liberation, either sexually or socially, remaining a masculine interpretation of how they might like it to look. The contemporary experience of many women remained defined by the socially imposed idealisation that female happiness was best realised by them carrying out domestic roles. The only real difference at this point in time

was an increased expectation that the modern housewife also become an erotic, domestic object. In many ways, Wesselmann's work offered the perfect illustration of the problematic 'feminist mystique'.

CHAPTER 2

Tom Wesselmann and Henry Miller: Sex, Obscenity and the Masculine Vernacular

> When I was doing these nudes with their legs spread, there were no girlie magazines. There might have been a *Playboy*, but they didn't have leg spread shots. There were no beaver shots, not that you could buy anyway… When I finally got hold of one in 1966 I think, maybe '65, it was very tame. It was a girl that had her legs spread and water was coming out of a bathtub onto her cunt. [1]

> Only once I saw a real cunt on a statue – that was by Rodin… she has her legs spread wide apart… I don't think there was any head on it. Just a cunt you might say. Jesus, it looked ghastly. The thing is this – they all look alike. When you look at them with their clothes on you imagine all sorts of things: you give them an individuality like, which they haven't got, of course. There's just a crack there between the legs and you get all steamed up about it…' [2]

Writing in 1980, Tom Wesselmann declared that he did not become interested in 'books and ideas' until he graduated from college in the late 1950s. When he did, Henry Miller was one of the authors who the artist identified as being of interest to

[1] Oral history interview with Tom Wesselmann, 1984 January 3-February 8, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Conducted by Irving Sandler.
[2] Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer* (Paris: Obelisk Press, 1934; repr. with introduction by Robert Nye (London: Flamingo, 1993), p. 144.

him in the early sixties.[3] In particular, Wesselmann credited Miller with helping him to reinforce a 'wish to deal visually with his own sexual preoccupations'.[4] Despite this, the existing scholarship has not explored the extent to which Miller's writing may have shaped the artist's visual descriptions of the female body.

Whilst Wesselmann referred to being interested in Miller's writing, the American publication of *Tropic of Cancer* by Grove Press in the early 1960s had a huge impact on the artist and wider culture, when it was at the heart of a legal case which brought about changes to U.S. obscenity laws. This paved the way for artists such as Wesselmann to produce increasingly sexualised images with less danger of them being censored. Yet whilst the sixties were widely considered as an era of increased liberal thinking which ushered in the sexual revolution, this did not always equate to what was happening socially or culturally, particularly in respect of the different ways that it played out for men and women. It might be closer to the truth to say that what became increasingly liberated during the decade was the stereotype of the sexually virile male, accompanied by a widespread dissemination of images which presented women as erotic spectacles.

The extent to which the female body became fragmented, and its sexual characteristics isolated, is apparent in Wesselmann and Miller's ways of describing women. This resulted in these figures being seen as incomplete and devoid of any inherent individuality or characteristics beyond their sex. Instead, the female form became reduced to a sum of its body parts and the lewd words attached to these were often used as shorthand to refer to women in general. This can be evidenced by Miller's written descriptions which sees the same four-letter word employed as a

[3] Slim Stealingworth, *Tom Wesselmann* (New York: Abbeville Press, Inc., 1980), p. 13.
[4] Stealingworth (1980), p.13.

slang term for female genitals being used interchangeably as an alternative for ‘woman’.

Somewhat surprisingly, Wesselmann used the same language in conversation with Irving Sandler when he participated in a Smithsonian Oral History in 1984. He also included the same lewd references in the titles of a number of his artworks. Miller used this vocabulary as part of a literary style which characterised his anti-establishment, and anti-American stance, providing an unromantic version of his bohemian lifestyle and the women he encountered. Within this environment, Miller portrayed sex as a basic, physical need which had to be satiated. This contrasted hugely with the public-facing persona that Wesselmann had established as a man who was the embodiment of the all-American success story, defined by his social, moral and sexual normality.

Looking at Wesselmann’s nudes, it becomes apparent that the ones he produced in the mid-to-late 60s shared much in common with Miller’s prose, particularly the way in which both men reduced the female body to a sum of its anatomical parts and identified them by way of a crude, masculine vernacular. As such, Wesselmann’s nudes might be seen as the visual equivalents of Miller’s written descriptions.

This chapter explores these similarities and considers the reasons why the artist and author adopted this descriptive method – was it to emphasise masculinity by sexualising and demeaning the female body, shock a largely puritanical audience, gain notoriety and, subsequently, publicity and/or afford the opportunity to exercise their right to freedom of expression, or a combination of all of these elements?

Tropic of Cancer's Impact on American Obscenity Laws

Miller's most notorious novel, *Tropic of Cancer*, was written in Paris in the 1930s during which time he lived an unconventional lifestyle surrounded by artists and writers including George Brassaï and Anaïs Nin. When the book was printed in France in 1934, this, and Miller's subsequent novel *Tropic of Capricorn* (1938), was banned from being taken into America. However, in June 1961, Grove Press published the book in the USA. By July of that year, it had been banned in Massachusetts, with Dallas following suit in August, and in 1962, a court in Brooklyn issued a warrant for Miller's arrest, charging him and his publisher with producing pornography. However, the ensuing legal proceedings became integral to bringing about a change in American obscenity laws which had a far-reaching, cultural effect.

In 1957, the case of *Roth vs United States* led to a Supreme Court ruling which set parameters for establishing whether printed material was obscene. The case involved Samuel Roth, a New York publisher, who was charged with sending lewd material through the post. Whilst freedom of speech was protected by the First Amendment, obscenities and material of a sexual nature were not covered by the Constitution. Sex itself, however, was not deemed obscene – so long as it was discussed in a manner that did not incite lustful thoughts, for example, if it was educational.

As a result of the Roth case, a new precedent was famously set for judging obscene material. For something to be deemed indecent it was ruled that it

1. appealed to prurient interest,

2. went substantially beyond contemporary community standards of candor in the description or representation of such matters.
3. was utterly without redeeming social value.[5]

Yet this was far from a definitive set of rules by which offensive material could be judged. The issue of censorship remained contentious, seeming at times to be at odds with the First Amendment right to the Freedom of Speech. The role of the censor, which was to protect society from material which may be harmful, was largely predicated upon individual judgments which were rooted within their personal religious, moral and political proclivities and beliefs, as well as being impacted by their social class and education. The predominant and prevailing social norms of the era also needed to be considered.

In the decade after the so-called Roth Test's inception, *Tropic of Cancer* was at the centre of legal proceedings. Miller's use of four-letter words and unromanticised descriptions of the sex act came under scrutiny. In 1964, the Supreme Court ruled that the book had literary merit and it was determined that 'an author may deal with an obscene subject in an artistic manner so long as it is "being faced seriously, honestly and with talent…"'[6] The subsequent relaxation of obscenity laws proved to be a pivotal moment and it seems no coincidence that it was around this time that Wesselmann began to make his female figures more erotic in nature.

In 1963, two years after *Tropic of Cancer* was published, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (known as *Fanny Hill*) went into publication for the first time in America. The book, written in 1748 by the English novelist John Cleland, is considered to be one of the first pornographic novels, telling the story of a young

[5] Al Katz, 'Free Discussion v. Final Decision: Moral and Artistic Controversy and the *Tropic of Cancer* Trials' in *The Yale Law Journal*, 79:2 (1969), p. 210.
[6] Katz (1969), p.224.

girl's sexual exploits and prostitution. Like *Tropic of Cancer*, the book became the subject of legal action and in 1966, the Supreme Court ruled that it was not obscene. The case was widely reported within the media and an article which appeared in the *New York Times* in December 1965 queried whether it was the Supreme Court's role to be continually called upon to make decisions on censorship. Concerns were raised as to whether the judiciary would end up as 'a body of supercensors of the nation's reading matter.'[7] Consideration was also given to the involvement of expert witnesses, with one attorney stating that the 'testimony of scholars about the literary and historical value of the book… is enough for (*Fanny Hill*) to pass the social importance test.'[8] Another suggested that expert witnesses should be relevant to the book's content. For example, they ruminated whether doctors should be called upon to comment on any medical issues that appeared in literature, with other subject matter being dealt with by similarly suitable 'experts'. Subsequently, Justice Black asked who the appropriate expert would be 'if (the book) is about sex?' to which one attorney remarked 'Perhaps an ordinary person in that case.'[9] Yet when it came to the legal issue of whether the book incited 'prurient interest,' it was believed by some that the court remained the expert. It seemed that judgements regarding obscenity were not only based upon personal opinion but whether the individual considered sex itself to be indecent.

During the 1960s, the visual arts avoided much of the censorship issues that the literary world faced. The restrictions placed upon the dissemination of printed material were largely due to concerns regarding how it might be consumed – by whom and in what environment, and particularly the effect it might have on young

[7] 'Court Sees Trend to Make It Censor', *New York Times*, 9 December 1965, p. 28.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.

people. Publications (including those which contained printed reproductions of art) were available to audiences who could view the material in the privacy of their own homes, at which point its consumption become more of an illicit act. In contrast, if a nude figure was viewed in a gallery, which was often a shared, public experience, it was endorsed by the establishment. In these circumstances, the viewer was looking at a work of art and not a naked body *per se*, and they were expected to adopt the high-cultural gaze which was reserved for art appreciation. Moreover, the gallery visitor was expected to be educated and looking to satiate an aesthetic need rather than a prurient one.

There was a history of fine art censorship in New York which had been established during the nineteenth century. In 1887, the proprietor of the Knoedler Gallery was arrested by the leader of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, Anthony Comstock. This was for selling photographs of work by French artists including Bouguereau and Cabanel. It was feared that the general public, and particularly the less educated, lower classes, might respond inappropriately to looking at reproductions of artworks, finding themselves sexually stimulated or having inappropriate desires.[10] The Comstock Law, which came into being in 1873 sought to ban any 'obscene book pamphlet, paper, writing, advertisement, circular, print, picture drawing or other representation, figure, or image on or of paper or other material, or any cast instrument, or other article of an immoral nature' and this included any 'lewd, lascivious or filthy book, pamphlet, picture, paper, letter writing,

[10] Nicola Beisel, 'Morals Versus Art: Censorship, The Politics of Interpretation, and the Victorian Nude', in *American Sociological Review*, 58:2 (1993), p.146.

print or other publication of an indecent character'.[11] It was not until 1957 with the aforementioned *Roth vs United States* that this law was changed.

There appear to be relatively few examples of specific works of art being censored in America during the first half of the twentieth century. What did draw the censors' attention were images which suggested homosexuality or specific anti-American sentiments. In 1934, Paul Cadmus's *The Fleet's In!* was banned from display in Washington D. C. as it depicted a figure who could be identified as homosexual. Works of art, or artists, considered to represent fascist or communist tendencies were particularly prone to the censors, with the latter leading to artists including Georgia O'Keeffe and Ben Shahn being placed under FBI surveillance in 1953.[12]

Of the artists who came under the Pop umbrella, Jim Dine was the most prominent to fall foul of the censors when, in 1966, the Robert Fraser Gallery in London held an exhibition of his work. It was raided by police and the gallery owner was subsequently charged for showing indecent (but not obscene) art. The *New York Times* reported that the images were 'nearly all… explicitly anatomical'.[13] Drawings such as *London #1*, which appeared on the front cover of the exhibition catalogue, *#2* and *#13* (Fig. 3.1) included penis-like shapes. Collages that Dine produced in collaboration with Eduardo Paolozzi, such as *Collages #1* and *#5* featured what resembled pubic hair and labia (Fig. 3.2).

[11] *United States Statutes at Large*, Act of March 3, 1873, ch. 258 – An Act for the suppression of Trade in, and Circulation of, obscene Literature and Articles of immoral Use, accessed via Library of Congress A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: U. S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774 – 1875 https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llsl&fileName=017/llsl017.db&recNum=0639 18 August 2022.
[12] Robert Atkins, 'A Censorship Time Line' in *The Art Journal*, 50:3 (1991), p. 34.
[13] Dana Adams Schmidt, 'Art by American Seized in London', *New York Times*, 21 September 1966, p 44.

Dine described the images as being 'phallic and vaginal forms' but explained that they reflected his feelings about London and were in no way pornographic.[14] Certainly, the shapes Dine used were suggestive, but they were neither used in a context, nor depicted in such great detail, that they could be categorically identified as genitals. The furore the images caused, and their subsequent suppression in the UK, prompted Dine to state that 'nobody has a right to censor art… When a person can make a painting with good intentions, and the police come along and say it's dirty, I think that's a pretty sad state of affairs.'[15]

In comparison, Wesselmann told Irving Sandler that despite an exhibition of his work held at the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York during 1966 attracting the attention of officials, it had remained uncensored. Wesselmann recounted how there was 'a rebirth of erotic concern on the city government's part and they were sending around from time-to-time vice-type squads to check on things. And they checked me out.'[16] In Wesselmann's words, the paintings on display included 'the first prick paintings' and 'the most vivid vagina I'd ever done'.[17] The latter, he believed, had offended women and a possible complaint may have been the reason for the work being scrutinised. However, there were no repercussions despite there being no misconceptions regarding subject matter.

Miller had reflected upon the differences between censorship in the literary and visual arts as early as 1945 when he wrote;

> 'Parenthetically it is curious to observe that painters, however unapproachable their work may be, are seldom subjected to the same

[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Oral History Interview (1984), n. p.
[17] Oral History Interview (1984), n. p.

> meddling interference as writers. Language, because it also serves as a means of communication, tend to bring about weird obfuscations… With books even the butcher and the plumber seem to feel that they have a right to an opinion, especially if the book happens to be what is called a filthy or disgusting one.'[18]

It certainly seemed that Miller had a point, identifying discrepancies between how the written word was treated in comparison to the way images, and particularly fine art images, were received. This is, perhaps, indicative of the way that art images have been accepted within an increasingly visual culture, as well as a predominantly patriarchal one. Whilst it would be wrong to suggest that all images of female nudes are obscene, they have become so normalised as part of artistic tradition that their appreciation as works of art have seen them judged exempt from generally inciting 'prurient interest'. Subsequently, an artist such as Wesselmann was merely continuing in the footsteps of Titian, Ingres, Matisse *et al* and could be judged as having similarly 'high-brow' intentions, even if there might be visual evidence which challenges this. Yet what Wesselmann did was take full advantage of the changing boundaries relating to censorship.

Evading the Censors

During the mid-1960s, Wesselmann had considered the possibility of incorporating a real-life nude into a piece he was planning to exhibit at the Janis Gallery. He told Sandler that he sought advice from a lawyer who was well versed in censorship issues. 'Hypothetically', Wesselmann enquired, 'what would happen if an artist had a work in which appeared a real, reclining nude?' A letter from attorney Martin

[18] Henry Miller, 'Obscenity and the Law of Reflection', in *Kentucky Law Journal*, 51:4 (1963) pp. 577-590 (first publ. Yonkers: Alicat Book Shop/ Hunt Turner, 1945).

Garbus, which Wesselmann received in March 1966, instructed the artist that 'A relatively recent Criminal Court decision permitting the posing by nude models for groups of professional photographers is indicative of a change in the attitudes of these Courts and bodes well for your plans'.[19] However, Garbus added that it was 'too early to say whether the reactions to the most recent Supreme Court decisions will affect your situation'.[20] Ultimately, it was deemed likely that the district attorney would make an arrest. Wesselmann considered going ahead by drawing up an agreement that meant Sidney Janis would be exempt from charges but eventually the piece was put on hold and to Wesselmann's chagrin, by the time he considered himself able to go ahead with the work public nudity was already visible in theatrical productions such as *Hair*, which started its inaugural off-Broadway run in 1967 and *Oh, Calcutta!* which began its first three-year stint in 1969. Conscious that he might be accused of jumping on the bandwagon, Wesselmann did not use a nude figure, or part of it, until 1970, when he incorporated an actual female breast in his installation *Bedroom Tit Box* (Fig. 1.7) – a three-dimensional re-working of one of his *Bedroom Paintings*. In many ways, whilst this still played with the artist's interest in juxtaposing elements of the real world alongside those parts he had painted or constructed, it was the opposite of what he had achieved with assemblages such as *Great American Nude #44*. With *Tit Box*, it was the body part which was real and the surrounding objects which the artist had made, which will be explored in more detail later in the chapter.

It is perhaps true to say that when Wesselmann's work attracted adverse attention it was for exemplifying the Pop characteristics of mass-production,

[19] Letter from Martin Garbus, attorney, to Tom Wesselmann dated 23 March 1966. Wesselmann Estate, New York, uncatalogued.
[20] Ibid.

consumerism and everyday, low-brow culture more than for depicting female nudity. There were two occasions when Wesselmann fell fall foul of the censors. In the first instance it was not due to sexual content. In the summer of 1963 Wesselmann had a letter printed in *Art News* magazine in which he complained about the Gallery of Modern Art in Washington's 'discriminating selectivity' as they had refused to exhibit his *Great American Nude #21* (1961) (Fig. 3.3).[21] Whilst the piece was one of a number which had been selected by Alice Denney, curator of the *Popular Image* exhibition, the museum's director, Adelyn Breeskin, subsequently requested it be excluded. The piece, which Wesselmann described as 'a reclining nude much like any of my others' included a photograph of President Kennedy on the wall above the figure.[22] The sprawling pink woman, featureless apart from a collaged mouth, was described by the artist as 'a simultaneous appearance of a nude and a picture of JFK, both in their traditional contexts'.[23] However, concerns were raised that it was a comment on the president's extra-marital affairs. In a letter to Wesselmann, Denney made it clear that she had supported the artist and invited him to attend the exhibition's opening, stating 'from our point of view deep down in you were not wrong and there is no ill feeling among the Board members really. I think they understood your position but could not vote otherwise – too complicated at the moment.'[24]

The second incident of censorship was in regard to the printing of Wesselmann's self-penned book. Published in 1980 and printed in Japan, when the second proofs of the book were sent to Wesselmann in the U.S.A., Japanese customs

[21] A copy of the letter, as it appeared in print, is included amongst a selection of articles cut out from magazines which is kept by the Wesselmann Estate, New York, uncatalogued. The handwritten note attributes it to *Art News* Summer 1963. There is no page number.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Original letter on Washington Gallery of Modern Art headed paper is addressed to 'Tom' and signed 'Alice' (Alice Denney). Wesselmann Estate, New York, uncatalogued.

intervened. According to the artist, customs 'seemed very upset by all those nudes.'[25] When the printing of the publication resumed, officials prevented the printing of two plates – one being a sketch entitled *Shaved Cunt* (1967) (Fig. 3.4) and the other being of an erect penis. The former, a close-up of the female genitals undertaken in pencil, has a certain abstract quality to it and if seen without the title, its content might not be immediately identifiable. However, whilst the title given to the image only clarifies the subject matter as being an anatomical detail, it is the choice of words which problematises.

Regarding the reaction to an image which showed an erect penis, this seems to demonstrate a continued social sensitivity to the male body which is far greater than anything afforded to the naked female, particularly if it indicates sexual excitement. Nevertheless, when Grace Glueck, reported on the book's release being delayed, she noted that the excluded plates were to be re-inserted in New York with a further proviso from customs officials that nothing of the book would remain in Japan, and it was not subjected to any American censorship laws.

In 1964, there was a move towards displays of erotic art within New York gallery spaces. Pre-dating the first change made to the obscenity laws, which came later in that year, this was staged at a time when the legal battles regarding *Tropic of Cancer* were highly publicised. The *First International Girlie Exhibit* opened at the Pace Gallery in January 1964. Promising the display of 'titillating work' it was advertised in advance as a 'group of paintings demonstrating the inspiration of the girlie or pin-up as an American symbol' and the opening promised pink champagne 'served by girls in bunny costumes', a direct allusion to the popular *Playboy*

[25] Grace Glueck, 'Art People', *New York Times*, 14 November 1980, section C, p. 21.

'bunnies'.[26] The poster which accompanied the exhibition was an innocuous, Victorian-style image of a lady's hand holding flowers and a note saying 'your true friend' whilst the entire poster was framed by words which ran along its outside edge, printed in different fonts (Fig.3.5). Including the words 'luscious', 'vivacious', 'sumptuous', 'curvaceous' and 'sultry', it was this which set the tone for the exhibition and brings to mind the way in which formalist art critique had used sexually provocative words when describing an image's visual characteristics, as discussed in my previous chapter. The purposeful blurring of lines between whether the viewer was being invited to look at art or interact with actual women was further alluded to when gallery owners Leo Castelli and Ivan Karp were acknowledged for their help in 'assembling the girlies'. Canaday, who was a *New York Times* art critic at the time, commented that the show's title had been successful in drumming up enough interest to ensure the exhibition's opening attracted the attention of reporters from newspapers, radio stations and television and subsequently accused the gallery of adhering to the principle 'if you can't make art, try to make news.'[27]

The pin-up was a particularly American phenomenon, with the term entering general usage around 1944-45. It referred to those pictures of young women which could be found in men-only places, such as barracks, machine shops and barbershops, as well as the painted versions which found their way onto the noses of American aircrafts during the Second World War and Korean War.[28] By the 1940s, the pin-up was the embodiment of the all-American girl who often appeared approachable rather than seductive, and wholesome rather than erotic, but whose emphasised physical attributes and poses held the possible promise of something

[26] John Canaday, 'Art: From Clean Fun to Plain Smut', *New York Times*, 7 January 1964, p. 31.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Thomas B Hess, 'Pinup and Icon', in *Woman as Sex Object: Studies in Erotic Art, 1730-1970*, eds Thomas B. Hess and Linda Nochlin (London: Allen Lane, 1973), pp. 223-224.

more. They often appeared on American aircraft alongside innuendo-laden captions such as 'In the Mood', 'Hard to Get' and 'Ace in the Hole' (Fig. 3.6) becoming the symbol of macho American bravado as well as being something of a lucky charm.

Having her heyday from 1945-1960, the pin-up was ideally a movie star or starlet whose photographs were mass produced for a primarily male audience. It was also common to see the pin-up used in advertisements for products such as *Buxom Brand Melons* (Fig. 3.7) and *Yankee Doll Apples* and even though obvious comparisons were to be made between the fruit being sold and the girls' physical attributes they retained a home-grown wholesomeness, as well as their clothes. Yet as Thomas B. Hess points out, in the post-World War II era, the fantasy image that was projected affected 'the role of woman in society and the image that women were expected to project – to themselves, to each other and to a dominantly masculine world.'[29]

The pin-ups which featured in early *Playboy* magazines were originally given similar girl-next-door identities which Hess described as 'a man-made object disguised as a girl' whose artificiality was enhanced by the erasure of physical 'peculiarities' (including body hair) and turned her into a symbol of wholesome, feminine attractiveness and fantasy'.[30] This 'cheesecake' form of sexual allure not only allowed the magazine to evade the censors, it was at Hugh Hefner's behest.[31] The founder and driving force behind the magazine asked that his models be 'fresh, young things in bedroom and bath… and similarly dressed as girls really are' whilst the nudity, or semi-nudity, had to be appropriate to the everyday scenes in which the

[29] Hess (1973), p. 223.
[30] Hess (1973) p. 227.
[31] 'Cheesecake' was a term which entered popular usage in 1915 and is described by Joanne Meyerowitz in 'Women, Cheesecake and Borderline Material: Responses to Girlie Pictures in the Mid-Twentieth-Century U.S.' as 'publicly acceptable, mass-produced images of semi-nude women' which 'removed some images of women's bodied from the margins of obscenity to the center of mainstream popular culture' (Journal of Women's History, 8:3 (Fall 1996), p. 10).

girls were portrayed.[32] Furthermore, Hefner believed that giving the women a name and persona enhanced their appeal as real-life individuals. It was this 'girl-next-doorness', rather than a possible sense of European sophistication, that made the Playmates' appeal so attainable to the average man – essentially domesticating them and indicating that sexualised women were not limited to the big screen or magazines but were evident in every household across America.

For Canaday, true American pin-ups represented a nostalgic and altogether more 'grand tradition' of Hollywood as exhibited by stars such as Jane Russell and Betty Grable, whom he considered 'generic symbols of all that is lovely, exciting, gracious, intellectual and sublime' – a description which suggested the unattainability of these screen goddesses and steered clear of alluding to outright sexuality or drew attention to any physical characteristics. [33] This veneration of the untouchable female seemed at odds with the 'girlies' on display at the Janis Gallery, which Canaday described as 'rang(ing) from good clean fun to just plain smut' , the latter being exemplified by the inclusion of works he considered to be 'really rather repulsive'.[34]

Of all the pieces on show at the *Girlie Exhibit*, Canaday singled out Wesselmann's *Great American Nude #44* (1964) (Fig. 3.8) for praise, calling it 'one very good bit of pure painting'.[35] Wesselmann's standing figure, which was posed in a fairly traditional manner with her arms behind her head, was situated in a modern interior that included components such as an actual radiator, door with a woman's coat hanging from it and a ringing telephone. A mixture of the real and the painted,

[32] Elizabeth Fraterrigo, *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 41.
[33] Canaday (1964), p. 31.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.

in which the artwork and the viewer's environment almost interact, the painted figure is the least 'real' part of the created environment and as such she safely maintains her status as 'art'. She also brings to mind Hefner's principle that nakedness should be seen in an appropriate environment and whilst in Wesselmann's piece she is neither in the bedroom nor bathroom, she remains within the domestic interior. The full-length figure owed much to paintings of female bathers and the pose, used in girlie magazines and paintings alike maximises the exposure of the figure's breasts and reveals the entire front of the body. Comprising limited detail, the figure resembles a pink silhouette with dark pink nipples, the suggestion of shading over a rounded pubis and a stuck-on mouth – with the latter being reminiscent of the smile which Lewis Carroll's Cheshire cat left hanging in the air after the rest of its body had faded from view. The image seems comparatively innocuous considering the exhibition's pretext and that Wesselmann's work had started to get more risqué the previous year when he produced *Great American Nudes #46* and *#47* (Fig. 3.9). These two almost identical images show the reclining figure wearing lacey underpants, in which the figure has her hand. Whilst the figure is not shown as touching herself, and her genitals remain hidden, it is clear what is being implied and the image can be described as being sexually suggestive without relying on graphic depictions of female anatomy.

When the *Erotic Art 66* exhibition was held at the Janis Gallery two years later, the show's title prompted Canaday to once again accuse the artworld of sensationalism. Taking place in October 1966, this was later in the same year that the Supreme Court had reviewed American obscenity laws after the furore surrounding *Fanny Hill*. The advance media attention afforded to the exhibition began in the summer of that year when there were rumours regarding whether the gallery might

attract the censors. Canaday commented that 'the police were virtually being dared to close it' even before it opened.[36] The critic went on to accuse the participating artists of producing work purely with the intention to 'out-eroticize one another. '[37] He complained that the visual representations of genitalia, intercourse and 'all the rest of the physical and visual paraphernalia of sex' was not erotic in the true sense of the word and what the show amounted to was 'neither a good, dirty romp nor a sophisticated display of perversion' and the participating artists were rebuked for taking part purely for the publicity. [38] However, it also emphasised the general public's predilection for an exhibition which did not shy away from adult content.

The gallery appeared to have a definite agenda from the very beginning. In a letter sent to Wesselmann by Sidney Janis dated 2nd May 1966, the owner wrote that he hoped to include one or two of Wesselmann's works in the show when it opened in the Fall season. Janis told Wesselmann that the exhibition was to include 'several of our own artists… (and) other young artists most interestingly involved with the subject' and invited him to submit work which 'may be as extreme as you wish'.[39] In the space at the bottom of this letter Wesselmann sketched out five ideas – a breast viewed from the side, four of which included clouds and resembled his *Seascapes*, whilst the other was a possible shaped canvas. Given the opportunity to produce a piece of art which might be sexually explicit, Wesselmann seemed to play safe in comparison to some of his contemporaries. Whether or not it was due to the publicity the show received and the possibility that erotic works had market potential at that

[36] John Canaday, 'The Trammels of False Emphasis', *New York Times*, 4 October 1966, p. 53 (hereafter referred to as Canaday, 1966a).
[37] Canaday (1966a), p. 53.
[38] John Canaday, 'This Way to the Big Erotic Art Show', *New York Times*, 9 October 1966, Section D, p. 27 (hereafter referred to as Canaday, 1966b).
[39] Letter on headed paper from the Sidney Janis Gallery to 'Tom' dated 2 May 1966. Wesselmann Estate, New York, uncatalogued.

point in time, Wesselmann began increasing the sexual content of his paintings. In the same year as the *Erotic Art Show* he created *Face #1* (Fig. 3.10), a shaped canvas showing a woman with her mouth open which included a painted shadow, the shaping of which suggested the woman was about to engage in fellatio. Wesselmann went on to produce more explicit nudes that year, including *Study for Spread Leg Nude* (1966) (Fig. 3.11) and *Helen* (1966) (Fig. 3.12), although it is unclear whether these were produced after the *Erotic Art Show's* success and the gallery owner's invitation to up the ante. The use of the open-legged pose may have been in response to Wesselmann describing seeing his first spread-legged nude in 1965-66. However, what is of particular interest is that the model used in these paintings, and *Great American Nude* #88 (1967) (Fig. 3.13) is not Claire. This demonstrates that Claire did not pose for all of the *Great American Nudes* and that she was not the model for Wesselmann's most explicit images, calling into question the artist's assertion that it was his wife who provided the erotic inspiration for his works. Wesselmann went onto quantify using certain poses in a 1968 interview when he said; 'As if perfectly respectable women, wives or girl friends never spread their legs or stick their tongues out at their men'.[40] Yet whilst this suggested something of a personal context for the poses, the artist did not go into any detail regarding moving away from using his wife as the model.

Whilst Canaday had commended Wesselmann' input to the *Girlie* exhibition, the critic referred to *Seascape #16* (1966) (Fig. 3.14) as seeming out of place due to what he described as 'an *anti-erotic* treatment of the female bosom' (my italics).[41] Elements of Canaday's review were echoed in Lucy Lippard's description of

[40] 'Tom Wesselmann: Pleasure Painter' in *Avant Garde*, Vol. 5 (November 1968). The magazine ran from January 1968 to July 1971, during which time 14 issues were published. It included erotic content and used language considered crude at the time.
[41] Canaday (1996a), p. 53.

Seascape #17 (Two Tits) (1966) the following year, in which she described Wesselmann as exhibiting the 'esthetics of nastiness' and lamented the tendency for artists to depict body parts and sexual acts in the most un-erotic of ways.[42] Certainly, Wesselmann made no attempt to make the image of a single, pink breast placed against an expanse of blue sky, appear realistic. There is no modulation or sense of corporeality as breast, sky, clouds and sea are all treated as flat areas of bright, synthetic colour. Yet with the breast dominating the image, the viewer is directed to focus on this part of a clearly naked woman, and it is difficult to do this without subsequently associating it with an entirely nude, female body.

Women's breasts have been long been the focus of sexual arousal and even when, for example, 1950s and 1960s girlie magazines could not show full nudity, the exposure of breasts and their fetishization became normalised. Caroyln Latteier notes how the focus placed upon this part of the female body 'avoids(s) the full impact of woman' and allows heterosexual males to 'get excited about (her) breasts without worrying about all the complexities of who (the woman) really is'.[43] In her exploration of what she identified as the 'Western breast fetish', Marilyn Yalom noted that the eroticisation of women's breasts overtook their associations with the maternal female.[44] In her book *A History of the Breast*, Yalom noted the attention paid to women's breasts and how the particular appeal of busty Hollywood stars 'gave the impression that sexuality was centered in the bosom', something which is emphasised in many of Wesselmann's images.[45]

---

[42] Lippard (1967), p.91.
[43] Carolyn Latteier, *Breasts:The Women's Perspective on an American Obsession* (New York, London: Harrington Park Press, 1998), p. 115.
[44] Marilyn Yalom, *A History of the Breast* (London: Harper Collins, 1997), p. 202.
[45] Yalom (1997), p. 193.

Canaday seemed disappointed that neither the police nor the church moved in to close the show, and bestowed Larry Rivers 'giant Negro athlete' the accolade of being 'the most outrageous bid for top spot'.[46] Rivers' large multi-media sculpture *Lampman Loves It* (1966) (Fig. 3.15) sees a figure bent over whilst another standing figure penetrates it from behind with a lightbulb penis. Yet whilst this was initially far more shocking than Wesselmann's exhibit, Rivers alluded to a more widespread commodification and fetishisation of the sexualised female body which had become comparatively conventional.

In 1967, Lucy Lippard questioned why, 'during this age of obscenity trials and 42nd Street stag movies… have so few art shows been raided, while books and films are constantly banned?'[47] Pondering on the differences between the erotic in visual arts and literature, Lippard surmised that a single image could not replace the sequential nature of the written word which 'proceeding in time, is more likely to provoke the rhythms of this sequence… A book even has the additional advantage… in that it permits the imaginative reader more scope for personal fantasy'.[48] Figurative art and pornography, Lippard suggested, might have the advantage of appearing 'instructive' but had limited appeal. Lippard believed that there had been a change in attitude during the 1950s which 'took the blatant representation of supposedly erotic subject matter to extremes of the absurd' and cited the prevalence of 'topless nightclubs and girlie advertising' as effectively numbing the public to

[46] Canaday (1966a), p. 53. Canaday suggested that, if the police and church did not attempt to censor the show 'perhaps the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) will object and get him a couple of columns in the newspaper in spite of everything'. In his article 'Renewal of Sexual Symbols and Metaphors in Works by Larry Rivers' in *Literature in North Queensland*, 19:1 (1992), pp117-125, Peter Rolfe Monks described the sculpture as 'A black mechano-man penetrates from the rear a forward-leaning figure, seemingly mulatto' (p. 120). He quotes Rivers as saying his work was 'referring to the dehumanization of black people under slavery and the popular fear of black virility' with this being a 'hostile act symbolic of racial degradation' and not an example of 1960s sexual permissiveness.
47 Lippard, (1967), p. 92.
48 Ibid.

representations of, among other things, 'genitalia, breasts (and) thighs'.[49] Subsequently, the sexualisation of women's bodies had lost some of its shock value, and whilst this was in part due to art aestheticising the unclothed body it was particularly indebted to popular culture's growing sexualisation of the feminine for a consumer society.

Clean and Dirty Eroticism

When Miller wrote *Tropic of Cancer* in 1930s Paris, he stated that he would 'prefer to be a poor man of Europe' than reside in America. [50] Miller called his country of birth 'the very incarnation of doom' and believed that it would ultimately 'drag the whole world down to (a) bottomless pit' and rued 'the cheap idealism of Americans'.[51] According to Miller, the New York of the Great Depression was a 'city erected over a hollow pit of nothingness' whereas even the beggars of Paris remained proud and gave the 'the illusion of being at home.'[52] For Miller, his move to Paris defined him as an author. Using a style of writing described as 'fictional biography', Mary V Dearborn noted that whilst this had 'some precedent in Europe' there was 'no distinct counterpart in America'.[53] Quickly aligning himself with the Parisian *avant garde*, Miller embraced his status as a displaced American with an almost romanticised vision of a life which, according to his character in *Tropic of Cancer*, included periods of near poverty and an existence on the perimeter of society amongst proud and filthy beggars.[54]

---

49 Lippard (1967), p. 94.
[50] Miller (1993), p.76.
[51] Miller (1993), pp. 99-100.
[52] Miller (1993), p. 74.
[53] Mary V Dearborn, *The Happiest Man Alive: A Biography of Henry Miller* (London: Harper Collins, 1991) p.12.
[54]Miller (1993), p.74. Miller described Paris as being full of poor people, 'the proudest and filthiest lot of beggars to ever walk the earth'.

The women Miller wrote about in *Tropic of Cancer* varied from prostitutes to ladies of social standing, but they all fulfilled a basic need – the satisfying of a bodily function rather than an emotional one. Miller frequently describes the corporeal body as a site of pleasure, repulsion and decay. This would have been reflective of his experience of 1930s France and the public warnings against the dangers of sex and infection, which the author described as 'grimly realistic, haunting reminders that Paris's equally ubiquitous prostitutes carried disease' and 'that sex and death were inevitable partners.'[55] Indeed, Europe was seen as a hotbed of sexual disease and syphilis was believed to have been brought to America from Europe centuries before.[56] During World War II, US troops who were sent overseas were issued with the pamphlet *Sex Hygiene and Venereal Disease* by the war department and warned about the perils of sleeping with foreign women of loose morals. However, whilst the European sexual body had been tainted with the notion that it was unclean, the erotic body of 1960s America was thoroughly sanitised.

In contrast to Miller's encounters with diseased prostitutes, Wesselmann's all-American nudes seem antiseptically clean, something which is emphasised by the smooth surfaces and synthetic colours which became typical of Wesselmann's work. This became even more apparent when he began fabricating his figures from moulded plastic as is the case with *Great American Nude #75* (1965) (Fig. 3.16) – a wipe-clean nude for a hygienically minded society. In *Bathtub Collage #2* (1963) (Fig. 3.17), the figure bathing was taken from an advertisement for pink Dove soap and other works from this series included actual bars of soap or collage which depicted products such as Listerine mouth wash. The use of Arrid deodorant was advertised as helping women to eliminate the wrong type of body odour, described

[55] Dearborn (1991), p. 124.
[56] John Parascandola, 'Quarantining Women: Venereal Disease and Rapid Treatment Centers in World War II America' in *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 82:3, (Fall 2009), pp. 435-436.

as ‘sex perspiration’, which was said to be caused by female arousal whilst using mouth wash was sold under the premise that it made women more attractive to the opposite sex.[57] An advertisement for Arrid deodorant entitled ‘Sex and Your Perspiration’ featured four drawings of women in different situations with an accompanying question for each of them. The first defined two different kinds of perspiration, one which was ‘physical’ and the other which was ‘nervous’. The latter was ‘stimulated by emotion or sexual excitement.’ The second drawing in the series asked, ‘Which perspiration is the worst offender?’ before responding with a pseudo-medical explanation which saw doctors identifying ‘sex perspiration’ as ‘the big offender in underarm stains and odor’. This was identified as being ‘the most offensive odor’ as it came from bigger, more powerful glands.’ The third scenario went on to explain how Arrid was ‘*specifically* formulated to overcome offensive “sex perspiration” odor’ as it was fortified with Perstop.

These products were primarily aimed at women with the sole function of making them more appealing to men by reducing any sign of normal bodily functions. The extent to which newness and cleanliness was considered appealing is reflected in an article by the critic G R Swenson published in 1966. He alluded to Wesselmann’s use of plastic and ‘newly installed bathroom tiles’ in his assemblages as stimulating the olfactory senses, and how this triggered associations such as the ‘imagined smell of a teen-age girl’s skin as she steps out of the shower’, making a direct association between youth, cleanliness, the senses and the sexual.[58] Whilst Wesselmann’s nudes might not exemplify the old adage that cleanliness was next to godliness, it certainly suggested it had a certain sterile sexiness.

[57] The advert for Arrid appeared in women’s magazines during 1963.
[58]G. R. Swenson, ‘Wesselmann: The Honest Nude’, in *Art and Artists*, 1:2, May 1966, p. 56.

Whilst Barbara Rose suggested that Wesselmann's inorganic treatment of flesh was an attempt to make his nudes 'intentionally unappealing' there is something about the sterile eroticism portrayed through the sleek artificiality of a graphic style that suggested the sanitisation of these women was an integral part of their appeal.[59] The more plastic her physical appearance and the more she became a stereotype of sex appeal, the more she seemed to embody social idealisations of erotic womanhood or act as an advertisement for it. Yet whilst Wesselmann and Miller's women offered a different type of sexual experience, the attention they both gave to individual physical features remained prominent in order to create a specific sexual female identity which was predicated upon satisfying the needs, and curiosity, of the heterosexual male.

Painted Versions of Dirty Words

Wesselmann and Miller detailed those areas of the female body towards which society remained particularly sensitive. It is not just the referencing of those tabooed, anatomical features which pushed the boundaries of what was deemed socially acceptable. The use of vulgar language reinforced the perceived offensiveness of both the body part and women to which it referred. Whilst the acknowledgement of the existence of female sex organs might be seen as a positive way of demystifying a sexually mature woman's anatomy, Wesselmann and Miller presented it as a feature to be displayed and explored by the male viewer. In his writing, Miller makes no attempt to distinguish between women, their sexual organs and intercourse, referring to all three as 'cunt'. He identified this as being a literary device 'to awaken, to usher in a sense of reality' which had little to do with 'sexual excitation', resonating with Wesselmann's contention that he gave his nudes shaved vaginas in order to make his

[59] Rose (1988), p.24.

images forceful or aggressive.[60] This aspect of Miller's writing led to contemporary Kate Millett's feminist appraisal of the author's work, within which she accused him of 'simply convert(ing) woman to "cunt"…', the result of which was that there was 'no personality to recognize or encounter' and therefore 'none to tame'.[61] Certainly, the lack of individuality which resulted from reducing women to their sexual characteristics is a prominent feature of Wesselmann's female figures.

Miller's male characters displayed both a fascination, and sense of revulsion, with women's bodies and sex, even though it was described as 'the eternal preoccupation.'[62] Van Norden, a major character in *Tropic of Cancer*, recounted the repulsion he felt when another protagonist described taking a close look at his lover's sex organs. Van Norden retold the story of how the man went 'down on his knees and with those two skinny fingers of his spread(ing) her cunt open' making a 'sticky little sound', with the latter detail preoccupying the storyteller's thoughts.[63] He also recollected being repelled by a woman who had shaved off her pubic hair, describing her genitals as resembling 'a dead clam'.[64] In a summary of his thoughts on women, Van Norden described female genitalia as having 'nothing to it after all' before concluding that the more he looked at it the less interesting it became.[65] Ruminating on the sameness of all 'cunts' – both the anatomical feature and as a term to describe women in general, Van Norden concluded that any sense of individuality that women might have with their clothes on is lost when they are naked.[66]

---

[60] Miller (1963), p. 587.
[61] Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (New York; Doubleday, 1970; repr. London: Virago Press, 1981) p.297.
[62] Miller, (1993), p.143. Miller describes 'cunt' as 'the eternal preoccupation'.
[63] Miller (1993), p.125.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.

It is the perceived sameness of the naked female body which is prevalent in Wesselmann's nudes. Whilst they might occasionally have different coloured hair or stockings, they are essentially identical, comprising the same physical characteristics which ultimately defines them. It is this lack of physical distinctiveness which is exemplified in *Great American Nude #82* – the same moulded plastic figure which was offered in five different colourways as though supplying an option for all tastes. Hair colour and skin tone were interchangeable, but the sexual characteristics remained the same. The artist also described that he gave his series the title *Great American Nudes* so as not to bestow the figures with any sense of individuality. Wesselmann was aware that there could be problems attached to entitling works when the images were already 'fraught... with all kinds of poetic possibilities that you could make all kinds of titles or you could read things into it' and he chose to counteract this by 'just (giving) them numbers to neutralize that effect'.[67] However, it might be said that this had the opposite result as the lack of specificity allowed the viewer to impose an identity or narrative onto the figures of their own choosing. Wesselmann also described minimising pictorial details so as not to 'interfere with the *fact* of the nude', although this resulted in the creation of a stereotypical idealisation of the American woman as a characterless, hyper-sexualised and generalised construct of femininity.[68] The result was somewhere between an everywoman and no-woman which allowed the viewer the opportunity to do with her as they wished. However, somewhat contrary to this was Wesselmann's continued contention that it be recognised that Claire was the model for these paintings and the sexuality inherent in the figure was symbolic of their relationship. Subsequently it becomes increasingly difficult to reconcile these two declarations.

[67] Oral History Interview (1984), n. p.
[68] Stealingworth (1980), p.23.

Both Wesselmann and Miller discussed the effect that pubic hair had on the female body. Whilst Wesselmann's shaved *Great American Nude #34* (1964) (Fig. 3.18) indeed had nothing more than 'a crack between her legs', the stuck-on pubic hair which he added to *Great American Nude* #55 (1964) led to John Adkins Richardson accusing the artist of being 'as obsessed as any preadolescent youth by pubic hair – a substance that appears to demarcate the last frontier of the avant-garde' before concluding its addition as 'antagonistic to convention and pretty obviously satirical,' despite it being an actual physical signifier of a woman's sexual maturity. [69]

It was highly likely that the women to whom Miller referred as being shaved, were prostitutes attempting to minimise infestations from pubic lice and fleas. Whilst the artistic, and specifically, classical precedent had seen artists shying away from including pubic hair, Wesselmann excluded it because he considered it 'blatantly erotic', as well as believing that its omission resulted in a similar visual response to the artist using a vivid and 'strong red'.[70] However, the shock was more likely to be that the contemporary convention was for women *not* to remove their pubic hair.[71]

Miller had Van Norden recall being shocked when he saw a work of art which had a realistic representation of female genitals, and he described Rodin's statue *Iris, Messenger of the Gods* from 1894 (Fig. 3.19) as being a representation of 'a real cunt' which he said 'looked ghastly', before concluding that even art could

[69] John Adkins Richardson, 'Dada, Camp, and the Mode Called Pop' in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 24:4 (Summer 1966), p. 556.
[70] Stealingworth (1980), p. 23.
[71] Rebecca M. Herzig, *Plucked: A History of Hair Removal* (New York University Press, 2015) In her publication, Herzig noted that American women 'did not publicly display(ing) their pubic hair until the introduction of the bikini in 1946' (p. 136) and even then, it was unusual for depilation of genital hair. Female university students who took part in an informal survey in 1971 showed that only 2% would shave or shape their pubic hair. Herzig identifies waxing and full pubic hair removal as becoming increasingly popular during the 2000s.

not make this part of a woman's body beautiful.[72] It is highly likely that Wesselmann might have encountered the sculpture when it was included in the Museum of Modern Art's Rodin exhibition which was held in New York in 1963 – a time when *Tropic of Cancer* was not only available but causing a media stir.

Rodin's naked and headless body has the female figure in the act of opening her legs in a way that reveals her genitals, makes them the sculpture's focal point and invites the viewer to examine them. The figure adopts a balletic pose, balancing on the left foot whilst taking hold of the right foot with the right arm and holding it away from the body, parting its legs. The dynamic configuration of Rodin's figure, which allows for the genitals to be fully revealed, shares much with the pose which Wesselmann had his model adopt in, for example, *Great American Nude #87* (Fig. 3.20) and *#91*. In a sketch of the former the model holds her leg away from her body and maximises the display. Whilst Wesselmann's figure is reclining, there are also similarities with the truncation of the limbs which extend beyond the canvas. This brings the viewer closer to the torso, breasts and pubic region. Whilst there is a sense in Rodin's figure that there is an interest in the body's anatomical structure and corporeality, the pose was no doubt directed by the artist in order to maximise the display of the genital region. Similarly, even though Wesselmann suggested that the open-leg nudes came about as a result of his wife assuming the position whilst modelling for him, other models would no doubt have been instructed to assume this posture. It is certainly not a pose that would be adopted naturally and further negates any sense that Wesselmann was using it in direct relation to his personal relationship with the model. These are not simply naked figures, they are images of women exhibiting their most private anatomical features for an unseen viewer.

[72] Miller (1993), p. 144.

Another feature of Rodin and Wesselmann's nudes is the lack of head or clearly visible face. Instead, the breasts and pubic area seems to transform into an appropriation of one, something which has much in common with Magritte's *The Rape* (Fig. 3.21) (1934). Whilst it is usually the facial feature which gives a person a clear identity, here the body's sexual attributes take the place of a visage. This denies the figure any sense of individuality and defines women purely in terms of their sexual characteristics.

Regardless of how Wesselmann indicated the female genital area, he made it a feature of his nudes. Initially showing it as a single line which indicated a crack between the figure's legs or as a dark triangle, he progressed to adding a sliver of pink protruding from a mound of pubic hair before depicting the labia as garish-coloured folds which resembled the painted rose petals he often included alongside his nudes. These were not the sexless depictions of women that had previously pervaded art, they alluded to bodies that participated in erotic acts.

Lynda Nead wrote;

> One of the principle goals of the female nude has been the containment and regulation of the female sexual body. The forms, conventions and poses of art have worked metaphorically to shore up the female body – to seal orifices and to prevent marginal matter from transgressing the boundary dividing the inside of the body and the outside…[73]

Wesselmann's nudes were not contained or wholly idealised. His open-legged figures were presented as bodies whose physical boundaries might be breached from the exterior and whilst his way of rendering flesh did not allude to any sense of corporeality, the suggestion that these open-mouthed, spread-legged women invited

[73] Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (New York & London: Routledge, 1992), p. 6.

penetration from the viewer's gaze, did allude to a certain physical reality. As such, this goes beyond the mere adoption of a male gaze which precludes the female viewer from experiencing the painting in the same way as her male counterparts.

This resonates with Millett identifying a tendency in Miller's writing whereby he used speech which had 'the inflection of telling the boys' and alluding to shared experiences.[74] Millett expanded on this by distinguishing Miller's use of humour as being that of 'the men's room' and described it as being dependent upon 'a whole series of shared assumptions, attitudes and responses, which constitute bonds in themselves.'[75] Suggesting that only an 'in-group' will be aware of what is being implied, it presents sex as 'a game… Its object is less the satisfaction of libido than ego' as the shared focus of male attention is the subject of the in-joke, excluded from the experience.[76] Within such a dynamic, sex is seen as something which is 'hard to get, comic, secretive' whilst 'cunts' (women) are seen as 'transparently stupid and contemptible', almost inviting humiliation.[77] As such, Wesselmann's late 1960s nudes in particular suggest a similar reaction – one which might be shared by the heterosexual male reader of *Playboy* or those all-male working environments in which it might have once been seen as acceptable to hang a risqué pin-up.

This sense that Wesselmann's nudes appeal to an implied 'men's club' is further reinforced by the language he used when he engaged in the Oral History Interview.[78] As a critic and active member of the New York art scene since 1952, the interviewer Irving Sandler had mixed in the same circles as Wesselmann and was involved with the Tanager Gallery where Wesselmann had been one of the member artists. Whilst the two men might not have been friends as such, they shared a

[74] Millett (1981), p. 303.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid
[77] Ibid.
[78] Oral History Interview (1984), n. p.

number of acquaintances and experiences which resulted in a possible male bonhomie and as such Wesselmann's candid language might not seem out of place. However, what seems most noticeable is the continued use of terms such as 'beavers', 'cunts' and 'tits' when describing the female body or alluding to some of his images suggesting that these women were having their 'pussy eaten'.[79] Whilst Wesselmann was using the same language that Miller had employed as a literary device intended to shock, as a feature of conversation, this was more redolent of vulgarities being used in all-male environments as a display of masculine sexual bravado.

Miller had openly admitted that he used obscenities in *Tropic of Cancer* to be provocative and hoped to achieve a similar level of notoriety that Theodore Dreiser had achieved with the publication of *Sister Carrie* in 1900. Miller simply labelled Dreiser's publication as a 'dirty book' and resolved to write similar.[80] The author was fully aware that his work would prove controversial and the fact that *Tropic of Cancer* was banned from publication in the United States for thirty years after it appeared in France, illustrates that Miller achieved much of what he had foreseen, if not, hoped for. Linguistically, Miller was using what Edward Sagarin, identified as 'the vocabulary of the street, the language of the gutter' in order to create an edgy, realistic feel to the book.[81] *The Anatomy of Dirty Words* was published by Sagarin in 1962, during a period which was scrutinising what constituted obscenity. The author examined the connection between using vulgarities in speech and the taboo subjects to which they referred, concluding that the word became imbued with the same 'dirtiness' as the object. In terms of what Wesselmann showed in his paintings, the

[79] Oral History Interview (1984), n. p.
[80] Dearborn (1991), p.128.
[81] Edward Sagarin, *The Anatomy of Dirty Words*, (New York: Lyle Stuart, 1962), p.83.

way in which he had the figures expose themselves imbued the body part with a sense of 'dirtiness', despite its pristine visual appearance.

Sagarin identified 'cunt' as being the most shocking word that was in use in the early 1960s, whether it was used to describe a part of the female anatomy or as a derogatory term for an individual. As Germaine Greer wrote, 'The worst name anyone can be called is *cunt*' yet when it came to the female genitals themselves, she noted that the best thing it could be 'is small and unobtrusive.'[82] In a psycholinguistic study of obscene language undertaken in 1978, Timothy Jay concluded that reducing an individual to their genitals indicated that they have no brains or heart – in essence, they are incomplete or fragmented as human beings and denied intellect or emotions.[83] As Jay surmises, 'referrents to sex organs… terms for body parts, products and processes are offensive and also related to the emotion of disgust'.[84]

Sagarin noted it was highly likely that 'if the language of profanity were to be replaced by the language of respectability, one would have to accept all organs of the body as free from shame', implying that the anatomical feature was tainted by the word used to describe it.[85] Examining the use of less offensive slang words to describe body parts, Sagarin accepted that using terms such as 'oranges' when referring to breasts was not necessarily derogatory and came with less shameful associations. Certainly, when Wesselmann painted oranges alongside breasts, as illustrated in *Bedroom Painting #4* (1967) (Fig. 3.22), he not only drew attention to

[82] Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (London: McGibbon and Kee Ltd, 1970; repr. London: Flamingo, 1999), p. 44.
[83] Timothy Jay, *Cursing in America: A psycholinguistic study of dirty language in the courts, in the movies, in the schoolyards and on the streets* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1992), p.180.
[84] Jay (1992), p.194.
[85] Sagarin (1962), p.102.

the visual similarities, he may also have been alluding to popular slang. However, writing as Stealingworth, Wesselmann explained that he purposely included fruit and flowers in order to illustrate the 'relation to the breast, navel and vagina, as though to underscore the importance of women to the fertility of his work.'[86] Used in a more traditional manner, both fruit and flowers have indicated female fecundity, yet Wesselmann suggests that he used them as visual metaphors for those parts of a woman's body which somehow reinforced his own fertility and virility, possibly provoking both a creative and direct sexual male response.

Sagarin highlighted how the language of sex, including references to body parts, problematically relied on the use of euphemism, clumsy technical terms or profanity.[87] Worst of all, it suggested the existence of a divide between 'a society that abhors sex while idolizing the male who obtains it and denouncing the female who offers it.'[88] Not unlike Millett, Sagarin stated that the use of obscenities and euphemisms within all-male peer groups signalled a 'need for masculine identification' which displayed an 'ambivalence of shame and want, fear and desire, lust and guilt'.[89] A predominant feature of this was predicated upon what a male would openly share with other members of a group including the details of what he would do *to* a woman, rather than *with* her, which implied a sense of masculine bravado and a lack of thought to the consensual. This is echoed in the poses which Wesselmann has his nudes adopt, particularly the ones in which she is posed with her legs apart, where it appears as though she is waiting for something to be done *to* her. Whilst this might simply be receiving the imposed male gaze, she is not expected to have a participatory role in whatever might take place.

[86] Sagarin (1962), p.124.
[87] Sagarin (1962), p.128.
[88] Sagarin (1962), p. 129.
[89] Sagarin (1962), p.125.

Wesselmann did produce a number of works where four-letter words featured in the titles. It appears that this was the artist's choice and not something which was bestowed upon his paintings at a later date, as they are in keeping with Wesselmann's spoken rhetoric. Certainly, the slang term 'tit' appeared in a number of his works' titles, including, *Bedroom Tit Box* and the illustration along with the title *Shaved Cunt* (1967) appeared in the publication produced by Wesselmann.

Among the Wildenstein Plattner's online digital corpus of Wesselmann's work, two titles appear with no accompanying image or further information – *Cut Out Cunt Study* (1968) and *Cut-Out Cunt (with Hair)* (1968), suggesting the artist's propensity for using the word. In April 1968, Wesselmann took part in a recorded interview with Jacqueline Bogrand in April 1968. Whilst the quality of the recording is not very good, you can hear the artist explaining that he was aware that a 'cunt has shock value' and that whilst it operated in the context of a painting he did not care what it did to the viewer. [90] He explained that he was often asked 'when are you going to start doing cunts?'[91] Whilst he can be heard saying 'I've started doing them now', it is unclear whether he was referring to them becoming more of a feature of his female nudes or whether he might have been considering isolating this detail in the same way that he had with the breast.[92] However, he can be heard emphasising that he had his own programme planned out and would do things in his own order, despite people often being impatient.

In 1968, Wesselmann received a letter from Grove Press, the same New York publishing house that had printed *Tropic of Cancer*. It was regarding an upcoming

[90] Jacqueline Bogrand, *Interview with Tom Wesselmann* , 26 April 1968. Part of the Barbara Rose papers, 1962-circa 1969 (Box 1, Folder 17; sound cassette) Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution: The sound quality is poor and it is difficult to discern most of what is being said and only parts of Wesselmann's responses are clear.
[91] Bogrand (1968).
[92] Bogrand (1968).

article ‘on the erotic in recent painting’ which was to appear in the magazine the *Evergreen Review*, and the author of the letter explained that this had ‘naturally’ led to Wesselmann being mentioned.[93] The literary review, founded in 1957, described itself as ‘an assault on American propriety: literary, sexual, and social’ and published work by ‘mixed voices from the literary and social fringes’ including, for example, William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, Susan Sontag and Henry Miller, and it was particularly known for its erotic content.[94] The informal letter, which began by asking after Claire as well and enquiring ‘how’s the fishing?’ requested the use of *Great American Nude #81, Black-stockinged Brunette* and its author had also mooted the idea of using ‘an erected cock’.[95] It seems as though at this point in his career Wesselmann was being seen less as a Pop artist and becoming more noticed for the erotic work he produced. In 1973 and 1974 Wesselmann received requests from Gemini Smith Inc. to include a number of his images in Bradley Smith’s upcoming publication *Erotic Art of the Masters: The 18th, 19th and 20th Centuries.*[96] Smith wished to include *Bedroom Painting #20, The All American Nude, Face No. 1* and a painting identified as *Double Masturbation*, which he had got from the artist Walasse Ting, someone who regularly sent correspondence to Wesselmann. Wesselmann noted on the letter that the correct title was *Nude Masturbation Drawing* from 1968 (Fig. 3.23), a far cry from giving his work numbers so as not to further problematise the image or any interpretation of what might be depicted.

[93] Letter from ‘Arnold’ to ‘Tom’ on Grove Press letterhead dated 3 July 1968, Wesselmann Estate, NewYork, uncatalogued.
[94] https://evergreenreview.com/about/ accessed 24 August 2022. The magazine’s website gives a brief overview of its history. In its original form, it ran from 1957 until 1973. It was then re-launched online in 1998 and again in 2017.
[95] Letter 3 July 1968.
[96] Letter signed by Iris Moses, assistant to Bradley Smith to ‘Mr Wesselmann’ on Gemini Smith letterhead dated 19 December 1973. Subsequent correspondence was signed by Bradley Smith and addressed to ‘Tom’ dated 10 January 1974 and 21 January. Wesselmann Estate, New York, uncatalogued.

Beyond the 1960s world of high art and literary culture, the use of obscenities was not only generally frowned upon but could result in prosecution. In the same month that *Tropic of Cancer* was judged not to be obscene, the comedian Lenny Bruce was on trial in the Criminal Court. Having been arrested in April at the Café au Go Go nightclub in Greenwich Village, Bruce and the club's owners were at risk of a jail sentence. Bruce's lawyer Ephraim London argued that the comedian's 'performances constituted social criticism and satire' and therefore had redeeming value, not unlike Miller's writing.[97] Protesters who supported Bruce, which included Allen Ginsberg, Henry Miller and Norman Mailer, attended a demonstration on Saturday 13th June 1964 which was in support of the satirist and the fight to protect 'creative activities' which should be 'free from censorship or harassment'.[98] Arguing that Bruce did not 'arouse (the) prurient interests of his listeners' by using vulgarities with 'satirical intent' they suggested that it was up to individuals, and not prosecutors, to decide whether or not they were offended.[99] Ginsberg went as far as to suggest that it was the creative *avant garde*, including artists, writers and performers who society sought to restrict because they positioned themselves outside of the prevailing social norms.[100]

In 1974, ten years after Bruce's arrest, a group calling themselves *Artists for a Fair D. A.* (A.F.D.A.) placed a large piece in the *New York Times* entitled 'Lenny Bruce Arrested' to mark the anniversary of the comedian's arrest. Supported by people working within the arts including Clement Greenberg, the Sidney Janis Gallery, Linda Nochlin, Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg and Wesselmann they

[97] Thomas Buckley, 'Lenny Bruce and 2 Café Owners Go on Trial in Obscenity Case', *New York Times*, 17 June 1964, p. 46 (hereafter referred to as Buckley, 1964a).
[98] Thomas Buckley, '100 fight arrest of Lenny Bruce' *New York Times*, June 14, 1964, p.75 (hereafter referred to as Buckley, 1964b).
[99] Buckley (1964b), p. 75.
[100] Ibid.

argued that the newly appointed District Attorney Richard H Kuh showed no 'respect for individual and artistic liberties' due to his involvement in Bruce's prosecution whilst in the role of Assistant District Attorney.[101] The A.F.D.A. lambasted the D.A.'s actions, stating 'There is hardly anything so repugnant to the principle of artistic liberty as the spectacle of law enforcement officers proceeding to render esthetic judgments, and to penalize artists who do not conform to their self-appointed standards' before concluding that the comedian's sentencing 'was a calculated attempt at muzzling iconoclastic satire, a veritable crusade against artistic liberty.'[102] It is clear that Wesselmann believed that it was an artist's prerogative to test artistic and moral boundaries whilst remaining uncensored.

However, in October 1973, as feminist scholarship began to blossom, Barbara Lawrence published an article which highlighted how vulgar language predominantly targeted and demeaned women and questioned the extent to which changes in obscenity laws had allowed it to become socially endorsed.

The article, _ _ _ _ *Isn't a Dirty Word* appeared in the New York Times and within it, the author examined the difference between 'phony-sounding middle-class words' (such as proper medical terms for anatomical parts) and their tabooed alternatives. Lawrence identified how 'the sources and the functions' of the language frequently alluded to actions which implied a physically invasive, damaging or mechanical action being carried out on 'an obviously denigrated *(female)* object'.[103] Lawrence ascertained that slang words effectively dehumanised women and, in particular, their 'sexual and procreative' characteristics which were reduced to 'their

[101]Artists For a Fair D. A., 'Lenny Bruce Arrested', *New York Times*, 3 April 1964, p. 40.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Barbara Lawrence, '_ _ _ _ Isn't a Dirty Word', *New York Times*, 27 October 1973, p. 31.

least organic'.[104] Lawrence questioned why it was that the vulgar, sexual language which had become popularised by male authors was seen as being somehow liberating yet in reality it was 'particularly contemptuous of the female partner', and so she questioned 'the values of a society whose literature and entertainment rest(ed)… on sexual pejoratives.'[105] This is equally true of both Wesselmann's use of linguistic and visual descriptions which implied that, as a man and an artist, he not only had free reign to present the female body in whichever way he chose, it was his constitutional right to do so. Operating within a social construct which afforded increased freedom to the eroticising male perspective, it seemed as though the best way to challenge conservatism was to exploit the female body and in particular those parts which, ironically, patriarchal society had tabooed.

Whilst the art community fought against restrictions on freedom of expression, four-letter words became the language of counter-culture protest. The Free Speech Movement (FSM), which was also known as the Filthy Speech Movement, was formed in 1964 by students at the University of California, Berkeley who were protesting the prohibiting of on-campus political activity. In 1965 John Thomson, a young man who was not a student, was arrested for public obscenity when he sat on the steps of the Student Union building holding a piece of paper upon which was inscribed one word – fuck. In response, the head of the FSM, Art Goldberg, organised a rally attended by 150 students, some of which shouted out the letters spelling out the word. Seen as the oppression of the students' rights to free speech as a political issue, graduate student Michael Klein followed the arrested man into the campus police station whereby he started to read from *Lady Chatterly's Lover,* a book which had been banned until 1959. He, too, was arrested. As W. J.

[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid.

Rorabaugh points out in *Berkeley At War: The 1960s* 'Klein was about to learn that society distinguished between reading a book in private and reading aloud from that same book in public.'[106]

The use of obscene language was essentially a subversive, anti-establishment act, but it also distinguished between social groups. On the one side were the creatives who were exercising their right to freedom of expression, irrespective of whether this might subjugate other members of society. On the other was the counter-culture who were using four-letter words as a political tool in the fight for social equality, without considering whether the language they employed was evocative of sexual acts or oppression. Somewhat more mainstream was the use of vulgar language amongst groups of men in order to demonstrate their macho, sexual virility. This sense of locker-room bonhomie was becoming an increasingly socially prevalent way for men to establish their heterosexual credentials and was exactly the demographic that *Playboy* was appealing to by defining women as erotic spectacles for male entertainment and endorsing being seen to look, rather than suggesting it should be an illicit act.

The Playboy Effect

Within the environment of a male vernacular and the forming of male-only social groups, *Playboy* magazine advertised itself as a 'pleasure-primer styled to the *masculine* taste' (my italics) for gentlemen, which claimed to be 'filling a publishing need only slightly less important than the one just taken care of by the Kinsey Report.'[107] Similarly, Marcia Brennan noted that *Playboy,* with its mix of titillating

[106] W. J Rorabaugh, *Berkeley at War: The 1960s* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.39.
[107] *Playboy*, 1:1, December 1951, p. 3. This was alluding to the report that Kinsey had undertaken on male sexual behaviour which had been published in 1948.

images and faux intellectualism, including articles and interviews by prominent authors, including Miller, set out to appeal to those 'professional bourgeois males' which Kinsey identified as forming part of an elevated social group who found 'erotic stimulation' in art and literature but never veered towards sexual perversion.[108] In 1964, *Playboy* printed an interview with Miller, in which he stated 'Obscenity has its natural place in literature, as it does in life, and it will never be obliterated. I feel I have restored sex to its rightful role, rescued that life force from literary oblivion.'[109]

Wesselmann may not have identified himself as being directly influenced by *Playboy*, but both he, and the magazine, presented images of women that were informed by popular culture. *Playboy's* feature on the bikini appeared in 1962, the same year that Wesselmann played with the notion of how the garment concealed and revealed a woman's most erotic anatomical details with *Great American Nudes #36* and *#38*. There is evidence in the artist's archive which suggests that Wesselmann might have been subscribing to the magazine in 1965, as were huge numbers of American men.[110] Whilst Wesselmann distanced himself from suggestions that his work was pornographic, J A Abramson wrote in 1966 that the artist showed a 'definite and increasingly powerful commitment' to it.[111] This comment was further substantiated by Abramson who stated that Wesselmann had indicated that he was 'actively in favor of the abolition of the term and concept of

[108] Brennan, (2004), pp.35-36. Kinsey distinguished between this class of male and the 'lower level males, who may look on such a thing as the use of pictures or literature to augment masturbatory fantasies as the strangest sort of perversion.'
[109] Bernard Wolfe, 'Henry Miller: a candid conversation with the venerable maverick of American letters' in *Playboy*, 11:9, (September 1964), p.77.
[110] The Wesselmann Estate have notes addressed to the artist, signed by the magazine's editorial director at the time, A. C. Spectorsky. These would have been sent out with copies of the July, August and October 1965 editions of *Playboy*. Whilst they appear to be personalised, asking for comments on cartoons, articles and artworks and offering the opportunity for these to be selected for inclusion in the subsequent 'Letters to the Editor' column, they may well have been sent to all subscribers with only the names and addresses changed.
[111] J. A. Abramson (1997), p. 352.

"pornography"' before suggesting that the artist had implied that the term should be redefined and people ought to adopt more broad-minded attitudes before saying that the problem lay with the viewer 'bringing a great deal of the subject matter of the work of art with him *to* the painting'[112]

Wesselmann's art seemed tailor-made for the *Playboy* readership, and his painting *Mouth #8* (1966) appeared in an article in January 1967, which had artists create interpretations of the female pin-up. The same painting was included in the 1971 touring exhibition *Beyond Illustration: The Art of Playboy* which travelled throughout North America, Europe and Japan over a 3-year period. Appearing in the magazine alongside the printed image was a quote from Wesselmann explaining that he focused on the mouth 'in order to isolate and make more intense the one body part that has a high degree of both sexual and expressive connotations' which he subsequently described as being painted 'with low degrees of each quality, to keep it, like the Playmate, somewhat glossy yet inviting.'[113] This glossy and inviting painting style was already a feature of his mature work.

By printing images of paintings and sculpture, the magazine was able to show full-frontal nudity, or as the magazine put it, show the Playmate as fine art in a way which combined 'the centuries old tradition of the nude in art and the current concentration among artists as the facts of everyday life'.[114] The cover of this edition included a photograph of an epoxy resin sculpture of a figure by Frank Gallo next to the usual array of photographs of more demurely posed models displayed as though they were framed works of art that were hanging on a wall (Fig. 3.24). Gallo's life-size young girl was described as 'a delicate… shy, youthful Playmate figure' whilst

[112] Abramson (1997), p. 352.
[113] 'The Playmate as Fine Art', *Playboy*, 14:1, (January 1967), pp. 148-149.
[114] 'The Playmate as Fine Art' (1967), p. 141.

the lack of pubic hair and small breasts suggested she was in the early stages of puberty (Fig. 3.25).[115] Other works by Salvador Dali and Ben Johnson showed women with pubic hair at a time when the magazine was still prevented from printing photographs of women's genital area, shaved or otherwise. It was not until 1969 when *Playboy* experienced competition from newcomer *Penthouse* that their way of depicting female nudity began to change and what became known as 'Pubic Wars' began. *Playboy* finally caught up with Wesselmann in 1970 when it began to show nudes with pubic hair and in 1972 it printed its first full-frontal nude.[116] So whilst Wesselmann's work presented the female body as an object for the erotic gaze in much the same vein as *Playboy*, he certainly predated what was allowed to be shown in the magazine. However, both the artist and the magazine shared certain visual features which enhanced the eroticism of their pin-ups.

Stockings began to appear in Wesselmann's paintings and whilst this meant the figures were no longer completely naked, their inclusion enhanced the overt eroticism of the body. In 1965, Wesselmann produced a series of 27 small embossed and individually hand-coloured, stockinged figures prior to including this as a feature in *Great American Nude* #81 (1966). *Great American Nude #82* also from 1966 saw him take the figure and reproduce it in moulded plastic, offering five different coloured versions of the same woman (Fig. 3.26). In 1967, the stockinged figure featured in a series of embossed works on paper and in 1968 he produced a further version which had the figure posing with her legs spread, as seen in *Embossed Nude #3 (Legs Spread)* (1968) (Fig. 3.27). Stockings have had a long association with the erotic, something which was utilised by high-kicking can-can dancers in the nineteenth century. As the dancers raised their skirts, they titillated the audience by

[115] 'The Playmate as Fine Art' (1967), pp. 148-149.
[116] Fraterrigo (2009), p.170.

revealing their stocking-tops and the item's removal was often an integral part of the striptease.

Playboy had its own stockinged figure which appeared regularly in the magazine. 'Femlin' (short for female gremlin) was created by LeRoy Neiman for the magazine and the character was identifiable by her stockings, high-heeled shoes and long evening gloves, which, like the stockings were a striptease favourite. First appearing in 1955, Femlin was a mischievous, doll-sized cartoon character who appeared on the 'Party Jokes' pages of the magazine (Fig. 3.28). Whilst *Playboy* did not show full-frontal nudity at this point, Neiman's Femlin was afforded the opportunity to appear fully naked, albeit with her physical features being suggested in greatly simplified form whilst the collectible model appeared with a featureless pubic region. In 1963, *Playboy* ran an article in which Femlin came to life. Appearing in a series of photographs, a real-life Playmate was dressed as Femlin and assumed the role of the 12-inch sex-pixie (Fig. 3.29). Unlike her cartoon counterpart, she only appeared topless.

Millett highlighted how stockings were used to emphasise the erotic in her feminist evaluation of the 'sexual politics' on display in the writings of D. H. Lawrence, Norman Mailer and Henry Miller. In her introduction to *Sexual Politics*, Millett quoted a passage from Miller's *Sexus* (1949) in which the character of Val seduces Ida, who is dressed in a bathrobe and stockings. Miller described how the character, another incarnation of himself, removed the robe from his conquest but left her stockings on, making the woman 'more lascivious looking' than if she were completely naked.[117] Millett argues that stockings operate as an example of a 'classic masculine fantasy (which) dictates that nudity's most appropriate exception is some

[117] Millett (1981), p. 3.

gauzelike material, be it hosiery or underwear' and identifies it as a much-utilised feature of 'traditional "girlie" figure(s).'[118] The use of see-through fabrics was also something that Matisse played with in his paintings of odalisques, as discussed in Chapter 1. In Wesselmann's depictions of stockinged nudes, it also operated as a formal device, further emphasising the contrast between covered skin and bare flesh as well as drawing the eye up the leg towards the displayed crotch.

To further quote Brennan, what both Wesselmann and *Playboy* represented (and I would add Miller to this), was 'the affirmation of heterosexual masculine identity… mediated and achieved through the displayed body of the woman', something which was reflective of a particularly prominent social issue which arose in the 1950s and continued into the 1960s.[119] In 1958, Arthur Schlesinger's *The Crisis of American Masculinity* was published in *Esquire* magazine. Schlesinger postulated that American men no longer had clearly identifiable masculine role models, were losing their sense of individuality and were becoming 'feminised'.[120] The one-time self-assured American male, Schlesinger wrote, was becoming unsure of his 'masculine role in society' and 'sense of sexual identity' which was partly due to a lack of clarity regarding male and female roles within the home and women's increased presence in the workplace.[121]

The threat of American society becoming feminised was echoed by J Robert Moskin in *The Decline of the American Male (*1958) which expanded on articles that he and fellow editors, George B Leonard Jr and William Attwood, had previously published in *Look* magazine. Moskin considered many of the social norms which defined the nature and progression of relationships such as 'going steady' prior to

[118] Millett (1981), p.5.
[119] Brennan (2004), pp.36-37.
[120] Arthur Schlesinger, 'The Crisis of American Masculinity' in *Esquire*, 50:5, November 1958, pp. 62-65.
[121] Schlesinger (1958), p. 62.

marriage, was driven by women and was 'completely opposed to the male's recognized biological nature, which impels him to seek the company of a variety of females'.[122] Wives who asked their husbands to help in the home and men who were expected to be 'housework-participating father(s)' were examples of women's domineering behaviour in the home, and the idea that they might go on to gain serious employment further threatened to emasculate American men. Moskin also suggested that wives were placing increased responsibility on their husbands to satisfy them sexually. The result of this was one of the most worrying effects of a 'feminised' society as overworked men who were being put under sexual pressure were increasingly at risk of becoming impotent.[123]

Myron Brenton, in his examination of the masculine crisis in the 1960s, suggested that modern woman's demand for sexual pleasure was not a result of equality between the sexes but a 'definite distortion of the natural order of things.'[124] This stemmed from both Freudian theory on sexual repression and the feminist movement, and Brenton contended that it had been 'given further impetus by the commercialization of sex.'[125] On the other hand, as noted by D'Emilio and Freedman, sex was becoming increasingly integrated into mainstream culture which meant that 'the erotic loomed large in the expectations of married couples' adding to the expectation and anxiety of many wedded men and women.[126]

---

[122] J Robert Moskin, 'Why Do Women Dominate Him?' in William Attwood, George B. Leonard Jr., and J Robert Moskin, *The Decline of the American Male* (New York: Random House, 1958), p.5.
[123] Moskin (1958) pp.11-12. Moskin identified fatigue, passivity, anxiety and impotency as being the four ways in which men suffered as a result of 'women's new aggressiveness and demand for sexual satisfaction'.
[124] Myron Brenton, *The American Male: A Penetrating Look at the Masculinity Crisis*, (New York: Coward-McCann Inc, 1966), p. 166 – 167.
[125] Brenton (1966), p. 167.
[126] John D'Emilio and Estelle B Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), p. 300.

Playboy joined in the discussion and in 1958 printed *The Womanization of America* by Philip Wylie and the concerns raised within it were still being discussed in June 1962 by the '*Playboy* panel', which included Edward Bernays (nephew of Sigmund Freud and public relations and marketing expert), Norman Mailer and psychoanalyst Dr Theodor Reik amongst others. The all-male panel 'failed to reach a consensus on the extent to which society was becoming "womanized"' but they agreed that 'changes in men's and women's roles threatened a sense of male superiority'.[127] It is perhaps no coincidence that the magazine imbued their models with a sense of girl-next-door coyness or non-threatening domesticity and when they were depicted in the workplace they were shown as secretaries, representing the more acceptable modes of employment for women. Wesselmann reflected a similar attitude in his early *Great American Nudes*, depicting them as women in domestic interiors and whilst their nakedness might have suggested that they were waiting to be joined by a suitor, there was a sense that these figures' main purpose was to be in readiness to offer enjoyment rather than claim it for themselves.

John Clellon Holmes' article *The New Girl* suggested to a *Playboy* audience in 1968 that a type of woman was emerging who did not wish to be like men but equally turned their back on female domesticity in favour of living an equivalent of the bachelor (or *Playboy*) lifestyle.[128] Echoing the sentiments of Helen Gurley Brown's earlier bestselling book *Sex and the Single Girl* (1964), it acknowledged the rise in young working women living in their own apartments and the emerging singles scene. Gurley Brown's publication saw the author telling her readers that there was nothing untoward about satiating the female libido and in a chapter entitled *How to be Sexy*, she advised the readership that a sexy woman was one who enjoyed

[127] Fraterrigo (2009), p. 35.
[128] Fraterrigo (2009), p. 173.

sex and promoted a body-positive approach which urged women to find their sexiness by 'accept(ing) yourself as a woman' and 'accept(ing) all the parts of your body as worthy and lovable'.[129] This certainly presented a different perspective to Wesselmann and Miller reducing the female body to those parts that might directly stimulate male arousal with minimal consideration being given to them being the seat of a woman's sexual pleasure. Gurley Brown did not disguise the fact that sex could be a 'powerful weapon' for the single girl, as well as for the married woman who could use it to 'blackmail' the husband who had given her 'his name, a home, an income, and a father for her children.'[130] Even though Gurley Brown told the single girl to aspire to a career (predominantly within an office), she advised women not to appear to undermine men by envying what she called their 'superior advantages' such as their jobs and 'their ability to exploit'.[131] Whilst Gurley Brown destigmatised women wishing to satisfy their own sexual desires, she also encouraged them to remain the subservient party if they wished to exploit men. She also reminded her readers that the ultimate goal was still marriage.

Hefner's Playboys were equally encouraged to exploit women, and whilst sex without guilt was suggested by Gurley Brown and Hefner, much of *Playboy's* popularity was that it offered the chance to encounter sexual female bodies whilst not having to directly engage with them. Similar to Gurley-Brown reminding the single woman that her aim in life was still to wed, *Playboy* portrayed the bachelor lifestyle as being a transitory phase until marriage became a suitable option, after

[129] Helen Gurley Brown, *Sex and the Single Girl*, (New York: Bernard Geis Associates, 1962; repr. Fort Lee, NJ: Barricade Books, 2003), p. 65.
[130] Gurley Brown (2003), p. 70.
[131] Gurley Brown (2003), p.86.

which it could only be hoped that the American male would neither become 'feminised' nor see their sons subjected to 'momism'.[132]

Hugh Hefner was described in a *Time* magazine article as 'the impresario of 'spectator sex'.[133] In the same article, the cultural critic Gershorn Legman was quoted as saying that *Playboy*'s role was primarily to appeal to 'the subvirile man who just wants to look' because 'Basically, he's afraid of the girls.'[134] The so-called crisis of American masculinity seemed to have resulted in a sub-culture of impotent men who had become so scared by women and their perceived sexual aggressiveness that what they ultimately sought was a way of satiating the male gaze rather than the libido. Moskin indicated that it had become necessary to 'invent new meanings and myths for maleness in America' in order to prevent men becoming more like women and vice versa.[135] The sharing of gender specific roles within the home and 'sexual ambiguity' which included homosexuality and gender reassignment (which was said to be 'enjoying a cultural boom') all added to the feeling that the American male's sexual identity was becoming lost.[136] Schlesinger mourned the disappearance of the rough and ready action hero, who had once been a dominant archetype in American literature and Brenton suggested that the last time men had felt 'manly' or 'rugged the way a man ought to feel' had been during military service.[137] Schlesinger subsequently highlighted a trend in literature which saw male characters

[132] Roel van den Oever, *Mama's Boy: Momism and Homophobia in Postwar American Culture*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 5. 'Momism' appeared in Philip Wylie's 1942 publication *A Generation of Vipers*. Van den Oever described it as an attack on 'mothers for having instilled in their sons an uncritical tendency towards mother worship' and 'mothers dot(ing) on their children without end, thereby infantalizing their sons in particular' (p. 6). Wylie went on to say that 'the whole thing was a gag' and that he thought it was 'hilariously funny' (p. 7) but by this point 'momism' had entered into public usage.
[133] 'Think Clean', *Time*, 89:9, 3 (March 1967), pp. 76 – 82.
[134] 'Think Clean' (1967), p. 80. Legman is identified as being 'a Paris-based writer on sexuality'.
[135] Moskin (1958), p. 24.
[136] Schlesinger (1958), p. 62.
[137] Brenton (1966), p.15.

'increasingly preoccupied with proving his virility to himself'.[138] Similarly, D'Emilio and Freedman noted that post World War One there was an increase in the use of 'street language to describe body parts and sexual acts' in popular novels.[139] Friedan also commented that, during the 1950s, 'Norman Mailer and the young beatnik writers confined their revolutionary spirit to 'sex and kicks… advertising themselves in four-letter words'.[140] Certainly, in Mailer's novel, *An American Dream* (1965), his male protagonist, the epitome of the successful self-made man, not only kills his wife but subsequently buggers her maid in a display of violent hyper-masculinity and dominance.

During the sixties, heterosexual masculinity seemed increasingly characterised in terms of how men exhibited their sexual attraction to women. Whilst there was a growing recognition that women, and particularly wives, might have their own sexual wants and needs, rather than this being seen as having a positive effect on a marriage, the worry was that it might place added stress on men who were already exhausted from the work which saw them provide for their families. Subsequently, shows of heterosexual male virility were enacted upon passive women, which included the act of looking at the erotic female body.

It was no coincidence that as this new type of male 'hero' emerged, feminism gathered pace. Yet whilst some saw it as a progressing equality between the sexes, others saw it as a further threat on established gender roles. Whilst Wesselmann stated that he was 'as sympathetic to women as he was to Blacks' the increased sexualisation of his nudes could be seen as a reaction to those women who were seeking sexual and social freedom.[141]

---

[138] Schlesinger (1958), p. 62.
[139] D'Emilio & Freedman (1988), p. 279.
[140] Friedan (1992), p. 164.
[141] Oral History Interview (1984), n. p.

A Feminist Critique of Wesselmann's Visual Masculine Vernacular

It is generally reported that Wesselmann was widely criticised by a feminist audience, and it has been intimated within the existing discourse that the Women's Movement had an adverse effect on his career. Livingstone recounted that Wesselmann was upset by the feminist criticism of the 1970s.[142] Similarly, Wilmerding cited *Bedroom Tit Box* as earning the artist 'the disfavor of feminists.'[143] Wesselmann told Sandler that, in his opinion, 'Women's Libbers tend to have a feeling that really makes art seem more like Social Realism, as if it has an axe to grind' and that the feminist agenda was that 'art has to have an ulterior or higher purpose.'[144] Wesselmann continued, 'so if you present the woman, then you've got to present aspects of her personality, her character – more about it than just the physical', and that there had been 'misunderstandings and arguments' between himself and feminists over the years.[145] Wesselmann suggested that Women's Libbers turn their attention to an artist like Mondrian instead, who should be considered as particularly anti-feminist 'because he doesn't even include women'. [146] Wesselmann reinforced this by pointing out that, when it came to women, at least his paintings did 'deal with them'.[147] In Wesselmann's opinion, what was being overlooked was the simple fact that the female nude afforded him 'an excuse to make a terrific painting.'[148]

---

[142] Livingstone, Zwirner Gallery (2016).
[143] *The Pop Object: The Still Life Tradition in Pop Art* (exhibition catalogue) Acquavella Gallery, New York, 09 April – 23 May 2013), John Wilmerding (New York: Rizzoli, 2013), p. 237.
[144] Oral History Interview (1984), n.p.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid. Whilst such terminology is now contentious, it was not as problematic during the sixties when protest groups such as Black Power were active. Wesselmann certainly seemed sympathetic to contemporary issues such as women's rights and racial equality, but it is difficult to determine to what extent. The phraseology used here suggests that he may not have fully comprehended feminist ideology.

There is currently only one identifiable feminist interpretation of Wesselmann's work and that was undertaken by Cecile Whiting in her book *A Taste for Pop* which was published in 1997. In her examination of Wesselmann's work, Whiting explored the relationship between the consumer taste of the female homemaker and the aesthetic one of both artists and collectors as a reworking of 'the visual codes of the postwar domestic economy' and the 'masculine control over the home.'[149] Whilst Whiting offers a thought-provoking interpretation of Wesselmann's paintings in terms of the gendering of domestic spaces and the power-dynamics therein, this is neither an examination of objectification of women's bodies nor a scathing, feminist critique of the artist. It appears that whilst Wesselmann maintained that he came under attack from feminists taking exception to his portrayals of naked women, it is most likely he was referring to comments made to him in person. Wesselmann recalled that, as a result of *Bedroom Tit Box* being exhibited in 1970, he was challenged by a woman at a cocktail party who accused him of producing work which castrated women, something which the artist said was typical of the 'scornful kind of things that have come my way' and presented himself as the injured party in the argument.[150] Yet the work which showed the single breast of a live model in a three-dimensional representation of one of his *Bedroom Paintings*, could easily be seen as representing female disempowerment.

The notion of society's castration of women was one which Germaine Greer explored in *The Female Eunuch*, which was published the same year that *Tit Box* was first shown. Within it, Greer indicated that treating women as 'aesthetic objects without function' deformed them and that the excessive attention which society paid to bosoms not only left the rest of the woman invisible but resulted in the breasts not

[149] Cécile Whiting, *A Taste for Pop* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1997), p. 99.
[150] Oral History Interview (1984), n.p.

even being considered as 'parts of a person but lures slung around her neck', the purpose of which was often to be clumsily man-handled.[151] According to Greer, the general female qualities which society both imposed upon women, and praised her for, were the same as those of the castrate – 'timidity, plumpness, languor, delicacy and preciosity.'[152] Likening women to beasts 'who are castrated in farming in order to serve their master's ulterior motive or be made docile' Greer believed that the overriding social tendency was for women to be 'cut off from their capacity for action.'[153] Made to be socially submissive, women had also 'been separated from their libido, from their faculty of desire, from their sexuality.'[154] It is easy to see why, at this point in time, advocates of feminism might read Wesselmann's work as being symptomatic of society's castration of women as well as making more obvious comparisons with the castrate as having a part of their body removed in order to diminish their sexuality. Wesselmann's removal of the breast from the rest of the female body suggested a powerful dynamic in which the male artist exhibited control of the female body, discarding those parts which did not serve his purpose – visually or sexually. The result is that the breast subsequently serves no purpose other than to be fetishized as an object of male desire and in removing it from the rest of the female body, the potency of the breast as a symbol of womanhood or biological signifier of child-rearing and nurturing, is removed with it.

What has remained central to any discussion of *Tit Box* is the story regarding the model who supplied the live 'tit', who incidentally, was not the same woman who inspired the piece. At the time of *Tit Box*'s first showing, Wesselmann

[151] Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch*, (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1970; repr. London: Flamingo, 1999), p. 39-41.
[152] Greer (1999), p.17.
[153] Judith Weinraub, 'Germaine Greer – Opinions That May Shock the Faithful', *New York Times*, 22 March 1971, p. 28.
[154] Weinraub (1971), p. 28.

complained of being 'thrust into a carnival atmosphere' because of the way *Time* magazine 'played it up.'[155] The small write-up, which appeared in the magazine's art section on 20th April 1970 was little more than a paragraph which stated that the installation would include 'the breast of a real live girl' and gave the times that the piece could be viewed. *Time* explained to their readers that the model would be 'safely out of sight and usually reading a book for her graduate studies in political studies at Columbia University' and a small black and white photograph of the piece accompanied the write-up.[156] The box, which could only be viewed from the front a though it were a painting, was set into a false wall. Inside were a flower in a vase, an orange, a 'lit' cigarette on an ash tray, a perfume bottle and a representation of a box of tissues, all rendered as three-dimensional objects. The model, hidden behind a screen, would lay across the top of the box and position herself so that one breast hung down into Wesselmann's version of a *tableau vivant*.

In his book on Wesselmann, Sam Hunter also makes the point that the model was a graduate student.[157] In *The Pop Object,* John Wilmerding does the same.[158] In conversation with Sandler, Wesselmann was keen to stress that the live model was 'a political science major' and that he was careful not to 'demean (her) as a feminist' or impinge on her time.[159] In the same way that it was necessary to emphasise that Claire was the model for his *Great American Nudes*, this contextualised, and excused the use of a live model and it was even suggested that her participation in the piece afforded her the time she needed for her study. It has never been clarified whether the model was a feminist, and it is more likely than not that a member of the

[155] Sandler (1984).
[156] 'Still Life', *Time*, 20 April 1970, 95:16, p57.
[157] Hunter (1994), p. 18.
[158] Wilmerding (2013), p. 237.
[159] Oral History Interview (1984), n. p. It is not known whether the model identified as a feminist.

Women's Movement of the time would not take part in displaying any part of her body in a work of art created by a man. The story appears to be little more than an attempt to place Wesselmann in a positive light, even suggesting that the artist had somehow helped the model by giving her the opportunity to study whilst participating in his live piece.

When Peter Schjeldahl reviewed the 1970 exhibition which featured *Bedroom Tit Box*, he described it as a display of 'voluptuous' nudes in 'sumptuous… *haute bourgeoise*' surroundings.[160] Whilst acknowledging that Wesselmann was 'one of the most persevering "pure Pop" artists' he considered that he had 'always operated in the shade of the acknowledged masters' (Oldenburg, Warhol, Lichtenstein and Rosenquist) and saw this exhibition as demonstrating the extent to which he was becoming completely eclipsed by them.[161] Schjeldahl condemned Wesselmann's work as being 'so busy and splashy that they give the eye nothing to do except admire their affects' and pointed out the viewer might be 'appalled' by 'the Playboy-ish values that this art appears to profess, especially the attitude towards women' and proclaimed that whilst there was an undeniable deftness to Wesselmann's pieces, the exhibition was titillating rather shocking, and ultimately forgettable.[162] It was not so much Wesselmann's ability as an artist that indicated his popularity was waning, but his treatment of subject matter. Far from being a feminist critique, this appears to be the only direct assessment of Wesselmann's work which makes any reference to how the content might be received by a feminist audience.

There were a number of female artists working under the Pop rubric, reacting to the same cultural references as their male counterparts. Marisol, Rosalind Drexler

[160] Schjeldahl (1970), Section D, p. 21.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid.

and Marjorie Strider in New York, the Belgian painter Evelyne Axell and Britain's Pauline Boty amongst others, began to challenge the male gaze and use the body to present female experience. In her analysis of the work of Axell, Boty and Drexler, Kalliopi Minioudaki makes a simple, yet crucial observation that pop art has been accepted as a story of 'male subjects and female objects' whilst an evaluation of the work of these women artists identifies them as 'subjects/artists rather than objects' which impacted their own approach to the female body.[163] Minioudaki notes that whilst these female artists took inspiration from the same aspects of popular culture as their male counterparts, including the erotic body, they did so with a 'conscious voicing of sexual difference in an, often humorous, Pop vernacular' which was markedly different from the heavily heterosexual, masculine viewpoint which characterised the act of looking at the female body as something which was innately pleasurable.[164]

With a rising discontent regarding the visual treatment of the female body during the 1960s, women artists began to create pieces which captured their own physical experiences and used nudity in a way that neither satisfied the male gaze, nor idealised the female body. Carolee Schneemann and Judy Chicago were two of the most famous exponents who used images of women's bodies to portray the reality of female physical experience. As a contemporary of Wesselmann's, Schneemann moved in the same circles within the New York artworld. When asked what she thought of Wesselmann's art, she commended his 'impressive, strengthening painterly methods with (his) enlarged scale and commercial paints' whilst on a personal level Schneemann remembered Wesselmann as a generous and

[163] Kalliopi Minioudaki, 'Pop's Ladies and Bad Girls: Axell, Pauline Boty and Rosalyn Drexler', *Oxford Art Journal*, 30:3 (2007), p. 402.
[164] Ibid.

delightful friend.[165] Nevertheless, Schneemann referred to a passage that she wrote about male-dominated American Pop art:

> In *Fuses* I was working against the inherited traditions of male projections of the female body, as in the work of Balthus and Hans Bellmer, but also in American Pop art, that began sustaining cultural obsessions with the female body, turning them into mechanized aspects like shiny car parts. Since none of this related to my lived experience, I wanted to find another visual vocabulary that might exist beyond what I had inherited from masculine tradition.[166]

Schneemann admitted that, whilst she did not name anyone in particular, Wesselmann was one of the artists that she had in mind before wryly concluding, 'It's seductive, the way dancing to the Rolling Stones *Under my Thumb* has its pleasurable aspect.'[167]

Whilst Wesselmann evaded feminist criticism, Miller's writing was widely discussed. Most notable was Kate Millett's diatribe which classified Miller's work as typifying men's sexual dominance of women and reflected the control they wielded in all areas of a patriarchal society. In the absence of Wesselmann being scrutinised by feminist critiques, and the similarities in the way he and Miller described the female body, can the discourse relating to the author be applied to work of the artist in order to suggest a comparable critique?

Writing in the early 1970s Millett identified Miller as being representative of 'the much acclaimed "sexual freedom" of the last few decades', and categorised him

[165] Email from Carolee Schneemann received 30 June 2017. This was in response to me asking whether she recalled there being any negativity amongst women artist's working in New York towards Wesselmann's female nudes during the 1960s.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Ibid.

as one of a number of male authors whose depictions of women exemplified a patriarchal power-structure of sexual and social dominance.[168] Millett concurred with the Supreme Court that Miller's work was not without literary merit and recognised that the content and vocabulary he used was a tool to shock and challenge a largely puritanical establishment. What Millett took exception with was 'the disgust, the contempt, the hostility, the violence, and the sense of filth which our culture, or more specifically, its masculine sensibility, surrounds sexuality' and the way in which this was primarily exemplified through women's bodies.[169] Millett accused Miller of making the female sex the one 'upon whom this onerous burden of sexuality falls'.[170] Certainly, some of these criticisms could as easily be applied to Wesselmann's portrayal of the erotic female body.

Mary Kellie Munsil argued that what Miller encapsulated was symptomatic of the failure of verbal communication between the sexes and a particular inability to understand women or his relationship to them.[171] Munsil contended that rather than being perceived as a misogynist, Miller should be considered 'pathetic' for his inability to relate to women in any way other than in terms of basic, sexualised needs. Certainly, a key element of what might be described as the Wesselmann 'myth' aims to contextualise the sexual content in terms of the artist's relationship to his wife, yet any visual invocation of this disappeared in his later nudes, despite the story remaining unchanged. The increased attention paid to the sexual attributes, and the mode in which Wesselmann had the nude display them, presented the female

[168] Millett (1981), p.294.
[169] Millett (1981), p. 295.
[170] Ibid.
[171] Mary Kelllie Munsil, 'The Body in the Prison-House of Language: Henry Miller, Pornography and Feminism' in, *Critical Essays on Henry Miller*, ed. Ronald Gottesman (New York and Toronto: Hall and Maxwell Macmillan, 1992), pp. 294-295.

body as serving only one purpose – their availability to satisfy the viewer's visual and/or sexual needs.

Not all feminists attacked Miller's work or Wesselmann's paintings. Erica Jong, the American novelist who portrayed a woman's search for her (sexual) self in *Fear of Flying* (1973) described reactions towards Miller as being a case of 'killing the messenger' and described his writing as a reflection of the existing mores of a society to which he was as 'enslaved' as everyone else.[172] Jong advocated that Miller was simply 'a mirror of society' who was unfairly castigated for articulating 'the war between cock and cunt'. [173] Ultimately, Jong proposed that Miller should be seen as 'a stronger force for feminism than for male chauvinism' as he wrote with a 'ruthless honesty about the self' which was lacking in the work of many women authors.[174] As an adjunct to Jong's support of Miller, when she was interviewed by Robin Finn for the *New York Times* in 2003, the reporter commented upon her large art collection, amongst which was a Wesselmann 'wall-sized, laser-cut steel sculpture of an odalisque painted in candied hues'.[175] Whilst I am not suggesting that Jong necessarily saw any similarities between Wesselmann and Miller, it is nonetheless interesting to note that this was one feminist who supported the work of both men and the ways in which they depicted women's bodies.

In her short essay which appeared in the catalogue for Wesselmann's Montreal retrospective Nathalie Bondil urged visitors to not to fall into the trap of viewing the artist's work as being politically incorrect. Suggesting that he denounced nothing and only showed beauty, she contended that the artist encapsulated an

[172] Erica Jong, *The Devil at Large: Erica Jong on Henry Miller* (New York: Grove Press, 1994), p.194.
[173] Jong (1994), pp. 194-195.
[174] Jong (1994), pp. 202-203.
[175] Robin Finn, 'Public Lives; Still Plain-Spoken, Still Writing, and Still Busy', *New York Times*. 18 June 2003, Section B, p. 2.

'uncensored freedom' in showing women 'at liberty to enjoy their bodies without complexes' which she defined as being more 'feminist and modern' that anything 'draped in mythology for the benefit of male voyeurism.'[176]

Similarly, Allison Palumbo believed that second-wave feminists, including Millett, were wrong to accuse Miller of the 'depersonalisation of women'.[177] Instead, the reduction of women to body parts were to be seen as 'metonyms for expressions of the body'.[178] Palumbo proposed that 'cunt' became 'a vital metaphor' which represented 'the unstunted expression of sexuality' and rather than representing the thing itself was a means for challenging social, sexual taboos.[179] Furthermore, she suggested that Miller rejected the binary oppositions of mind and body and embraced a 'particular consciousness of visceral experience' which was a feature of *écriture féminine* as defined by French feminist writers such as Helene Cixous.[180] It is Palumbo's belief that Miller sought to challenge 'the hegemony that masculine writing's logic exerts over the body' and in particular the mystery with which the female body was so often imbued.[181]

Miller's use of language also resonated with those feminists who moved to embrace the word 'cunt' as its etymology indicated that it was less defined by hegemonic language than 'vagina' which had linguistic associations with a sheath

[176] Nathalie Bondil, 'Tom Wesselmann's Bombshells: An Art Named Desire' in *Tom Wesselmann* (exhibition catalogue for *Beyond Pop: Tom Wesselmann*, The Montreal Museum of Fine Art, Montreal, 18 May 2012 – 7 October 2012, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, 6 April 2013 – 25 July 2013) ed. Stéphane Aquin (Montreal, Munich: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts; DelMonico Books; Prestel, 2012), p. 17.
[177] Allison Palumbo, 'Finding the Feminine: Rethinking Henry Miller's Tropics Trilogy' in *Nexus: The International Henry Miller Journa*l, Vol. 7, 2010, p.168.
[178] Palumbo (2010), p. 168.
[179] Palumbo (2010), p. 165.
[180] Palumbo (2010), p. 160-161.
[181] Palumbo (2010), p. 162.

for a sword or 'receptacle for a weapon'.[182] However, as Greer noted, the four-letter word remained a powerful one and society largely reacted to it in the same way that Francis Grose noted in his *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* published in 1785 – that it was 'a nasty name for a nasty thing' and the worst insult that could be bestowed upon a person.[183] Its power to shock, as a four-letter word or as a direct reference to the female anatomy, was not lessened by an attempt to use it as a term of female empowerment. Indeed, the feminist attempt to own and use the word could be perceived as an aggressive act in a similar way to Wesselmann describing depicting a shaved vagina as being antagonistic. It did seem unlikely, however, that Wesselmann had any desire to subvert phallocentric ideals, on the contrary, his images endorsed them and his intention seemed primarily to shock for the sake of it.

Wesselmann and Miller's work exists somewhere between the obscene and an acceptance of reality, low- and highbrow and male/female experiences and are both situated within a social framework which is reliant upon those binary oppositions which establish a sense of normalcy against which the other is judged. Depicting the naked female body became normalised by art but showing those physical attributes which were a signifier of a woman's biology remained taboo and imbued with a sense of shame, although this might be related more to the woman displaying this part of her anatomy than it was to a man looking at it. However, when Miller wrote about it and Wesselmann painted it, this body part was presented primarily for male examination. It did not matter whether this might be as part of the mechanics of sexual excitement or if it resulted in repulsion, and it certainly did not

[182] Germaine Greer discussed the etymology of 'cunt' in the BBC television programme *Balderdash and Piffle* which aired in the U.K. in 2007. The programme examined the roots of words used in the English language and was supported by writers of the Oxford English Dictionary as part of their Wordhunt project. The excerpt referred to can be viewed via YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=59&v=GDJutaFuVD0 accessed 27 August 2022.
[183] Francis Grose, *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (London: S. Hooper, 1788, second edition), n. p. Grose did not write the word in full, presenting it as C**t.

need to take female participation or experience into account. Rather than challenging the taboos which existed in respect of women's bodies and female sexuality, they operated within an established context which reinforced them.

Male Body Parts

In 1967 Wesselmann produced a small number of paintings in which the erect penis replaced the female body. Wesselmann considered these works to be 'incredibly vivid, even electrifying, image(s)'.[184] Explaining that he ceased being the viewer and became the 'subject', he admitted that the images 'inevitably take on a bit of exhibitionism.'[185] Whilst these images might be considered a form of self-portraiture or somehow autobiographical, Wesselmann stated that the penis, which appears erect 'rather literally takes the place of the reclining nude as subject' as it is positioned horizontally across the picture plane, retaining something of the visual format of a reclining female nude.[186] Yet whilst the reclining figure remains passive, the erect penis is, by implication, active. It protrudes across the image in a state of undeniable sexual excitement, as is the case with *Bedroom Painting #18* (1969) (Fig. 3.30). Entering the picture plane from the left-hand side, the penis almost reaches across the entire width of the canvas. The tip of the penis is directed towards flowers and a painted portrait of the artist's wife which appears in a frame alongside a clock and cigarette. The clock and cigarette are hard-edged, masculine objects in comparison to the more 'feminine' roses and the female portrait. As is the case with many of the *Bedroom Paintings*, there is the sense of an implied narrative and the suggestion of both a male and female presence. The portrait of Claire possibly provides the impetus for arousal and the work could be described as a companion piece to

[184] Stealingworth (1980), p.56.
[185] Ibid.
[186] Ibid.

Bedroom Painting #15 (1968-70) (Fig. 3.31) in which Wesselmann's framed portrait, situated between the 'feminised' orange and cushion, is obviously positioned at the reclining woman's feet. The artist's portrait in relation to the woman's body indicates that he looks up the body of the reclining figure from its feet, adopting a similar position to that in which he places the viewer of his spread-legged nudes.

In the same article in which he provided a review of *Tit Box*, Schjeldahl indicated that whilst Wesselmann's prick paintings were 'of some news value', he concluded that they were 'an innovation that seems rather studied and jokey, more distracting than anything.'[187] Wesselmann did not like his erection paintings being dismissed as humorous. He told Sandler that he resented it when a critic 'referred to my big erection paintings as jokey', no doubt referring to Schjeldahl, as they were no more so than his paintings of 'tits'.[188] In typical Wesselmann fashion, he stated 'At the same time, I was aware that a big prick painting – it's not that easy to stand there with a straight face, I think. I think it's rather amusing… But I've always denied a kind of conscious attempt to be funny.'[189] There is no real clarification as to whether the artist took the images entirely seriously. Instead, as with other discussions of his art, Wesselmann seems to be somewhat conflicted as to what viewpoint he wishes to adopt – that of an artist who imbued his work with humour; someone who was fully intending to shock; an individual who embraced the sexual as subject matter or as a formalist. Whilst there are elements of all of these factors in his work, the Wesselmann myth certainly adheres to emphasising the formal aspects.

[187] Schjeldahl (1970), p. 21.
[188] Oral History Interview (1984), n. p.
[189] Ibid.

The penis featured in Wesselmann's *Seascapes* and *Bedroom Paintings* for a brief period towards the end of the 1960s and as with the images which included the breast, they were often the same representation of the body part placed against a selection of slightly different backgrounds. There has been little attention paid to these paintings and this may typify the unease with which society, and critics, particularly male ones, seem to show when discussing the sexual male body. There are precedents already in place for discussing the female body and alluding to its erotic appeal, particularly for male critics, but this assuming of a male gaze has also been the convention imposed upon women writers. Wilmerding, somewhat tentatively, mentioned *Bedroom Painting #20* (1969) as taking on 'an unnerving abstract character'.[190] Hunter made scant reference to the paintings, describing the penises as 'monumental' and 'gratuitously enlarged' but offered little by way of a further discussion of them.[191] Perhaps this is because an erect penis is unmistakably a symbol of sexual arousal and therefore might be more directly associated with prurient interest.

If the erect penis as a symbol of male sexual potency had few precedents in high art, it certainly had its equivalents in American literature. Miller's prose often placed the sexually aroused male at the centre of his narrative, affording his protagonists, particularly the character Van Norden, the opportunity to offer some frank insights into how he experienced his own, sexual body, with the character musing, 'All you think about is getting your ramrod inside; it's as though your penis did the thinking for you'.[192] Indeed the notion that the penis acts independently from the rest of the body has frequently resulted in it being personified by being given a

[190] Wilmerding (2013), p.237.
[191] Hunter (1994), p. 26.
[192] Miller (1993), p. 144.

humorous name. This has been identified as a way to 'reinforce(s) the myth that a male can be expected to have difficulty controlling his sexual organ' as it is somehow a separate entity which acts independently from the rest of the body.[193] In Wesselmann's paintings, the penis appears as autonomous, and whilst the presence of the rest of the male body is implied, as with the image of a single breast, its holistic being is denied and the individual is reduced to their sexual organ. Ultimately. there is a significant difference between Wesselmann's visual representation of his own physical arousal and sexual virility and him intimating it by imposing it onto another's body. One is reliant upon known bodily experience whilst the other is an interpretation of female desire based on, and appealing to, heterosexual masculine fantasy.

Conclusion

Miller seemed to impact Wesselmann both directly and indirectly. The amendments made to American obscenity laws as a result of *Tropic of Cancer's* publication and ensuing legal wrangles resulted in the arts being less subjected to censorship, allowing for artists to produce more explicit work. The extent to which Miller afforded Wesselmann the opportunity to visually come to terms with his own 'sexual concerns' appears palpable in the increased eroticisation of the female figure, attention paid to certain physical characteristics and their display.

Wesselmann and Miller both described the sexual, female body in terms of its constituent erotic features and drew attention to the 'sameness' of women. Body parts are often displayed to satisfy male curiosity, either resulting in sexual excitement or repulsion, and sometimes a mixture of both. Whilst Wesselmann's

[193] Vernon R. Wiehe & Ann L. Richards, *Intimate Betrayal: Understanding and Responding to the Trauma of Acquaintance Rape*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1995), pp. 79-80.

images do not have the same gritty realism as Miller's tales of 1930s Paris, his mature, graphic style and allusion to consumerism presents his nudes as having a similar lowbrow sex appeal and availability. This is also reflected in the crude and demeaning language used by both artist and author. This not only implies the nude is subjected to the male gaze, but it also invites a certain complicity regarding the way in which it is viewed.

Miller used vulgarities as a literary device to purposely shock his audience, and as a way to garner notoriety, yet Wesselmann was less amenable to discussing his intentions outside of a formal context, leaving the image content to speak for itself. Whilst it is likely that he hoped to attract similar attention by shocking his audience, it seems that in 1960s America he was more intent on exercising his constitutional right to freedom of expression, whilst hoping to gain something of the publicity that had been afforded to Miller. Yet this anti-censorship stance favoured male artists, providing an opportunity for even more examples of sexual exploitation and domination to be played out on the female body. Or as Millett put it, the social environment was providing 'unlimited scope for masculine aggression', sanctioning a power-dynamic which could be expressed in increasingly unrestricted forms.[194]

Whilst Wesselmann's nudes might not have been well-received by feminists, there is no evidence to suggest he attracted specific, adverse critical attention, certainly not when compared to Miller. Despite feminist theory and art historical critiques becoming a part of the scholarship of the early 1970s, Wesselmann has not been the subject of any reappraisals which adopt these academic methods. Wesselmann's possible decline in popularity towards the end of the sixties and into the seventies was not as a result of any feminist criticism aimed directly at the artist.

[194] Millett (1981), p. 313.

However, the fact that some galleries were beginning to shy away from exhibiting Wesselmann's work demonstrated an awareness of how the artworks might be received, and that *had* been impacted by feminism. Wesselmann's female nudes reduced women to erotic spectacles in a way that had not only gone unchallenged, it had been socially endorsed, not least by the Supreme Court. Wesselmann was one of a vast number of individuals operating within the visual culture of sixties America who, as Millett said of Miller, gave a 'voice to certain sentiments which masculine culture had long experienced but always rather carefully suppressed: The yearning to effect a complete depersonalisation of woman to cunt.'[195]

[195] Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

Tom Wesselmann, John Dewey and the Aesthetics of the 'Everyday'

> A lot of real life gets left out, but what is missing is constantly asserting itself in the roving changing nature of (Wesselmann's) work – in the exact range of subject matter and the changing form of the painting. Art to him was not so much about the elements of our life, but rather an esthetic attitude toward painting – and painting includes all aspects of our lives.[1]

> The sources of art in human experience will be learned by he who sees how the tense grace of the ball-player infects the onlooking crowd; who notes the delight of the housewife in tending her plants, and the intent interest of her goodman in tending the patch of green in front of the house; the zest of the spectator in poking the wood burning on the hearth and in watching the darting flames and crumbling coals… The man who poked the sticks of burning wood would say he did it to make the fire burn better; but he is none the less fascinated by the colorful drama of change enacted before his eyes and imaginatively partakes in it.[2]

[1] Slim Stealingworth, *Tom Wesselmann* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1980), p. 31.
[2] John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, (New York: Minton, Balch & Co, 1934; repr. New York: Perigree Books, 1980), p. 5.

In 1984, Wesselmann told Irving Sandler that reading the work of John Dewey allowed him to think 'so rationally, so specifically', but there has been no examination of whether Dewey's thought might be evidenced within his artworks.[3]

Dewey, a pragmatist philosopher and educationalist, published his aesthetic theory *Art as Experience* in 1934. Within it, he described the nature of an individual's interaction with their environment as a symbiotic relationship which allowed for practical learning and the gaining of knowledge as something which can be experienced both intellectually and physically. Placing an emphasis on overcoming the dualisms which separated art from life and mind from body, Dewey examined how philosophical thought had divorced the senses from the physical world and the affect this had on aesthetic experience. Maintaining that both art and life presented the opportunity for such events, Dewey believed that if an individual underwent *an* experience, a memorable occurrence which was situated in the everyday yet stood out from the mundane, then this embodied the same aesthetic qualities that could be appreciated in both art and nature.

Dewey's theories provide a framework for examining Wesselmann's nudes and assessing the personal and sexual nature of the images in terms of embodied aesthetic experience. Applying Dewey's theoretical approach to Wesselmann's paintings of the female body I consider whether this might provide a more nuanced exploration of the artist's relationship to the female body, impacted by his personal experience, than is afforded by simply maintaining that his work objectified women. Adopting this approach, I contemplate whether Wesselmann's paintings might be seen as experiments in developing an aesthetics of the sexual before questioning how

[3] Oral history interview with Tom Wesselmann, 1984 January 3-February 8, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Conducted by Irving Sandler.

this reflected an increasingly more problematic cultural phenomenon and whether this fulfilled Dewey's proclamation of how art should play a role in a democratic society.

Dewey's Vision for the Democratic Purpose of Art

Rooted in the pragmatism of Charles Sanders Peirce and William James which developed in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Dewey's *Art as Experience* was based on a series of papers that he had presented at the inaugural William James Lectures held at Harvard in 1932, the subject of which was the Philosophy of Art.[4] Pragmatist thought signalled American philosophy's move away from the dominance of European intellectual thinking and shifted the emphasis from seeing the mind and body as somehow separated from each other to recognising their interdependence and which in turn shaped an understanding of individual experience. Within his work, Dewey deliberated on the role that he believed art should play within a democratic society and how both art and life were sources for aesthetic experience.

When Dewey embarked on his academic career as a student of psychology, there was much prominence given to Introspection. This approach, dominant in Europe, held that the mind, and consciousness, was separate from external factors and mental states were to be assessed by examining an individual's innermost thoughts and emotions. With the mind effectively seen in isolation from the physical body, a dualism existed in which thought was as separated from experience and the body as the individual might be from society. However, much of Dewey's pragmatist thought attempted to bring into question the existence of dualities which effected the human condition. The resulting compartmentalising, according to

[4] Dewey (1980), p.vii.

Dewey, could lead to disorder and conflict. For example, 'institutionalized compartments' included a divide between high and low art, the profane and spiritual and 'material and ideal'.[5] Such dualisms also applied to social situations, for example, resulting in art being isolated from the culture which produced it. Subsequently, Dewey feared that 'oppositions of mind and body, soul and matter, spirit and flesh' had their 'origin, fundamentally, in fear of what life may bring forth' and their existence prevented the individual, and wider society, from experiencing and interacting with the world in a fulfilling manner.[6]

It was the interaction of what Dewey termed the 'live creature,' or individual, with their environment which he believed was essential for human development and formed the basis for all experiences. Devoting the first chapter of *Art as Experience* to a discussion of the live creature, or living being, Dewey explained that it is 'bound up with its interchanges with its environment, not externally but in the most intimate way.'[7] Not only does the living creature adapt whilst operating within this environment, it achieves a sense of order by undergoing these changes or experiencing these 'rhythms'. Amongst such changes and adaptations Dewey identified how 'want and fulfilment' propelled the live creature onwards as the identification of the former could be resolved with the achievement of the latter, resulting in a sense of equilibrium. Interacting with the environment, undertaking inquiries and finding answers, the live creature gains knowledge obtained through their own practical experiences rather than by accepting widely held or indisputable 'truths' which would be passed on as part of didactic learning. As David Hildebrand writes, 'Dewey's challenge was to develop a conception of experience which took

[5] Dewey (1980), p. 20.
[6] Dewey (1980), p. 22.
[7] Dewey (1980), p. 13.

account both of experimental limits and the pervasive influence of culture' and as such he embraced a 'bottom up' approach to disseminating knowledge which emphasised a practical model of learning through doing rather than the adoption of a theoretical starting point.[8] According to Hildebrand, this and a 'melioristic motive,' or a belief that life was 'improved only by human effort', ultimately nourished society.[9]

If experiential learning had a positive effect on the community, compartmentalisation and dualisms promoted a negative and undemocratic environment in which factions of society became separated or placed in opposition to each other. There was, in his opinion, a need for communities to work together in order to solve problems, and there was also a need for art to be 'widely enjoyed in the community' and seen as a sign of 'a unified collective life.'[10] Dewey claimed that indigenous cultures exemplified the integration of art and the everyday by way of the cultural objects they produced. Identifying crafted items which were also domestic utensils, furnishings or objects which might be used as part of a ritual, Dewey noted how, what had once belonged to the everyday processes of daily living had come to be labelled 'art' and placed in museums. Not only did this divorce art from its social context, Dewey also believed that many galleries and museums served a negative communal purpose, doing little more than glorifying the rise of 'nationalism and imperialism' and decried the fact that some collections were built around treasures looted during wars.[11] However, he did not question the imposing of the term 'art', in its Western context, onto non-Western cultural objects.

[8] David Hildebrand, *Dewey: A Beginner's Guide*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2008), p. 4.
[9] Hildebrand (2008), p.5.
[10] Dewey (1980), p. 81.
[11] Dewey (1980), p. 8.

Dewey believed that art should not be separated from other aspects of everyday living, and this involved a transformation of understandings of artistic subject matter, method of display and aesthetic appeal. In contrast, keeping art within a museum environment endorsed intellectual, cultural and social hierarchies and set artistic standards, hence undermining what for Dewey was the original intention of art as 'enhancements, or depictions of, the processes of everyday life'.[12] If it was appreciated as a mode of communication, art could illustrate the commonalities which existed within society and help maintain a sense of community which was underpinned by an understanding of shared experiences.

The knowledge that the individual gained from daily life through interacting with their environment afforded the opportunity for experiential learning through such practices as problem-solving, which subsequently directed an individual's ongoing development and affected future experiences. For Dewey, a human's interaction with their environment provided opportunities for learning and development through a series of 'doings' and 'undergoings'. Dewey described how an individual might lose their sense of harmony with their surroundings, or fall out of step with it, but could regain it by re-establishing a connection or retaining a sense of balance by, for example, working through a problem. Furthermore, the individual would appreciate this as an enriching process. It was subsequently this overcoming of problems or reaching of conclusions that Dewey described as consummatory. When such periods of tension ended, or solutions were found, a sense of equilibrium was achieved which was 'akin to the esthetic'.[13]

Dewey maintained that it was those everyday events which were particularly memorable and stood apart from the mundane due to certain identifiable features,

[12] Dewey (1980), p. 6.
[13] Dewey (1980), p.15.

that could be recognised as having the same aesthetic characteristics as art. Therefore, he made a case for the individual no longer needing to look to fine art in order to satisfy their aesthetic needs as this could be satiated within the everyday environment. Subsequently, the everyday was more than suitable as a source of artistic inspiration. Indeed, it could communicate to a wider society more effectively than anything which represented an elitist establishment.

Whilst the text of *Art as Experience* is notoriously convoluted, Philip Jackson simplifies Dewey's account of the similarities shared by art and life in *John Dewey and the Lessons of Art,* demonstrating how it aids a development of aesthetic appreciation. According to Jackson, Dewey demonstrates how both life and art can comprise elements which encompass a satisfying, pervasive quality. They also exhibit a degree of expressiveness which unfolds temporally, and both can possesses meaning and value through such components as rhythm and balance as well as affording the opportunity for gaining knowledge. Art, however, exhibits all of these elements at their most concentrated and intense but those who interact with it can foster an awareness of similar properties they might experience within the everyday. Jackson summarises Dewey's approach as teaching individuals to open their eyes to seeing things differently, whilst this change in perception of the world helps to shape future experiences of it.

Dewey wrote *Art as Experience* during the era of the Great Depression – a very different period in American history to the economic boom and consumerism which spawned pop art. For Dewey, the era's Federal Art Project epitomised the role that art should play within democratic society. In an article printed in the *New York Times* in October 1935, the project, which was overseen by the Works Progress Administration, sought to find work for between '3,500 to 5,000 painters, sculptors,

graphic artists, commercial artists, craftsmen and teachers of art'.[14] One area the project supported was the production of murals within shared, community spaces including schools, post offices and libraries, frequently referencing American folklore and history and depicting the honest toil of rural and agriculture workers as well as showcasing manufacturing and industry. In New York, Louis Schanker, Louis Ferstadt and Stuart Davis were among the artists who created abstract murals for buildings including the Williamsburg Public Housing Development built between 1936-37 and the WNYC public radio station (1939). In 1938, it was proclaimed that the Federal Art Project had allowed for 'new vistas' to be opened to the public which allowed them to 'learn the function and meaning of art.'[15] With the establishing of Federal galleries and art centres becoming 'common meeting places' this allowed the artist to 'establish a more understanding relationship with those who see his work. He is made more aware of their preferences, and they, in turn, become acquainted with the mechanics of art' and became more 'encouraged to view art as a common, everyday experience.'[16] Ultimately, it was suggested that 'it is this policy of intermingling the workmen and the audience that, to the credit of the Project, had done much to remove art from the sterility of cloistered museums, and made it a part of American life available to the average citizen.'[17] Yet whilst these were impressive claims, they were also idealistic, and the same article opened by noting that 'even after two successful years of work', for most citizens the Federal Art Project was 'a vague undefined agency contributing little or nothing to the life of the community in

[14] 'U.S. to Find Work for 3,500 Artists', in *New York Times*, 4 October 1935, Section L, p. 23.
[15] 'WPA Federal Art Project' in *Current History (1916-1940)* 48:4 (April 1938), p. 68.
[16] *Current History* (1938), p. 69.
[17] Ibid.

return for thousands of dollars of taxpayers money' – a complaint which has often been levelled at publicly funded arts projects.[18]

It was perhaps not until the 1960s that the divide between art and the everyday appeared to lessen when Pop artists began to reference the lived experience of ordinary Americans by its inclusion of everyday consumer products, the influence of the mass media the adoption of a visual language which had been the preserve of commercial artists. Yet as John Rublowsky noted: 'It is ironic that an art based directly on the most common images of our world should appeal to the most sophisticated tastes' highlighting that, whilst these works might reference a soup can, they neither had the same aesthetic properties when transformed into fine art, nor commanded the same price.[19]

Undergoing *an* Experience – an aesthetic for Pop Art?

Whilst Dewey believed that art's purpose within a democratic community was to reflect certain social values and enhance the lives of those within it, a crucial element of his aesthetic theory was the concept of the individual undergoing *an* experience. At its simplest, *an* experience occurs within daily existence but stands apart from it because it is particularly memorable. On recalling the experience, the individual would remember it as complete and exhibiting a particular pervasive, or aesthetic, quality. Amongst the examples he gave, Dewey included completing a chore, having a memorable meal, or solving a problem as having similar qualities. Common to all of these events was that they unfolded over a period of time until a satisfying, conclusion occurred, and as a result the individual's life has been enriched or somehow changed through the process. As David Granger explains in *John Dewey,*

[18] *Current History* (1938), p. 68.
[19] John Rublowsky, *Pop Art* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1965), p. 158.

Robert Pirsig and the Art of Living, Dewey highlights the revelatory nature of aesthetic experience as allowing the individual to gain 'a new dimension of the meaning of the human encounter with the world' and as a result is able to express these qualities in new ways, including art.[20]

Central to Dewey's notion of *an* experience and the aesthetic properties therein, is the recognition that this is not restricted to specific senses, such as sight or sound, but incorporates the whole body. Dewey contended that one does not simply undergo an experience based upon what it *looked* or *sounded* like, but rather through a combination of all the senses, including what it *felt* like emotionally and physically. For Dewey, separating the senses divorced the mind from the body, or the intellectual from the physical.

Dewey's theory has been discussed in connection with the work of the abstract expressionists and in his article *John Dewey and the Visual Arts in America* published in 1975, Stewart Buettner suggested that artists took from the philosopher the notion that the artwork was 'a lived environment established through the emotional context of the painting.'[21] Whilst examining this connection, Buettner identified the core ideas which the artists (and particularly Pollock) shared with Dewey as being 'an emphasis on energy, tension, living on the canvas, and the artist's painting as a mixture of life and action' and concluded this as being the embodiment of undergoing *an* experience.[22]

In *John Dewey and the Abstract Expressionists* (1998), Maurice R Berube noted that Buettner's essay lacked any firm evidence that the abstract expressionists

[20] David A. Granger, *John Dewey, Robert Pirsig, and the Art of Living: Revisioning Aesthetic Education* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 104.
[21] Stewart Buettner, 'John Dewey and The Visual Arts in America' in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 33:4 (Summer, 1975), p.385.
[22] Buettner (1975), p.390.

had read or discussed Dewey, but he concluded that Jackson Pollock would have been aware of Dewey via his teacher, Thomas Hart Benton, and their involvement with the Federal Arts Project. Berube argues that whether or not artists such as Mark Rothko, Robert Motherwell and Willem de Kooning were aware of Dewey, the manner in which they described their working processes echoed his sentiments. Focussing on the role that expression and emotion played in the production of their work, Berube states that the 'hallmark' of abstract expressionism was that 'the creative act not only must have emotion but that the art produced must embody emotion as well.'[23] In comparison, Berube described Pop Art as lacking any such sensations.[24]

Looking back at the art of the 1940s and 1950s, the critic Leon Jacobsen accused its exponents of moving 'away from the course prescribed for them by Dewey' and suggested that there was a 'discordance between *Art as Experience* and contemporary American visual art'.[25] Jacobsen condensed the philosopher's theory to six major points which not only supported Dewey's warning against an art of total abstraction but had much in common with the emergence of Pop art, primarily the move towards realism and art having greater significance for a wider social group. For Jacobsen, Dewey's theoretical approach demonstrated six major objectives. Amongst these, Jacobsen identified the importance of problem-solving in daily life; recognising that a heightened form of ordinary experience had an aesthetic phase; that recognisable aesthetic emotions can only properly be conveyed with reference to concrete experience; and that the aesthetic experience of a painting is not unrelated

[23] Maurice R. Berube, 'John Dewey and the Abstract Expressionists' in *Educational Theory*, 48:2, (Spring 1998), p. 216.
[24] Berube (1998), p. 217.
[25] Leon Jacobsen, '*Art as Experience* and American Visual Art Today' in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 19: 2 (Winter 1960), p. 117.
[25] Jacobsen (1960), pp. 122-123.

to the objects represented in it. Jacobsen also noted Dewey's assertion that capitalism should be replaced by a society which emphasised the importance of object-centred, individual experience and a reinstituted bond between art, artist and public.[26]

Dewey was disparaging of art which was too abstract or too introspective as he believed that it did not communicate anything to an audience. Whilst Dewey was not opposed to abstraction itself, he maintained that there should remain a connection between visual reality and the extent to which the artist used it in his work and regarded an artform that was to be 'taken to be one of *self*-expression' as resulting in 'substance and form fall(ing) apart.'[27] If an artist's work was too self-reflective, Dewey warned that this might result in 'a peculiar esthetic' which was reliant upon esoteric and theoretical approaches and excluded the work from the experience of others.[28] Furthermore, an artist whose work reflected their individuality effectively distanced themselves from the rest of society by choosing to operate on its periphery and 'often feel(ing) obliged to exaggerate their separateness to the point of eccentricity.'[29]

In the fifth chapter of *Art as Experience* Dewey demonstrated how Albert Barnes had helped form his understanding of how abstract art operated in terms of aesthetic experience. Quoting Barnes's assertion that references to the 'real world (did) not disappear from art when forms cease to be those of actually existing things' Dewey suggested that art should focus on the qualities which all objects share – 'color, extensity, solidity, movement, rhythm, etc.' When there is an increased focus

[26] Jacobsen (1960), pp. 122-123.
[27] Dewey (1980), p.107.
[28] Dewey (1980), p. 9.
[29] Dewey (1980), p. 9.

on such features that formalism offers an adequate method of critique.[30] Yet Dewey still believed that abstraction was 'usually associated with distinctively intellectual undertakings' and whilst he conceded that all art abstracts to some degree it 'could not occur without some measure of "abstraction" from physical existence.'[31] He continued by stating that: 'the one limit that must not be overpassed is that some reference to the qualities and structure of things in environment remain. Otherwise, the artist works in a purely private frame of reference and the outcome is without sense, even if vivid colors or loud sounds are present.'[32] Abstraction, according to Dewey, should remain firmly rooted in concrete reality. A work of art might appear abstract due to the elements the artist selected in order to convey their experience.

Political scientist Mark Mattern examined how art operated as a visual language, and in particular Dewey's assertion that the more closely it represented the realities of daily existence, the more effectively it communicated to its audience. Dewey's stance, according to Mattern, was based on a definition of art as allowing people to 'learn about each other's similarities and differences, break through some of the barriers to understanding and awareness and develop some of the commonalities that define community.'[33] Whilst Mattern suggested that Dewey failed to resolve the issue that the majority of what is labelled 'art' does not form a part of most people's daily lives, popular culture does, as it is 'potentially better able to play the communicative roles that Dewey envisioned.'[34] Mattern does, however, point out that a major flaw in Dewey's notion of a democratic society is that it

[30] Dewey (1980), p. 92-93.
[31] Dewey (1980), p.94.
[32] Dewey (1980), p. 95.
[33] Mark Mattern, 'John Dewey, Art and Public Life', in *The Journal of Politics* 61.01 (1999) 54-75, pp. 54-55.
[34] Mattern (1980), p. 55.

upholds the experience of a majority demographic and not that of the sub-groups existing within it.

In 1934 Dewey recognised that 'the arts which today have most vitality for the average person are things he does not take to be arts: for instance the movie, jazzed music, the comic strip' whilst also being aware that 'newspaper accounts of love-nests, murder, and exploits of bandits' were also a part of the popular mass media.[35] Whilst conceding that the examples he gave had certain aesthetic qualities, Dewey's acknowledgement that the 'unconquerable impulse to search towards experiences enjoyable in themselves,' meant that the individual for whom museums and galleries remained outside of their normal experience would be left with no other option than to 'find(s) such outlet as the daily environment provides.'[36] However, Dewey warned that when 'the objects acknowledged by the cultivated to be fine art seem anemic to the mass of people, esthetic hunger is likely to seek the cheap and the vulgar.'[37] Somewhat problematically, even though Dewey recognised that popular culture provided rich stimuli, he remained wary of suggesting that it could provide a total substitute for the academy. Even so, he maintained that art should not be 'a literal copying of objects, but that it reflected the emotions and ideas that are associated with the chief institutions of social life.'[38]

What Dewey proposed was the reintegration of art within society and the extent to which it might be problematic. Considering the high quality of handcrafted domestic objects made and used by indigenous, non-industrial societies, and particularly those items which were used as part of cultural rituals, Dewey maintained that these had superior qualities to anything which was mass produced.

[35] Dewey (1980), p.5-6.
[36] Dewey (1980), p. 6.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Dewey (1980), p. 7.

The latter, Dewey believed, were poorly manufactured and aesthetically displeasing. With a capitalist society placing high monetary, and intellectual, values on art objects, mass production would seemingly be unable to meet similar aesthetic standards, and Dewey fell short of offering a solution to this problem. Instead, he turned his attention to examining how theoretical thinking isolated art from the lived environment and so looked to identifying the aesthetic in life itself.

The Pragmatism of Pop

Writing in 1969, the art historian Barbara Rose examined how pragmatist theory underpinned many of the anti-European, anti-Idealist aesthetics which she described as being features of art during the sixties in the US. Rose identified experimental composer John Cage as representing the opposite of Clement Greenberg's commitment to expounding the 'traditional values of Western culture contingent on the existence of a cultural elite' as he expounded 'a genuinely democratic art which extends the esthetic beyond the unique object into the life and environment of everyman'.[39] Pointing to elements such as simplicity, honesty, the physical and the literal, which Rose identified as being present in the art of the early twentieth century as well as that which was being created in the sixties, she suggested that these were elements which were typical of an intrinsically American attitude and experience. Rose singled out Oldenburg as being the artist who, under Cage's tutelage, most embraced the philosophical work of William James and the aesthetic theory of Dewey's *Art as Experience*, by rejecting 'the idealist aesthetics of European art… in favour of the empirical values of American pragmatism.'[40] Rose made a clear

[39] Barbara Rose, 'Problems of Criticism V: The Politics of Art, Part II' in *Artforum*, 7:5 (January 1969), pp. 44-49.
[40] *Claes Oldenburg* (exhibition catalogue, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 25 September 1969 – 23 November 1969), Barbara Rose, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1970), p. 36 Rose (1970), p. 35.

distinction between artists in the late fifties and early sixties incorporating actual objects into their work and that of the preceding Dadaists: Dadaists used junk and found-objects to make art whilst mid-century American artists were 'mak(ing) art out of what was at hand' – an altogether more American pragmatist approach.[41]

Oldenburg was a key figure in bridging the gap between abstract expressionism and Pop art and along with fellow artist Allan Kaprow, their work, which included live performances in everyday spaces, helped to create an atmosphere which Wesselmann described as emanating a general air of excitement. Central to much of this new direction in the arts was the work of John Cage. Wesselmann described himself as 'caving in… to the influence of John Cage' when he began using collage in the late 1950s.[42] This approach enabled Wesselmann to work spontaneously, directed by what he had to hand, which he likened to Cage's method of incorporating the element of chance into his musical compositions.[43]

Cage had a direct link with Dewey through the Black Mountain College in North Carolina. Cage visited the college a number of times between 1948 and 1953. The college was a progressive, liberal institution which, during its operational years (1933-1957) attracted artists including Robert Rauschenberg and Willem de Kooning as well as others who were active on the New York art scene in the late fifties and early sixties. Black Mountain was an establishment which had been set up with Dewey's educational principles at its heart, championing 'democratic governance', a sense of community and experimental learning.[44] It was at Black Mountain in 1952 that *Theater Piece No. 1* was first performed. With music by Cage, the performance is considered to be the first example of what came to be known as a 'Happening',

[41] Rose (1970), p. 49.
[42] Oral History Interview (1984), n.p.
[43] Stealingworth (1980), p20.
[44] http://www.blackmountaincollege.org/history/ accessed 01 May 2019.

and brought together dance, art and other media within the same piece. In 1953 Cage gained notoriety for his piece *4' 33"*. Its performance, in which the musicians remain silent for four minutes and thirty-three seconds, encouraged the audience to experience their own environment and what occurred within it. Each performance would be unique, with sounds being produced as elements of chance, dependent upon the nature of the environment, the movement of the audience and things occurring in the immediate vicinity.

Amongst Wesselmann's contemporaries, Kaprow was the artist who was most clearly influenced by his teacher Cage, and had a clear interest in Dewey. In his introduction to Kaprow's book *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, Jeff Kelly noted that the artist was known to have owned a copy of *Art as Experience*, in which he made copious notes such as 'art not separate from experience… what is an authentic experience? Environment is a process of interaction.'[45] Whilst Kelly points out that Kaprow never directly referred to Dewey in his writing, his wish to 'observe, engage, and interpret the processes of living' and to situate the aesthetic within common experience rather than a quality to be bestowed upon chosen cultural objects, shared much with the general concepts underpinning the philosopher's theoretical approach.[46] The experimental and participatory nature of Kaprow's art, which frequently involved his own body as both method and material, closing the gap between the intellectual and physical, also encapsulated Dewey's notion of learning through experience and challenging dualisms.

In his essay *The Legacy of Jackson Pollock*, written a year before the first of his Happenings in 1958, Kaprow commented that the abstract expressionists changed

[45] Jeff Kelley, 'Introduction', *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* ed Jeff Kelly (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. xi.
[46] Kelley (1993), p. xii.

the nature of how artists would look to everyday life for inspiration and materials. In a passage which is reminiscent of Dewey's contention that an individual could be aesthetically enlivened by the sight and sound of a fire engine or the skill exhibited by a manual labourer, Kaprow posited that artists would 'utilize the specific substances of sight, sound, movements, people, odors, touch' whilst 'paint, chairs, food, electric and neon lights, smoke, water, old socks, a dog, movies… or a billboard selling Drano' and would present themselves as subject matter or even materials.[47] Kaprow concluded *The Legacy of Jackson Pollock* by suggesting a way forward for artists which embraced the ideals of the Pop art which was to come. Kaprow wrote; 'Young artists of today need no longer say, "I am a painter" or "a poet" or "a dancer." They are simply "artists." All of life will be open to them. They will discover out of ordinary things the meaning of ordinariness.'[48]

Initially Kaprow described the Happenings with which his name is synonymous. as being 'a collage of rather abstract events for a moveable audience.'[49] In his 1961 essay *Happening in the New York Art Scene*, exhibiting ideas which were reminiscent of Dewey's concept of 'undergoing', Kaprow explained these events as comprising 'a number of occurrences to which we are more than normally attentive. They exist for a single performance, or only a few, and are gone forever as new ones take their place.'[50] Kaprow considered 'this organic connection between art and its environment' as having great meaning before suggesting that 'Happenings invite us to cast aside for a moment these proper manners and partake wholly in the real nature of the art (and one hopes) life'. It was also implied that anyone who did

[47] Allan Kaprow, 'The Legacy of Jackson Pollock (1958)' in ed. Jeff Kelley *Allan Kaprow*: *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* ed Jeff Kelly (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 9
[48] Kaprow (1993), p. 9.
[49] Allan Kaprow, 'On the Way to Un-Art' in ed. Kelley *Allan Kaprow* (1993), p. xxvii.
[50] Allan Kaprow, 'Happenings in the New York Art Scene (1962)', in ed. Kelley, *Allan Kaprow* (1993), pp. 16-17.

participate would subsequently undergo *an* experience.[51] Kaprow also echoed other Deweyan ideals when stating that Happenings were 'a moral act.'[52] He emphasised how the experimental, and experiential, process that drove forward the production of art was the opposite of the art which was displayed in museums. Kaprow, not unlike Dewey, considered that the museum operated as a 'repository for dead artists', as well as perpetuating cultural elitism. As such, they maintained a division between art and everyday life as well as trading on art's commercial potential. [53]

Wesselmann was an active part of the environment which staged Happenings, not least due to his involvement with the Judson Gallery. The gallery, part of the Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich Village, was a space which began exhibiting art in the late 1950s. Assistant minister for the church, Bud Scott, was keen to offer the space to local artists who needed somewhere to exhibit experimental work without censorship. In 1957, Oldenburg, Jim Dine and Robert Rauschenberg had the first show at the gallery and Wesselmann and Marc Ratliff became involved as founding members. The Judson, along with the Reuben Gallery, became synonymous with Happenings, and Dine, Oldenburg and Kaprow, in Wesselmann's words, 'made the gallery come alive'.[54] Wesselmann recalled that Oldenburg was always short of actors to appear in his Happenings and so he would frequently be asked to participate. Describing himself as being 'too jealous of my time to do it' Wesselmann only agreed to bit parts which 'required no rehearsal'.[55] However, both he and Claire participated in Oldenburg's *Circus: Ironworks/Fotodeath* (1961) (Fig. 4.1).

[51] Kaprow (1993), p.18.
[52] Kaprow (1993), p. 21.
[53] Kaprow, 'The Artist as a Man of the World (1964)', in ed. Kelley (1993), p.56.
[54] Oral History Interview (1984), n.p.
[55] Ibid.

Like Kaprow, Oldenburg's work was rooted in the experiential and showed an awareness of Dewey's theories, if not directly referencing them. Writing in his notebook in 1960, Oldenburg said, 'I make my work out of my everyday experiences, which I find as perplexing and extraordinary as can be'.[56] However, it was not only the artist and those who actively participated in the production of the Happenings who were part of the experience. As Henry Geldzhaler wrote 'the audience and the performance are surrounded by what happens; the action is never merely dead ahead but in several possible directions at once.'[57] Artist(s), artistic creation and audience became inextricably linked through shared, creative and aesthetic experience.

Having moved away from abstraction, Oldenburg found that 'his deepest responses… related to his own environment and experience.'[58] In her monograph on the artist, Rose described Oldenburg's approach as differing from that of the abstract expressionists due to his 'conviction that the content expressed through form must change and direct the nature of experience, rather than existing outside and apart from life.'[59] Rose considered Oldenburg's approach as encapsulating much of what Dewey described as having 'an experience' as well as a rejection of what she deemed as European 'idealist aesthetics' in favour of a pragmatic approach.[60]

Indeed, Oldenburg's convictions, as clarified in his written piece, *I am For…* produced in 1961, seems nothing short of a pop manifesto, reflecting many Deweyan ideas, including the need for art to arise from what Dewey called 'concrete

[56] Rose (1970), p.35.
[57] Henry Geldzhaler, 'Happenings: Theater by Painters', in *The Hudson Review*, 18:4 (Winter, 1965-66) pp 581-586.
[58] Rose (1970), p.35.
[59] Rose (1970), p.35.
[60] Ibid.

experience' as well as his assertion that it should not be confined to museums.[61] Oldenburg began by stating 'I am for an art that is political-erotical-mystical, that does something other than sit on its ass in a museum… embroils itself with the everyday crap and still comes out on top' and 'takes its form from the lines of life itself'.[62] Oldenburg identified the aesthetic experiences to be had from witnessing such everyday occurrences as smoke rising from a chimney, the drool falling from a dog's mouth or the tap of a blind man's stick on a sidewalk – all of which resembles Dewey's explanation of undergoing *an* experience which might be informed by something as mundane as a 'fire-engine rushing by.'[63]

Certainly, during the late 1950s and early 1960s, both Kaprow and Oldenburg espoused the idea that life did not merely imitate art (or vice versa) but were essentially two sides of the same coin. However, the establishment, represented by individuals such as the art critic Dore Ashton, an opponent of Pop, attributed the reliance on randomness and the inclusion of an audience as participants, as a 'rebellion against metaphor.'[64] Furthermore, she accused those artists who included the element of chance into their work of '(refusing) to take the responsibility for his choices'.[65] In the early stages of his artistic career, Wesselmann stated that he had an impartiality to subject matter, with his work being frequently directed by the objects he cut from magazines. Whilst using these collage elements, Wesselmann felt no need to try and replicate them in paint. Describing himself as having no 'point of

[61] Dewey (1980), p.10.
[62] Claes Oldenburg originally wrote the statement 'I am for…' to be included in the catalogue which accompanied the exhibition *Environments, Situations, Spaces* which was held at the Martha Jackson Gallery, New York, in 1961.
[63] Dewey (1980), pp. 4-5.
[64] 'A Symposium on Pop Art' in ed. Steven Henry Madoff *Pop Art: A Critical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 70. This is a transcript of the symposium which took place on 13 December 1963 at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. The participants were Peter Selz, Henry Geldzahler, Hilton Karmer, Dore Ashton, Leo Steinberg and Stanley Kunitz.
[65] 'A Symposium on Pop Art' (1997), p. 70.

view to paint the things myself', this was in part because he felt he lacked the necessary skill to do so at that juncture.[66] For Wesselmann, his experiments with collage simply allowed him to work quickly. Describing himself as 'impatient' when it came to making images, collage allowed the artist to cover areas swiftly by adding areas of pre-printed colour, patterns or objects. Yet by predominantly using magazines Wesselmann's 'chance' encounters with images were determined by his sources' content and this also impacted the size of what he was producing. As he was teaching during the day, Wesselmann had a limited amount of time to devote to making art. Working in his small apartment and setting himself the task of completing a work each evening, such environmental factors certainly played a part in what he created.

At the *Symposium on Pop Art* held at the *Museum of Modern Art* in 1963, Henry Geldzahler argued that Pop was 'a new two-dimensional landscape painting' which captured 'the artist responding specifically to his visual environment'. This environment comprised an urban, mass-media fuelled society, and he concluded that it was 'logical for art to be made out of what we see.'[67] In response, the art critic Hilton Kramer, proclaimed that Pop did not 'tell us what it feels like to be living through the present moment of civilization – it is merely part of the evidence of that civilization. Its social effect is simply to reconcile us to a world of commodities, banalities and vulgarities...'.[68] Yet those artists who were using the common experience and referencing banal objects were increasingly popular because they were communicating via the signs and symbols of their contemporary society. Pop artists were not only aware of what it was like to live in a commercially abundant

[66] Oral History Interview (1984), n. p.
[67] 'A Symposium on Pop Art' (1997), p.66.
[68] 'A Symposium on Pop Art' (1997), p. 69.

and visually rich environment, they were engaging in a two-way conversation between fine and commercial art; shared and individual experience; the intellectualised dialogue of museums and galleries and the common parlance of city streets. As such, the art which was being produced in 1960s New York was questioning the dualities which separated parts of society in much the same way as Dewey had done.

Wesselmann's Aesthetic Awakening

Wesselmann described first encountering Dewey's work as a student at The Cooper Union School of Art and that it resulted in him thinking rationally and specifically for the first time.[69]

Before his enrolment at Cooper Union, Wesselmann had already studied at the Art Academy of Cincinnati, hoping to have a career in cartooning. Prior to that, he had received a degree in psychology from the University of Cincinnati, starting his studies there in 1951. Having been drafted into the army in 1952 Wesselmann completed his degree in 1954. Course catalogues acquired from the University of Cincinnati for the academic years 1952-53 and 1955-56, which would have been applicable to the time that Wesselmann was studying, show that psychology students were advised to undertake a basic course in philosophy.[70] It is highly likely that Wesselmann would have encountered the work of William James, if not Dewey himself, and the philosophical theories which helped shape American pragmatism during his early days of study.

After obtaining his psychology degree, Wesselmann moved to New York and enrolled at The Cooper Union School of Art. This was a progressive and inclusive

[69] Oral History Interview (1984), n. p.
[70] Confirmation received in an email from the University of Cincinnati dated 14 September 2017.

institution, offering 'free education to all residents of the United States of America who qualified in the competition for admission, regardless of their race, religion, or sex.'[71] The school's statement of purpose specified that students were taught in 'an environment conducive to the development of aesthetic sensitivity, the ability to think and the power to act' as well as being instructed in 'the contemporary point of view' and the adaptation of its program to 'the changing social and cultural needs' of its students, as indicated by the school's mission statement which echoed the commitments of its founder, the philanthropist Peter Cooper.[72]

The curriculum at Cooper Union was varied, offering practical and theoretical art classes. The catalogue for the 1956-57 academic year, a time during which Wesselmann was studying at Cooper Union, shows that classes ranged from drawing, lettering and sculpture in the first year to contemporary thought and cultural traditions in the third. Alongside the practice-based parts of the curriculum, Cooper Union students were also taught *Contemporary Thought I* and *II* which included social philosophy and examined literary and philosophical works 'with emphasis on the problems of man in contemporary society.'[73] *Elements of Aesthetics* introduced the students to 'the psychology of art', and in *Studies in Cultural Values I* students examined the 'dominant values in contemporary American culture' which included 'individualism, materialism, humanitarianism' and 'pragmatism'.[74] Wesselmann recalled that it was during his second year of study that he started to 'be pulled into philosophical thinking' and this eventually lead him to question 'what to do about God and all those other things.'[75] Along with 'trying to make this decision

[71] The Cooper Union Art School course catalogue 1956-1957, p. 2.
[72] The Cooper Union Art School course catalogue 1956-1957, p. 1.
[73] The Cooper Union Art School course catalogue 1956-1957, p. 20.
[74] The Cooper Union Art School course catalogue 1956-1957, p. 21.
[75] Oral History Interview (1984), n. p.

about marriage and painting and throwing out God, and finally deciding, yes… throwing out God' Wesselmann concluded, 'John Dewey had a lot of intellectual clout with me.'[76]

Writing as Slim Stealingworth, Wesselmann recounted undergoing his first aesthetic experience in relation to looking at art. Visiting the Museum of Modern Art as a student, and on seeing one of Robert Motherwell's paintings from the series *Elegy to the Spanish Republic*, Wesselmann recalled 'a sensation of high visceral excitement in his stomach, and it seemed as though (his) eyes and stomach were directly connected.'[77] In interview with Sandler, Wesselmann added that it was 'the first time I got a physical thrill, actually a thrill in my stomach… It's quite exciting to be able to react that way to a painting, because before that I could look at paintings and record them but I couldn't experience them.'[78] The reaction that Wesselmann had to this huge, monochrome canvas might be seen to support Buettner's assertion that the abstract expressionists not only embodied the emotional and experiential when producing art, but were able to invoke *an experience* in the observer even though the images might not have their basis in visual realism.

As a result of his experiencing Motherwell's work, Wesselmann subsequently endeavoured to induce 'this same feeling to determine the completion of (my) own paintings.'[79] Such an approach suggests the importance of consummation to Wesselmann's artistic practice, that is the recognition that 'a piece of work is finished in a way that is satisfactory' rather than there being a mere cessation of doing.[80] For the artist, the experience is complete once the problem of

[76] Ibid.
[77] Stealingworth (1980), p.13.
[78] Oral History Interview (1984), n. p.
[79] Stealingworth (1980), p.13.
[80] Dewey (1980), p. 35.

making a piece of art is resolved and the finished object can be seen as the culmination of doings and undergoings.

Wesselmann's recollection suggests the importance placed upon personal, lived experience as a way of inspiring, or shaping, how one learns. Wesselmann recalled how students were encouraged 'not to accept everything that had come before… but to be open to something new' and how, as a result, 'I started to examine everything I was ever taught about anything.'[81] Speaking further about his time at the school, Wesselmann remembered 'the good thing about Cooper – they didn't teach us very much, but they set us on fire do so something.'[82] Of all the classes he undertook at Cooper Union, Wesselmann identified his painting teacher, Nicolas Marsicano as being the most important to him and he recalled how his teacher encouraged him to find his own way of doing things.[83] Speaking about Marsicano's teaching practice, Wesselmann said, 'what was important was that he didn't try to teach us anything; he just simply tried to nudge us into higher levels of awareness.'[84] Wesselmann described how Marsicano would spend up to fifteen minutes with a student discussing the painting they were working on as part of the making process. This allowed the student to 'get more insight into it' and Wesselmann likened the experience of being taught by Marsicano to being taken on a journey.[85]

Marsicano offers a direct link between Dewey and Wesselmann. Having been a student at the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia, Marsicano had first-hand experience of Dewey's educational theories in practice. The foundation, established by the wealthy philanthropist, Albert C Barnes, was set up in 1922 and continues to

[81] Oral History Interview (1984), n. p.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid. Wesselmann recalled how Marsicano said to him 'Matisse found his way of drawing eyes; You've got to find a way of drawing eyes. You can't do what Matisse did.'
[84] Ibid.
[85] Oral History Interview (1984), n. p.

promote his beliefs that enjoying art can be a transformational experience for everyone and how engaging with art can provide 'personal and intellectual development' proving that it has 'a meaningful role to play in the service of improving society'.[86]

Writing in *The New Republic* on the occasion of being granted an educational charter in 1923, Barnes described his wish to continue the foundation's early forays into providing an environment for individuals who were 'sensitive to color, design, drawing, to beauty in any object' and cultivating within them 'joy… growth' and the development of an 'aesthetic capacity' by providing the opportunity to spend time with his paintings.[87] According to Dewey, the method which Barnes adopted brought a scientific approach to the teaching of art by encouraging 'objective seeing' – a method of study which directed students away from learning facts or the language of art appreciation, and encouraged them to actively look at and interact with art.[88]

The foundation's educational methods were founded on Dewey's approach to teaching and Barnes proclaimed that at the heart of this philosophy was the conviction that 'all genuine experience is intelligent experience, experience guided by insight derived from science, illuminated by art.'[89] In his preface to *Art as Experience,* Dewey acknowledged the role Barnes played in shaping 'my own thinking about the philosophy of esthetics' and recalled how the conversations the

[86] These appear as the first three core beliefs which appear on the Barnes Foundation's website https://www.barnesfoundation.org/about/values accessed 31 August 2022.
[87] Albert C Barnes, 'The Barnes Foundation' in *The New Republic*, 14 March 1923, pp. 65-67.
[88] John Dewey, foreword in Albert C Barnes and Violette de Mazia, *The Art of Renoir* (Philadelphia: William J Dornan, 1935; 2nd edn. 1944), pp.ix-x.
[89] Margaret Hess Johnson, 'John Dewey's Socially Instrumental Practice at the Barnes Foundation and the Role of "Transferred Values" in Aesthetic Experience', in *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 46:2 (Summer 2012), pp 43 – 57, p. 43. Johnson references this quote from Barnes.

two of them had 'in the unrivalled collection of pictures he has assembled' shaped his understanding of art.[90]

Marsicano began his studies at the Barnes Foundation in 1933. As a student he would have had access to collection of art amassed by Barnes, who, by 1930, had the largest number of paintings by Matisse in America. In 1935, Barnes started to collect decorative arts which students viewed alongside fine art as a way to develop aesthetic appreciation. The emphasis 'to look at works of art primarily in terms of their visual relationships' is still demonstrated by the foundation's method of displaying fine and decorative arts together in its 'wall ensembles' (Fig. 4.2) which encourages students to look for formal similarities which exist between a variety of different objects. [91]

In the introductory chapters of *The Art of Renoir* (1935), which Barnes co-wrote with one of the foundation's teachers, Violette de Mazia, clear guidelines are given for studying art. The book comprises chapters entitled *Method*; *Learning to See*; *Expression and Form* and *Experience and Growth*, and the reader is prescribed a general method for approaching art prior to them examining any works in detail. In the second chapter, Barnes urges the reader to see a picture as 'an embodiment of an artist's experience in his contact with the world'.[92] He summarises the third chapter as looking at the 'living being' and its interaction with environment as the undergoing of continual adjustments which results in a 'rhythmic organization of the material of the objective world'.[93] In the final introductory chapter, Barnes suggests that 'genuine experience in reasoning and in artistic creation is a continuous

[90] Dewey (1980), p. viii.
[91] https://collection.barnesfoundation.org/ accessed 9 May 2019.
[92] Albert C Barnes and Violetta de Mazia, *The Art of Renoir*, (Philadelphia: William J Dornan, 1944, 2nd edition, first published in 1935), p.10.
[93] Barnes and De Mazia, (1944), p.32.

process… resulting in a constant reorganization both in the individual and in the world' and as such makes the point that the production of art and the lived world are crucially co-dependent.[94] It is clear from this how closely Barnes and Dewey influenced each other's work and approach to aesthetic theory.

Marsicano's method of teaching was undoubtedly guided by his time at the Barnes Foundation. In a radio interview conducted by Ruth Bowman in 1973, Marsicano explained how, as a teacher, he was careful not to inflict his own way of painting onto his students. His aim was to enable students to find the means to help themselves – learning through doing and making available what they needed in order to develop as painters.[95] Marsicano credited this approach to him having been fortunate that his own education encouraged him to talk and think about painting outside of himself.

Cooper Union Museum for the Arts of Decoration, not unlike the Barnes Foundation, also boasted an eclectic collection. Opened in 1897, it was established by Sarah and Eleanor Hewitt, the granddaughters of the school's founder, in order to fulfil what they described as a 'need for cultural resources in the United States'.[96] On the fortieth anniversary of the museum, Dewey wrote *The Educational Function of a Museum of Decorative Arts*, within which he praised Cooper for his 'personality and activities' which 'gave new significance to a form of citizenship that is a precious memory and an enduring inspiration.'[97] In that essay, Dewey emphasized the

[94] Barnes and De Mazia, (1944), p. 37.
[95] Ruth Gurin Bowman, *Views on Art*, 10 April 1973. Gurin Bowman interviewed Nicholas Marsicano as part of her series on WNYC Radio. This is now part the NYPR Archive Collections. WNYC archives id 8859 available at https://www.wnyc.org/story/nicholas-marsicano/. Accessed 12 October 2022.
[96] *Treasures from the Cooper Union Museum* (exhibition catalogue, National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, 13 July – 24 September 1967; Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1967), p.7.
[97] John Dewey, 'The Educational Function of a Museum of Decorative Arts' in *The Chronicle of the Museum for the Arts of Decoration of Cooper Union*, 1:3 (April 1937), p 93.

importance of Cooper Union Museum as 'an educational agency' which equalled the role of the school itself.[98]

Dewey's discussion of the role of the museum in a democratic society continued in a similar vein to that which he had espoused in *Art as Experience* three years earlier. He despised the way that museums and galleries seemingly removed art objects from the everyday lives of the general public, and welcomed an environment which offered a 'breaking down of the walls that so long divided what were called the fine arts from the applied and industrial art.'[99] Adhering to the idea that the decorative arts allowed the public to have aesthetic encounters in their daily lives, the Cooper Union Museum operated on the principle that 'every article of daily use has form and color' and that 'wherever form and color exist there is the opportunity for art'.[100]

Dewey praised the museum for its method of display. Objects were arranged 'on the basis of community of design rather than historic periods' and grouping together objects with different uses and made from a variety of materials, would aid 'the purpose of learning' by allowing the viewer to appreciate an object's 'esthetic form'.[101] Dr Richard P Wunder, who was the Assistant Director of the Cooper Union Museum in 1968 (the year in which it came under the aegis of the Smithsonian Institution), described the museum as an adjunct to the art school which also served a purpose for professional designers.[102] He was clear that the purpose of the museum was to open the individual's eyes to the inherent beauty in objects which surrounded

[98] Dewey (1937), p. 93.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Dewey (1937), p. 98.
[102] Interview with Dr Richer P. Wunder, Assistant Director of the Cooper Union Museum, 5 July 1968. NYPR Municipal Archives, WNYC Collection https://www.wnyc.org/story/cooper-union-museum/ The interview with an unidentified journalist took place just prior to the museum coming under the aegis of the Smithsonian Institution.

them in the mundanity of their everyday existence, and he suggested that this should be the purpose of all museums and galleries.

The diverse nature of the collection was believed to be 'a particularly American contribution to museum development' which fulfilled a 'pragmatic ... purpose in the world of the arts'.[103] The museum's approach to display was not unlike the Barnes Foundation's 'wall ensembles' and objects would be grouped together in order to emphasise characteristics such as 'texture' or 'color' and highlighted the items' common visual qualities, as demonstrated in this design installation from 1958 (Fig. 4.3).

For Dewey, Cooper Union Museum presented a possibility for 'the unity of the arts' which included applied, industrial and fine arts.[104] By offering designers the opportunity to examine the applied arts they could develop the necessary artistic integrity which allowed them to produce objects which maintained aesthetic standards. Whilst wary of mass production, Dewey noted that manufacturers were becoming increasingly aware that 'good business and the creation of satisfactory designs in color and form can go together' and even the limitations which might be imposed by machine production should not lead designers to the 'sacrifice of artistic qualities.'[105] Such considerations meant that well-designed, aesthetically pleasing objects afforded the opportunity for art and daily life to co-exist.

Wunder identified the role that the museum played in offering particular benefits for the student who might become successful in the world of commercial art or design. He noted that many of the artists who had graduated in the previous ten years (which included Wesselmann) had achieved an unprecedented level of success,

[103] *Treasures from the Cooper Union Museum (*1967), p.8.
[104] Dewey (1937), p. 95.
[105] Dewey (1937), p. 97.

and attributed this to their proximity to the museum and its array of decorative and commercial arts. It is highly likely that the museum's collection of objects guided these artists to look upon everyday items as the inspiration for art. Wunder also pointed out that the museum provided a valuable environment for working commercial artists who could examine objects held by the museum in order to work out design problems. He spoke of it being of particular importance in respect of 'flat' or two-dimensional design, including packaging and advertising, and how Cooper Museum's collection provided inspiration to graphic designers and illustrators. This may have directly, or indirectly, influenced the move towards artists embracing the styles adopted by commercial artists.

More directly, Cooper Union's courses in graphic design and techniques, typography and illustration formed part of the art school's curriculum. Wesselmann recalled the two-dimensional design classes taught by David Lund, which he undertook in his first year, as providing him with something he had not encountered before. Wesselmann explained this as being 'a very inventive kind of composition' with 'no rules' and he also stated that he found a course in advertising very interesting.[106] When looking at Wesselmann's mature painting style, with its flat, brightly coloured areas and simplified forms, there is clear evidence of his being influenced by graphic arts and two-dimensional design. As he developed an art style which did not emphasise painterly qualities his work increasingly resembled commercial art. As his *The Great American Nudes* became larger in scale, they seemed to directly allude to the lived American experience of city streets adorned with advertising billboards as well as echoing their predisposition for imbuing even the most commonplace of objects with an innate sex appeal.

[106] Oral History Interview (1984), n. p.

Dewey's 'Life-Changing' Influence

Whilst Wesselmann explained that encountering Dewey as part of his studies at Cooper Union led to him reading 'meaningfully' for the first time, the affect the philosopher had was possibly even more far reaching. [107] In interview with Wesselmann's one-time model and studio assistant, Monica Serra, at the artist's former studio in New York, she explained that it was the artist's view on religion which were mostly altered by his encounter with Dewey. She later explained:

> Tom and I were discussing the concept of God, and the hereafter and stuff along those lines… His mention of John Dewey had everything to do with that and not his views on education.
>
> If my memory serves me, in our conversation, he was telling me that he was questioning his childhood values - church going, what about marriage and heaven and the like. He said he had started to question these things and those values he took from his youth when he went to Cooper Union. He told me that he started his own self-examination there in college along with his fellow students and began serious reading.
>
> John Dewey, he said, had touched a nerve for him… maybe the fact that Dewey was so logical, and also a humanitarian (Tom shared these values). At any rate, what the conversation came down to was that Dewey led him to the logical conclusion that God did not exist, because who then created God?... What I came away with was that Tom seemed to have a sure answer to his first inquiry, that he deduced from Dewey, in the form (of) this question.[108]

[107] Ibid.
[108] Email from Monica Serra dated 18 September 2018. This was first discussed with Serra during my visit to the Wesselmann Estate in May 2018.

Whilst Dewey's writings encompass education, religion and art, these are all underpinned by similar theoretical ideas. According to Dewey, both religion and art had been removed from the 'scope of the common or community life' and they no longer operated as 'enhancements of the processes of everyday life' but had become marginalised.[109] As Hildebrand explains, 'Dewey became convinced that much of traditional religion… amounted to a cynical disparagement of human experience.'[110] Although Dewey did not deny the effect certain experiences had on an individual, he questioned why they were attributed to higher powers and not recognised as part of enriching, human existence which was fully experienced through the unity of mind and body, something that he also applied to art.

Dewey disagreed with the concept of an 'unseen power controlling our destiny' as this suggested that society was governed by an ideal and that the individual had little personal impact.[111] The problem then became the adherence to an ideal which was beyond that of lived experience, or as Dewey explained 'the claim on the part of religions to possess a monopoly of ideals and of the supernatural means… stands in the way of distinctively religious *values* inherent in natural experience' (emphasis mine).[112] As Hildebrand states, Dewey sought to identify the source of religious experience and moral faith within 'the physical and social environment we actually inhabit.'[113] Believing that a democratic society should place an emphasis upon humanity rather than divinity, Dewey's stance was that this meant celebrating individuals' experiences and achievements as being self-driven and as a result of a full interaction with the lived environment which, ideally, was egalitarian.

[109] Dewey (1980), p. 6.
[110] Hildebrand (2008), p. 187.
[111] John Dewey, *A Common Faith*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1934; repr. 1991), p.23.
[112] Dewey (1991), p.28.
[113] Hildebrand (2008), p195.

Creativity and aesthetic experience were also the result of the entire being's interaction with, and awareness of, their daily environment. These interactions provided individuals with all that was necessary for them to gain knowledge, learn and develop and find beauty and inspiration in the mundane. According to Dewey, the arts were 'the handmaiden of religion', serving the purpose of instilling devotion in the viewer. [114] However, seeing art in these terms did not take into account either the skill of the artist who had produced the work or what they had undergone to create images which inspired emotion that was akin to being spiritual.

In 1933, Dewey was one of 34 signatories to the first *Humanist Manifesto*. The manifesto comprised fifteen points, which endorsed the importance of humankind as a driving and creative force in the development of civilisation, the communicative importance of social interaction, equality and a belief in the individual having the power to achieve their dreams. Humanists believed that the problem with religion itself was that it had become institutionalised. This could be remedied to a great extent by removing the prominence that was placed on oppositions such as sacred/profane, spiritual/physical or even mind/body. Maintaining such dualisms prevented the fully integrated individual from being the centre of their own existence and in charge of their own moral and creative potential. Subsequently, it is easy to see why Dewey might have 'touched a nerve' for Wesselmann. Not only did he help the artist come to terms with religious values he was questioning, it may well have instilled in Wesselmann more belief in fulfilling his own potential.

Formalism, Pragmatism and Materiality

[114] Dewey (1980), p.31.

Dewey advocated that an artist should avoid 'playing minor variations upon old themes in styles and manners that are agreeable because they are the channels of pleasant reminiscence.'[115] Instead, he wrote;

> Great original artists take a tradition into themselves. They have not shunned but digested it. Then the very conflict set up between it and what is new in themselves and in their environment creates the tension that demands a new mode of expression… The great innovators in modern painting were more assiduous students of the pictures of the past than were the imitators who set the contemporary fashion.[116]

Dewey was forward thinking in that he identified artistic innovation as demonstrated by a knowledge, and reworking, of traditional genres in inventive ways. Yet whilst he promoted change in some areas, there were others in which Dewey upheld an adherence to more old-fashioned moral and artistic standards. Whilst Dewey maintained that the mind and body should not be placed in opposition but needed to be fully integrated in order to undergo a complete, and aesthetic, experience, he never fully reconciled problems pertaining to certain aspects of the lived experience of the body. This is particularly the case when it came to considering the nude or what might be described as the most fully integrated experience of body and mind, the sexual. Even though Dewey identified the nude as a suitable subject for art, he seemed unable to divorce it from certain physical, bodily associations, and it was exactly those which placed it within the everyday, lived experience. Dewey upheld the notion that the nude had to be transformed by, or *into* art, which effectively removed it from the everyday experience of individuals, and particularly one of their

[115] Dewey (1980), p.159.
[116] Ibid.

primary interactions with the human body. This not only reinforced the notion of a divide existing between art and life, it upheld the existence of the dualisms that Dewey sought to challenge.

In spite of this, Dewey urged artists to cover 'all aspects and phases of experience,' saying that there should be no restrictions placed upon subject matter. He even went as far as to say that one of the most important aspects of art was that boundaries and restrictions should not be placed upon 'the material fit to be used in art' as it hemmed in 'the artistic sincerity of the individual' and 'force(d) his perceptions into channels previously worn into ruts and clip(ped) the wings of his imagination.'[117] Dewey believed that 'one of the functions of art is precisely to sap the moralistic timidity that causes the mind to shy away from some materials and refuse to admit them into the clear and purifying light of perceptive consciousness.'[118] He accused 'the moralist' for denouncing 'the lust of the eye as part of the surrender of spirit to flesh' and for connecting 'the sensuous with the sensual and the sensual with the lewd.'[119] Yet even so, Dewey was not averse to playing the moralist himself. Warning artists against displaying 'one-sided and morbid' interests and 'sly and furtive' intentions, Dewey identified exactly these elements as being present in 'much contemporary exploitation of sex.'[120]

Dewey was aware that images of the female nude could be problematic and accused some artists of producing works that 'merely excite'.[121] Yet he seemed to steer away from considering how the naked figure might operate within an aesthetics of the everyday. Keeping paintings of the nude separate from the actuality of

[117] Dewey (1980), p.190.
[118] Dewey (1980), p. 189.
[119] Dewey (1980), p. 21.
[120] Dewey (1980), p. 190.
[121] Dewey (1980), p. 178.

experiencing an unclothed body, Dewey wrote that he admired Renoir's nudes as they were delightful without any 'pornographic suggestion.'[122] He attributed this to art's ability to transform the values of objects and remove 'conventional associations', yet it is precisely the removal of the object from conventional associations and everyday experience which effectively placed it outside of society's lived reality.[123] Even though Dewey acknowledged that Renoir retained and accentuated 'the voluptuous qualities of flesh', a phrase which surely alluded to certain physical traits and pleasures, he maintained that it was the artist's use of colour and a certain mode of abstraction which removed the 'ordinary associations with bare bodies' and 'transferred (them) into a new realm' in which 'the esthetic expels the physical… and ejects the erotic.'[124] This allusion to formalism was certainly indicative of Barnes' influence, yet Dewey seemed unable to adequately conflate his anti-dualism stance with the naked or erotic body..

For Dewey, celebrating the integration of mind and body, rather than seeing them as opposing elements, was one thing, but when it came to images of the naked form, he seemed to find it necessary to impose a distinction between the intellectual and the physical. Furthermore, it was essential that the artist transformed the image into 'art'. Any allusion to the corporeal was seen as testament to the artist's ability to use paint and colour effectively, and not a reference to physical experience as such. Illustrations of the body had to be appreciated in terms of their formal characteristics which allowed them to become intellectualised, and thus removed from the physical. If a nude was considered salacious then Dewey asserted that this was due to the artist exhibiting 'a partial or frustrated organization of outgoing energy' and producing

[122] Dewey (1980), p. 190.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.

something which was meant 'merely to excite.'[125] In such cases, Dewey accused the artist of representing 'a simulated esthetic experience' in which 'life (was) pretended, not enacted' yet this negated the very process of physical and sexual experience.[126]

At the very end of *Art as Experience*, Dewey considered the 'moral office and human function of art.'[127] Believing that a society's moral tendencies were partly shaped by the art that it produced, Dewey deduced that the arts flourished in a morally rich environment. Yet he also conceded that social standards changed. Whilst this informed new developments in art, Dewey noted that they were not always well-received if they reflected values which differed from those which preceded them. In particular, individuals with a conservative attitude frequently labelled new directions in art as 'immoral and sordid' and subsequently, Dewey warned, they looked to 'products of the past for esthetic satisfaction.'[128] 'The only question', Dewey wrote, 'is whether and in what ways art should conform to a moral system already developed' which seemed to indicate that art did not necessarily have to be constrained by existing boundaries but might even actively oppose them.[129]

Wesselmann's Pragmatist Approach

Wesselmann's images certainly seemed to challenge aspects of society's moral standards, being more representative of an environment which was becoming increasingly liberal-minded, fighting for freedom of speech and redefining what constituted obscenity. More than ever, the art produced in the 1960s broke free from the limitations of tradition – both by way of subject matter and methods of art

[125] Dewey (1980), p. 178.
[126]Ibid.
[127] Dewey (1980), p.344.
[128] Dewey (1980), p. 346.
[129] Dewey (1980), p. 347.

production. Although Wesselmann argued that his art should not be seen as offering any social commentary, by reflecting elements of contemporary America and making his nudes evermore erotic, they did just that. Wesselmann was producing snapshots of daily life with which many Americans could associate.

One element of Wesselmann's working practice exemplifies a particularly pragmatist outlook: the manner in which he continually reworked the same motif, particularly the nude, with slight alterations to composition and in various materials as though there was an ongoing 'problem' that he aimed to solve. A variety of his *Great American Nudes* and *Bedroom Paintings* feature the same figure. For example, the figure which appears in *Great American Nude #68* (1965) was removed from her outdoors setting and became the focus for the shaped canvas *Great American Nude #69* (1965). Wesselmann did the same with *Great American Nudes #70* and *#71* (both 1965) whilst *Great American Nude #84* and *#85* (both 1966) sees the same figure against different backgrounds, one being an outside setting and the other being an interior. The development of his figures throughout the whole series of *Great American Nudes* could be identified as the artist's ongoing attempt to solve the 'problem' of defining the nude for a contemporary American environment. As experiments in formalism, the alterations that Wesselmann made to the figures allowed him to see how the result was impacted by considerations such as changes in colour and composition or by isolating the nude. This constant reworking of the same motif brings to mind Dewey's assertion that 'There can be no movement towards a consummating close unless there is a progressive massing of values, a cumulative effect… (which) cannot exist without conservation of the import of what has gone before.'[130] Subsequently the entire series of Wesselmann's one hundred

[130] Dewey (1980), p 137.

Great American Nudes, can be seen as the artist working towards a pragmatist and consummatory experience.

Dewey highlighted the importance of an artist's continual development being formed through experience and experimentation as well as constant interaction with their surroundings:

> The artist is compelled to be an experimenter because he has to express an intensely individualized experience through means and materials that belong to the common and public world. This problem cannot be solved once for all. It is met in every new work undertaken. Otherwise an artist repeats himself and becomes esthetically dead. Only because the artist operates experimentally does he open new fields of experience and disclose new aspects and qualities in familiar scenes and objects.[131]

Wesselmann definitely adopted an experimental attitude towards producing art, from his early use of collage, incorporating actual items into his assemblages and exploring the interaction between painted elements and real objects. When he began to include items such as working radios and televisions, ringing telephones, bathroom tiles, toilet seats, refrigerator doors and other household items, he brought the sights and sounds of contemporary America into the gallery space and enhanced the aesthetic experience by referencing the everyday. Placing a speaker playing street sounds behind the window in *Great American Nude #54* (1964) (Fig. 4.4) the displacement of the commonplace into the gallery environment made the connection between the aesthetic nature of the everyday and its effect on art. In relation to the use of an intermittently ringing telephone in *Great American Nude #44* (1963) the artist wrote that 'When the phone began ringing, the whole painting seemed to wake

[131] Dewey (1980), p. 144.

up and race around within itself, and the viewer's eye became more activated in relation to seeing the painting' which suggests an increased awareness of the aesthetic being enhanced by something which references the everyday experience.[132]

With reference to his juxtaposition of real life objects with painted areas, with the female nude being within the latter category, Wesselmann claimed that the three-dimensional items gave structure to the image in a way which intensified the two-dimensional aspects of the piece. Wesselmann was keen that these works were not to be seen as something that the viewer would physically engage with. For example, whilst the rug which was used in *Great American Nude #48* (Fig. 4.5) protruded into 'real' space, the viewer was not supposed to step on it, but to see it as an extension of the painting and view it from the front as though it were two-dimensional. This prevents the viewer from any physical engagement with the artwork and emphasises the act of looking and experiencing the piece as though it was flat, but as a slice of the everyday, it also implies how daily life can provide a source for aesthetic contemplation.

Wesselmann experimented with a number of industrial materials throughout his career and in conjunction with commercial manufacturers. Developing processes which incorporated the use of, for example, moulded plastics in ways which assimilated qualities inherent in advertising signage, is in keeping with Dewey's notion of the more democratic potentialities of art. Indeed, whilst Dewey was of the opinion that mass produced, machine-made objects lacked the aesthetic appeal of individually crafted items, it did not preclude the use of materials normally associated with manufacturing process from being used to make art. In fact, Dewey wrote that 'what makes a material a medium is that it is used to express a meaning

[132] Stealingworth (1980), p. 33.

which is other than that which it is in virtue of its bare physical existence' and this is equally applicable to the raw materials an artist used.[133]

Wesselmann was inspired to experiment with moulded plastic having noticed the visual impact of illuminated gas station signs, such as the vacuum formed plastic signs produced for companies like Kerr-McGee (Fig. 4.6). These were not to be an artist's impression of commercially inspired plastic signage but employed the actual materials to make an art object. In 1964 Wesselmann visited a plastic display manufacturer in Brooklyn. Describing this as heralding a move towards a 'new shift' in his art production, Wesselmann explained that he was having three-dimensional objects custom made by the manufacturer who also produced items used in store displays. Wesselmann described *Still Life #46* (1964) (Fig. 4.7) as being the most important of these experiments in vacuum formed plastic and was keen to explain the manufacturing process:

> So *Still Life #46* was vacuum-formed, using a mold of the plastic apple that had so excited Wesselmann, and molds from wooden elements made by his carpenter to his specifications. From these assembled elements, a plaster mold was made from which the unit was vacuum-formed. The image was painted on at the factory by an expert at spray painting for illumination.'[134]

Wesselmann produced *Great American Nude #74* (1965) (Fig. 4.8) as a series of twelve figures with various skin tones and hair colour. Wesselmann described the manufacturing process of blow-moulding as being more 'sympathetic to his use of the third dimension to intensify the two dimensional experience'.[135] Rather than having to initially sculpt a three-dimensional object in order to make a mould,

[133] Dewey (1980), p. 201.
[134] Stealingworth (1980), p. 43.
[135] Stealingworth (1980), p.47.

Wesselmann explained that he only had to 'cut(s) the desired shape out of a flat surface, and the heated plastic sheet is sucked through the hole to whatever depth is desired', resulting in 'a streamlined fake sculptural sense'.[136]

Wesselmann's use of the skills of workmen and creating artwork from materials which dealt in the same visual language as those signs and symbols found within the urban landscape, brings to mind Dewey's ideal of the artist as one of many labourers working within society in order to produce something which might benefit the community. However, it is difficult to disassociate specific materials from certain associations. Moulded plastic not only made the artworks Wesselmann produced resemble street signage, but the resulting artworks also appeared to advertise the naked female body as though it were a commodity to be purchased.

As Wilmerding noted, 'in this age of rampant consumer culture, aggressive advertising and promotion of all manner of new cosmetics, focus on bodily details came naturally' and this was something which possibly made Wesselmann's images of body parts seem less out of the ordinary.[137] The public were used to seeing anatomical fragments such as legs, or even dismembered torsos, as part of in-store displays. Counter-top and department store mannequins, particularly those for lingerie and cosmetics, drew attention to those parts of the body which related to the product being promoted, as did printed advertisements (Fig. 4.9). Wesselmann's close-ups of red-toenailed feet as seen in *Bedroom Painting #7* (1967/69) (Fig. 4.10) would not have looked out of place in an advertisement for nail polish and his *Mouth* paintings could easily be used to promote lipstick. Yet whilst this was part of the visual language of consumer culture, when there is no saleable item to accompany

[136] Ibid.
[137] *The Pop Object: The Still Life Tradition in Pop Art* (exhibition catalogue) Acquavella Gallery, New York, 09 April – 23 May 2013), John Wilmerding (New York: Rizzoli, 2013), p. 232.

the anatomical feature, it is the body itself, or its fragmented part, which becomes the commodity. Such associations did not go unnoticed and were commented upon in a brief review of Wesselmann's Janis Gallery exhibition held in May 1966, which featured some of his moulded plastic pieces. Writing in the New York Post on Saturday May 21st, Charlotte Willard commented '(Wesselmann) has converted his females into objects, sometimes with great vulgarity, sometimes with extraordinary invention'.[138] She described one of the *Mouth* paintings as 'monstrous' and continued:

> For the rest, his nudes and seascapes, using the same technique of painting inside a formed plexiglass shape almost revert to the highway poster signs from which they originally sprung. The line that separates them from advertising is their brash, sterile treatment of his subject matter. He makes no concession to pleasing or seducing. The great American nude comes through as a real cool female who is solely a sex object and who appears to be totally disengaged from any other human concern. If what Mr Wesselmann records about the American nude is true – though I doubt it – I tremble for our future'.[139]

Yet if Wesselmann appeared to be presenting his figures as advertisements for the sexualised female body, how might it be contextualised as part of the lived experience, and could the erotic be seen to have any aesthetic quality?

Sexual Aesthetics and Having *an* Experience

In the wake of the furore surrounding the American publication of *Tropic of Cancer* and the Supreme Court being called upon to define what constituted 'obscenity', the

[138] Charlotte Willard, 'In the Art Galleries', *New York Post*, 21 May 1966, magazine section, p. 14.
[139] Willard (1966), p. 14.

scholar and aesthetician Arnold Berleant, published his article *The Sensuous and The Sensual in Aesthetics*. Written in 1964, Berleant aimed to address the aesthetic nature of the erotic and highlighted that whilst 'the sensuous (was) reluctantly admitted into the province of aesthetic experience' the sensual was not.[140]

Berleant's article was rooted in Dewey's pragmatic theory, but it also delivered something of a side-swipe at his precursor. Berleant noted that whilst it was not unusual for 'aesthetic theorists with a commitment to a religious or moral doctrine' to differentiate between the sensuous and the sensual, it was 'more surprising to find it accepted without serious question by writers on aesthetics whose naturalistic or scientific bent might cause one to have expected otherwise'.[141]

In distinguishing between the sensuous and the sensual, Berleant identified the former as pertaining to pleasure obtained through the senses, whilst the latter alluded to 'the experience of the senses which is confined to bodily pleasures as contrasted with intellectual satisfaction, where appeal is to the "grosser" bodily sensations, particularly to the sexual.'[142] Berleant attributed this to theories which could be traced back to the Greek philosophers Aristotle and Plato, who favoured the senses of sight and hearing (or 'distance receptors'), over those of the 'contact senses' (taste, touch and smell). Berleant noticed that 'it is only when the sensual has been depersonalized, removed from proximity, spiritualized, does it render itself aesthetically acceptable.'[143]

The favouring of the distance receptors over the contact senses, and its relationship to thought, clarifies the origin of the mind/body division which Dewey

[140] Arnold Berleant, 'The Sensuous and the Sensual in Aesthetics' in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 23:2 (Winter 1964), p.185.
[141] Berleant (1964), p. 185.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Berleant (1964), p. 187.

sought to overcome. However, when Dewey attempted to distinguish between the sensuous and the sensual, he characterised the latter as being a feature of 'such things as narcotics, sexual orgasms, and gambling indulged in for the sake of immediate excitement of sensation' and excluded such things from being aesthetic in nature – yet each of these, by way of Dewey's own definition, might easily be identified as having all of the attributes of *an* experience.

An examination of Wesselmann's initial description of how he came to paint the *Great American Nudes* series, suggests that their inception might have been due to his undergoing *an* experience. This is directly related to his relationship with Claire. Throughout his career, Wesselmann has spoken about his nudes in direct relation to his wife and even when Claire was not the model, he still related any erotic elements to her. This continues to define the way in which viewers are directed to engage with Wesselmann's nudes. Speaking at the Almine-Rech gallery in 2016 at the time of the Wesselmann exhibition *A Different Kind of Woman*, Jeffrey Sturges acknowledged that the artist was best known for his *Great American Nudes* and commented that 'the model for these paintings was his new wife at the time, Claire, and these works were a celebration of the new domestic life that he had.'[144] Whilst I have discussed in Chapter 2 how there is no distinction between the earlier works and their contextualisation in terms of the impact of the artist's relationship with Claire, and those later, explicit works for which she did not appear to be the model, it is undeniable that for the initial part of his career, Wesselmann was painting this particular woman and suggesting something of his sexual reaction to her.

[144] Panel discussion relating to the exhibition *A Different Kind of Woman* (Almine-Rech Gallery, Paris, 17 October 17 – 21 December 2016). The discussion took place between art historian Brenda Schmahmann, art dealer Julian Solms and Jeffrey Sturges from the Wesselmann Estate. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RgzCf8q75pA accessed 11 November 2021.

Throughout his life, Wesselmann was clear about the impact Claire had on him and his art, and in particular the effect she had on the artist defining himself as a sexually mature male. Pinpointing 1962 as being the year that his nude figures started to become more sexual in nature, Wesselmann said that this was as a direct result of his burgeoning relationship with Claire. He credited her for his work's inherent eroticism and described them as 'an expression of his joy at rediscovering sex' after a failed first marriage.[145] Wesselmann stated that 'while I was just painting a nude, it was terribly important to me that it was Claire and it was my great excitement personally about her, about sex, about being an adult, about being in New York City, about being an artist – about all these things. I was trying to put it into that one moment of doing.'[146] Subsequently, Claire represented a transformative period in Wesselmann's life after which he defined himself as an artist and a mature, sexual male or to put it in Deweyan terms, the artist underwent *an* experience.

Berleant's examination of the art which was being produced at the start of the 1960s, saw him comment on the inclusion of 'surprising subject-matters' and the ways in which artists were working with a selection of materials or increasing the interaction between art and its audience. The writer mooted that the conventional role attributed to aesthetics as being a purely contemplative experience needed to be expanded to include the effects of physical experience.[147] Deliberating over an increase in the erotic nature of the nude in art, Berleant described it as having an 'unquenchable appeal' as both a sensuous and sensual subject.[148] Quoting Dewey, Berleant suggested that there should be no distinguishing between the aesthetic and

[145] Stealingworth (1980), p. 23.
[146] Oral History Interview (1984), n. p.
[147] Arnold Berleant, 'What is Aesthetic Engagement?' in *Contemporary Aesthetics*, 11: 5 (2013) https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/liberalarts_contempaesthetics/vol11/iss1/5/ accessed 1 September 2022.
[148] Berleant (1964), p. 189.

physical pleasures experienced in everyday life. 'If we regard the sensual as continuous with the aesthetic', Berleant wrote, 'problems in aesthetic theory move closer to clarification and resolution, issues such as the significance of the nude in art, psychological theorizing about the relation of the artist to sexuality, and especially the place of the tactile and other contact senses in aesthetic experience' could be resolved.[149] Berleant also noted the importance of the engagement of all of the senses, or 'the whole man' in fully and richly realising an aesthetic experience.[150]

The aesthetic nature of sex and the sensual has more recently emerged through the development of somaesthetics which Richard Shusterman defines as 'the critical, meliorative study of the experience and use of one's body as a locus of sensory aesthetic appreciation (*aesthesis*) and self fashioning.'[151] Citing Dewey's pragmatist ideals of a mind-body unity as being central to this, Shusterman also questions the exclusion of sex as a source of aesthetic experience. Concluding that this is predicated upon nothing other than 'old prejudices,' he posits that:

> …the visual and verbal representations of erotic desire and activity clearly form an important part of many artworks that move us aesthetically rather than pornographically or voyeuristically. In such works, the representations of sexuality is depicted, structured, and deployed in ways governed by certain distinctively formal aims or aesthetic criteria and meanings.[152]

Shusterman also acknowledges that it can be difficult to entirely separate eroticism from the naked body. Images of the nude can appeal to the distance receptors,

---

[149] Ibid.
[150] Berleant (1964), p. 190. I would suggest that this comment is problematic as it implies that in respect of the male/female dualism, the nude is always female.
[151] Richard Shusterman, 'Somaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal' in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 57:3 (Summer 1999), p.30.
[152] Richard Shusterman, 'Aesthetic Experience: From Analysis to Eros' in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 64:2 (Spring 2006), p. 226.

contact senses, or both. However, Shusterman also points out that whilst *an* experience does not always have to be satisfying, Dewey, amongst many philosophers, tended to categorise aesthetic experience as being both 'valuable and pleasurable' which, it could be argued, reinforces the argument for the aesthetic nature of the sexual as a personal experience.[153]

In exploring the phenomenological nature of aesthetic experience, that is, how it is experienced by the individual, Shusterman explains a relationship between the object or the 'what of experience' and 'the specific "how" or "feel" of that experience' as being co-dependent and clarifies that an experience has to be *about* something.[154] In arguing that aesthetic experience can be sexual, Shusterman draws upon the notion that aesthetic pleasure has historically been seen as a purely intellectualised process and reminds the reader that the omission of sexual pleasure from aesthetic consideration is rooted in cultural prejudices and traditions, and therefore based within social morals which, as Dewey noted, changed over time. Shusterman proposes that the appearance of the erotic in art not only indicates that sex can be represented in terms of 'distinctively formal aims or aesthetic criteria and meanings', but aims to prove that it can be appreciated 'aesthetically rather than pornographically or voyeuristically.'[155] Central to this is the notion that an image reflects how an individual reacted to the 'intentional object', or that which becomes the focus of the aesthetic and sensual experience, and how this stimulates a 'direct and appreciative awareness.'[156] Proposing that the intentional object is not only the person with whom the individual engages in sexual activity, Shusterman identifies it as also being representative of 'the erotic episode, drama, or interactive relationship

[153] Shusterman (2006), p. 218.
[154] Shusterman (2006), p. 219.
[155] Shusterman (2006), p. 226.
[156] Shusterman (2006), p. 219.

that is being shaped through one's intentional activity and in which the "particularized" object of desire… is embedded.'[157] Therefore, for Wesselmann, Claire might be identified as the 'intentional object' in that he both engages in sexual activity with her but also uses her image to symbolise his experience of this and in doing so identifies its aesthetic properties.

In stating his case for the aesthetic nature of sex, Shusterman writes that it:

> powerfully displays the phenomenological dimension of being subjectively savoured but also intentionally directed at an object (typically another human subject) that structures the experience, shapes its quality, and gives it important dimensions of meaning commensurate with the properties and significance of that object. A cognitive experience providing knowledge of one's own body and mind and also those of one's sexual partners, the sexual act typically displays a distinctive unity both of coherence and completion, a sense of something developing consistently and powerfully toward a fulfilling consummation. It also stands out distinctively from the flow of ordinary hum-drum experience.[158]

In defining parameters for discussing the aesthetics of sexual pleasure, Shusterman emphasised that it should be characterised in terms of being an enjoyable, consensual practice. However, whilst this might refer directly to the mutuality of the physical act itself, if the aesthetics of sex are only successfully appreciated when seen as a reciprocal act, can its aesthetic nature successfully translate into an image which only equates to half of the experience and, in terms of Wesselmann's images, is only represented by the physical characteristics of the female nude? Does it mean that by

[157] Shusterman (2006), p.229. Shusterman expands on this as part of footnote 39.
[158] Shusterman (2006), p. 226.

modelling for the artist, the experience is then deemed as consensual or does the artist subsequently share with the viewer their sexual experience *of* rather than *with* another being?

In his essay *Sight and Sex* (1966), John Berger began examining the longstanding tradition of the painted, female nude and proposed that 'the interest in drawing or painting nude or semi-nude figures is profoundly sexual', and that they had always served a purpose very much along the same lines as contemporary pin-ups or 'Beauties of the Month,' and exhibited a 'common appeal.'[159] Flying in the face of much intellectualised discussions of the painted figure, Berger makes the salient point that men have frequently produced images of naked women simply because they enjoy looking at them. His examination of the complex arguments which surrounded the act of looking at images of unclothed women sheds light on a continued failure by the establishment to admit that even the most 'artistic' of nudes had the ability to appeal to a more basic pleasure and that it should be more widely recognised that many were produced with exactly this in mind. Berger did not see this as a negative way of interpreting images and highlighted the 'positive visual value' of nakedness and how it effects sexual desire, something which might even be suggestive of pragmatist thought.[160]

Berger suggested that seeing a naked body in reality serves a very specific purpose. Whilst a clothed body retains a sense of mystery, an unclothed one can signal 'a strong sense of relieved happiness' that its revealing confirms it has the expected physical attributes for desired sexual activity to subsequently take place.[161] Berger identifies this as being the first step in a natural progression of events which

[159] John Berger, 'Sight and Sex' in ed. Paul Barker, *Arts in Society* (London: Fontana, 1977), p. 51.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid.

allows the observer to make a connection to 'the sexual function of nakedness in reality' and as a result concludes that the nude figure operates as a precursor to erotic activity and therefore art's representation of it being a 'naturalised' state is misleading.[162] The progression of a figure from clothed to unclothed across a period of time and its subsequent revealing of nakedness might also be considered as a consummatory experience.

One of the issues which Berger identifies with looking at an unclothed body is that the viewer cannot help but focus on its sexual characteristics more than, for example, facial or other features. In doing so, the naked body is 'reduce(d) or elevate(d)' to its 'primary category' or defined purely by its biological attributes.[163] This resonates with Wesselmann's reductionist approach to the body or 'erotic simplification' which emphasised 'the bluntness of the *fact* of the nude.'[164]

Whilst Berger made a clear connection between the fine art nude and the naked figure in everyday experience in his publication *Success and Failure of Picasso* (1965), he reflected on how the Frenchman's paintings of his lover Marie-Thérèse captured the eroticism of their relationship. Arguing that many of Picasso's images capture a 'profound personal experience', in Berger's opinion, these paintings could not only be seen as autobiographical, they also conveyed the satisfying of sexual desire.[165] According to Berger, Picasso's images of his lover express the couple's *shared* relationship and this is achieved through his use of abstraction, or displacement of parts, which he posits creates 'a visual image that can

[162] Ibid.
[163] Berger (1977), p. 54.
[164] Stealingworth, (1980), p. 24.
[165] John Berger, *Success and Failure of Picasso* (London: Granta in association with Penguin, 1992), p.154.

correspond to sexual experience.'[166] Berger contends that these works are full of the sensations and shapes of sex and the artist's displacement of parts of his model's body results in the expression of a sensual experience of his lover. Berger appears to predicate much of this upon the artist's use of rounded forms and the simplified, yet prominent, breasts and basic indication of the genital region – the crudeness of their representation making the sexual element paramount.

One element which Berger highlights is in relation to the model's pose and whether this illustrates Picasso's delight in his lover's body or signifies Marie-Thérèse's own pleasure. This is equally applicable to Wesselmann's images, particularly his portrayal of nudes as celebrating or enjoying their own sexuality with their legs open and heads thrown back. Sabrina Tarasoff, in her review of Wesselmann's *A Different Kind of Woman* exhibition at the Almine Rech Gallery, argued that the model not only consented to the viewer's gaze but that Wesselmann captured the model's own physical pleasure.[167] Similarly, the press release for Wesselmann's *La promesse du bonheur* exhibition which took place in Monaco in 2018 saw the curator Chris Sharp, stating that the portrayal of 'female agency' heralded a move away from a repressed, Victorian notion of sex which was central to an understanding of the artist's nudes.[168] However, other than *Great American Nude #46* and *#47*, in which it is suggested that the figure may be masturbating, there is little within his nudes which indicates she might be in the receipt of physical pleasure. Instead, and this also includes *Great American Nude #46* and *#47*, there is

[166] Berger (1992), p. 157.
[167] Sabrina Tarasoff, 'Tom Wesselmann at Almine Rech, Paris' in *Mousse* Magazine, December 2016 http://moussemagazine.it/tom-wesselmann-at-almine-rech-paris/ accessed 26 August 2020.
[168] Press release for the exhibition *Tom Wesselmann: La promesse du bonheur* at the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco, Villa Paloma 29 June 2018 – 6 January 2019.

a sense that the nude is displaying her body, or aspects of her sexuality, strictly for the viewer's enjoyment.

Images such as Wesselmann's *Great American Nude #91* (Fig. 4.11) and *#92* (Fig. 4.12) both from 1967 and Picasso's *Nude in a Black Armchair* (*Nu au fauteuil noir*) painted in 1932 (Fig. 4.13) and *Nude, Green Leaves and a Bust* (1933) (Fig. 4.14) see the painter use an almost identical pose under the watchful presence of a male bust. The pose is one that is recognised within artistic and pornographic conventions as indicating an ecstatic moment. Picasso achieves this by positioning the reclining figure with her head and arms thrown back, eyes closed and mouth open, and there is a suggestion that the back is arched. Wesselmann uses a similar pose when he has a model throw one arm back and open her mouth, thus emphasising an erotic moment in *Great American Nudes #91* and *#92*. Whilst the artist was keen to point out that he did not show anything which illustrated a sexual act, he conceded that when he depicted figures with 'their head thrown back and her tongue out or her mouth open… it's clear she's probably having an orgasm or being eaten or whatever like that', before saying that 'you can't hang a man for being suggestive'.[169] However, if what is being implied is seen in terms of the painted figure undergoing *an* experience, it is being described from a third-person, or voyeuristic, viewpoint.

For Berger, then, it is possible to recreate the mutuality of the sex act in a painting by alluding to the autobiographical. Berger described Picasso's paintings of Marie-Thérèse as being 'the most direct manifestation of his own feelings' which 'captured the experience of making love to this woman.'[170] Rosalind Krauss pointed

[169] Oral History Interview (1984), n. p.
[170] Berger (1992), p. 156.

out in her examination of the autobiographical in art history, or the 'history of the proper name', that to identify someone by name plays a particular role in forming a relation between 'image and meaning.'[171] Krauss suggests that the use of a proper name allows for meaning to 'stop within the boundaries of identity' and attributes the image with an ultimate interpretation, or identifies an individual in a way that becomes apparent. When Picasso's paintings are identified as portraying his lover, there is a specificity which comes with knowing her name. But how might this relate to Wesselmann's *Great American Nudes*? On the one hand there is his insistence that they be recognised as being Claire and an expression of Wesselmann's intimate relationship with her, which gives the nude individuality and draws upon the autobiographical. The allusion to the autobiographical frames the *Great American Nudes* in terms of being symbolic of the artist's experience of *his* relationship with *his* wife and this alters the perception that these images are merely representative of the objectifying male gaze. On the other hand, Wesselmann's portrayal of the figures as anonymous stereotypes of American femininity, and his denying them any individuality, provides an entirely different context for the erotic which is no longer reliant upon a personal narrative and invites the viewer to adopt a male gaze in order to appreciate the nude's sexual characteristics. However, whilst Berger suggests that even though Picasso's paintings of his lover are autobiographical it does not preclude them from embodying a certain universality which 'includes in some part or another the experience of all lovers'.[172] Yet whilst this might indicate that any sexually active adult might be able to see their own relationships mirrored in Picasso's, and by implication Wesselmann's work, it is most likely the case that, when presented with an image of a female nude, it is predominantly the heterosexual male experience of

[171] Rosalind Krauss, 'In the Name of Picasso' in *October*, Vol. 16 (Spring 1981), p.9.
[172] Berger (1992), p.18.

both looking at the sexualised body as well as a physical interaction with it, which is invoked.

A number of problematic issues arise when contextualising Wesselmann's work in terms of them embodying *an* experience even when it remains within the boundaries of the personal. The more that the nature of the relationship between artist and model is explained in terms of it being deeply intimate, the more the observer is placed in the position of being a voyeur. That the artist invites the observer to view something which is so personal seems to betray the intimate nature of the experience being portrayed. Subsequently, the experience should perhaps be considered in terms of what is actually being described and also, who really has ownership of that experience. Whilst Berger felt that it was entirely possible for the mutuality of the sexual relationship to be conveyed via the female form, the extent to which it might subsequently elicit anything which indicates and understanding of the woman's experience is questionable.

However, the female bodily experience of mutual love-making was something that Carolee Schneemann sought to convey in her work, as well as other more personal experiences pertaining to the female body. Her performance art of the 1960s often saw her appearing naked, and she wrote that she strove to 'integrate (our) creativity and sexuality' and undertake a female exploration of eroticism which presented it from a female perspective.[173] Schneemann wrote that women needed to 'dismantl(e) conventional sexual ideology and its punishing suppressions… because our experience of our bodies has not corresponded to cultural depiction.'[174] Putting women's bodily and erotic experience at the centre of her work, Schneemann

[173] Carolee Schneemann, 'The Obscene Body/Politic' in *Art Journal*, 50:4, 1991, p. 28.
[174] Ibid.

advocated art which demonstrated female liberation from the prevailing male social, cultural and sexual dominance which was present in much of the art produced by her male counterparts. In her film *Fuses* (1964-67) (Fig. 4.15) she presented sex as a mutual experience, showing herself and her partner engaging in intercourse with which both heterosexual men and women could identify. In comparison, Wesselmann's nudes were naked bodies to be looked at from an implied male perspective, and they were representative of no other female experience than that of being looked at as a sexual object. Whilst Dewey does provide a theoretical approach for looking at Wesselmann's nudes which considers the artist's personal experience and its aesthetic possibilities, it does not completely preclude objectification or the adoption of a male gaze.

Ultimately, whilst Claire might be recognised as the 'intentional object', the part she plays in what is being seen as a shared experience, is minimal. Although she might be the subject of, or the inspiration for, the experience, she is not what the image is *about*. Claire's image represents the artist's experience of her body and not her own. Therefore, it might be concluded that whilst an artist may be able to portray something of their own experience, and convey this to others who have undergone similar, they cannot adequately portray the experience as undergone by someone other than themselves. The feminine aspect of the mutual experience, as expressed by the male artist (and vice versa) is largely negated, and female sensuality remains a fabricated male fantasy. As such, the images which Wesselmann produced of Claire can only be seen in terms of him undergoing *an* experience which was stimulated by his reaction to another and resulted in the consummatory act of him creating an art object.

Commonality and the Shared Sexual Experience

Despite there being clear changes in Wesselmann's portrayals of the female nude throughout the 1960s, this is rarely recognised in terms of how it impacted subject matter. As previously noted, Wesselmann frequently attributed Claire as the model for the *Great American Nudes* yet he also described her as a 'metaphor' for a more general concept of what 'woman' meant to him 'on a deeper psychological level.'[175] Whilst the artist appears to struggle to describe exactly what he meant by this, and seemed reticent to consider the psychological implications, he explained that when he described his spread-legged nudes as depicting an 'enticing gesture' his wife might make for him whilst modelling this was 'something that in fact she did or might have done or in fact something I wish she would have done or it becomes a symbol of what I want'.[176] The painted versions of the female body can therefore be identified as representing Wesselmann's fantasies. However, as long as these artworks are interpreted as being of or about Claire, and it is intimated that they encapsulate the spontaneity and intimacy of the sexual relationship she shared with her husband, they remain within the realm of the autobiographical or experiential. Yet when they are contextualised in terms of being symbolic of what Wesselmann desired, the nudes become one of any number of sexually provocative images constructed to satiate heterosexual masculine mores.

It is here that Wesselmann's work can be seen as fulfilling the purpose of erotic spectacle in the same way that the magazines for sale in the proliferation of adult bookstores around Times Square and 42nd Street did. Whether or not Wesselmann visited the peep shows or saw any of the short 'beaver' movies, is

[175] Oral History Interview (1984), n. p.
[176] Oral History Interview (1984), n. p.

neither here nor there as he was obviously aware of their existence. There is also evidence that he has an association with an individual who gained notoriety for their sexually uninhibited, and often pornographic, work. In 1964, Dutch author and artist Jan Cremer moved to New York. Cremer had garnered attention for the sexual content that pervaded his book *I Jan Cremer* which was published in the USA in 1965 (a year after it was available in the Dutchman's home country) and in 1966 he published its follow-up. Once in New York, Cremer became greatly influenced by Pop art and sought a place within the same circles as its best-known exponents. As a photographer, Cremer worked for *Nugget*, a men's magazine which began publication in 1956 and was in a similar vein to *Playboy*. Cremer also contributed articles to *Evergreen Review*, a literary magazine with a penchant for the erotic.

Cremer described the content of his writing during 1965-66 as differing to that of his paintings. Describing his written work as 'roguish mythologization and provocative escapades' he commented that he was 'aware of the market value of such visual material.'[177] Moving to Wellfleet, Cape Cod, in 1965 Cremer came into contact with one of his 'celebrity' neighbours, Wesselmann, who had started to holiday in the area and was noted for going fishing every day. In an article written by W. A. L. Beeren, Larry Rivers and Wesselmann are identified as being the two artists with whom Cremer developed the closest friendships – describing them both as 'belong(ing) to the Pop circuit but (being) less sophisticated.'[178] Beeren wrote that 'Cremer's gaudy eroticism can be recognized in Wesselmann's *American Dreams*',

[177] Freddy De Vree, 'The New York Period of Jan Cremer' (originally published in Freddy De Vree, *Cremer*, Kunstpocket 20, Kunstforum Schelderode, 1985) http://www.jancremer.com/article-the-new-york-period-of-Jan-cremer.php accessed 1 September 2022.
[178] W. A. L. Beeren, 'TheMuse of Jan Cremer' http://www.jancremer.com/article-the-muse-of-jan-cremer.php accessed 1 September 2022.

and whilst this misquotes the works' titles, the claim suggests that the artist might have been influenced by the Dutchman.[179]

There is nothing within the literature on Wesselmann which makes any reference to Cremer. However, at the Wesselmann Estate, among correspondence received by the artist, there are a number of letters that Cremer wrote to Wesselmann between 1968 and 1972. The letters are addressed to Tom and Claire, with the tone and content being informal and friendly and references made to previous letters which had passed between the two. Cremer wrote to Wesselmann from various locations including Wellfleet, Finland and London. In a letter dating from 1969, Cremer commented that he was unhappy that no agreement had been reached between his publisher and the artist which allowed for one of Wesselmann's images to be used on the cover of writer's latest book.

It is difficult to establish exactly how well acquainted the two men were as whilst Cremer's letters are informal, he does enquire about buying some of Wesselmann's work at reduced prices and asks for information regarding the artist putting him in touch with various people, including the publisher Harry Abrams. It may be that the relationship between the two was embellished by the Dutchman and that he tried to use Wesselmann's status for his own purposes. However, the mutual exchange of family news and Cremer extending regular invitations to Wesselmann and Claire to visit, does intimate that they might have been more than casual acquaintances. It may well be that it was Cremer, with his connection to the world of soft-porn magazines and erotic writing, who informed Wesselmann's more risqué imagery. Whilst the erotic nature of Wesselmann's art can be seen to increase in relation to legal changes to obscenity laws, it was also after he met Cremer that the

[179] Ibid.

nudes lost something of their girl-next-door wholesome titillation and became full-on sex objects.

Whilst the idea that Wesselmann's work was impacted by legal changes does not initially seem to share a great deal with Dewey's aesthetic theory, reacting to this by making his nudes more sexual saw him directly affected by the social environment. As such, his female nudes begin to be more representative of the shared experience of looking at women, and not just a personal one, and this had more widespread implications. To some extent, this resonated with Dewey identifying how certain objects produced by a society were representative of 'the manifestation of group and clan membership' or 'collective' living.[180] Despite Dewey placing prominence on the craftsmanship of handmade objects, and not mass produced items, he noted the importance on those signifiers of a 'community life' which 'reflected those emotions and ideas that are associated with the chief institutions of social life'.[181] Jeffrey Escoffier, in his examination of the 1960s as a period of 'sexual revolution', points out that what was radical about the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s was not necessarily that society was more or less sexually active than had been the case previously, but that the 'public discussion of (sex) had come to occupy an increasingly significant place in American culture' and that it was 'less a revolution in sexual conduct than a cultural revolution in which the social framework within which sex took place was radically transformed – the everyday sexual scripts, the grand cultural narratives… and the scientific understanding of sex were all dramatically modified.'[182] Sex, and the numerous ways in which it proliferated throughout contemporary culture, had found its way into the everyday, even

[180] Dewey (1980), pp. 6 – 7
[181] Ibid.
[182] Jeffrey Escoffier, 'Pornography, Perversity and the Sexual Revolution', in eds. Gert Hekma & Alain Giami, *Sexual Revolutions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 207-208.

becoming banal, yet its dissemination and public acceptance was driven by a male perspective.

In 1964, *Time* magazine printed an article that referred to the communal experience of 'spectator sex'. Appearing in the magazine's 'morals' section, the article defined the era as one of 'pop hedonism' in which 'phony sexual sophistication grows apace' and it noted that whilst the *Playboy* clubs might be seen as licentious, there were very clear parameters in place, one being that 'no one is supposed to even touch the 'Bunnies'.'[183] The article noted a new openness regarding discussing sex both in, and outside, of marriage which even extended to some factions of the church and it also debated the expectancy that this placed upon couples to 'perform', particularly the domestic women who might be required to adopt the dual roles of both wife and mistress. The article also identified one observation made by a theatre critic that a number of Broadway plays opened with couples being shown in bed together, but whilst this seemed to embrace sex within marriage, it was also a way of immediately clarifying that 'the male is not a homosexual.'[184]

It is the latter which seemed to drive some of the expectations of a shared spectatorship as a means to display heterosexual masculinity. As such the image of the sexual female operated in many ways to uphold Dewey's belief in art's ability to communicate the existence of commonalities. However, as Mattern identifies, Dewey's notion of the perfect democratic society was a rose-tinted idealisation of how he perceived ancient Athens and a misdirected belief that in this environment, art operated to instil great civic pride within *all* its citizens. Mattern points out that

[183] Ervin Drake, 'The Second Sexual Revolution' in *Time Magazine*, 24 January 1964, p. 54 .
[184] Drake (1964), p. 55.

this was a hugely hierarchical society and that within such civilisations the majority of the population comprised 'noncitizens such as women and slaves.'[185] Art, therefore, did not communicate to *all* of society, it spoke directly to its predominant faction. Whilst the notion of a democracy remains one which is based upon equality and justice, as Sarah Churchwell recognises, 'one person's freedom… soon infringes upon principles of social justice and democratic equality' particularly in a society so driven by capitalism.[186] However, Mattern indicated how the personal can become a shared experience if an aspect of human identity is tied to a *particular* social context. He noted that whilst 'the artist has had many of the same experiences common to others' they were essentially defined by the social groups to which they belonged.[187] One only has to look at the adult bookstores, peep shows and movie theatres around Times Square (Fig. 4.16) and the popularity of the lifestyle advocated by *Playboy* magazine during the 1960s to see how men, and particularly a social sub-group of young professional, heterosexual males, were being actively encouraged to participate in looking at women as erotic spectacles. Whether or not this was a result of the 'momism' of the previous decades or post-Second World War anxiety that gender-divisions were becoming indistinct, men looking at women as sexual objects was almost endorsed, and advertised, as a national pastime (fig. 4.17).

Perhaps Dewey remained more aware of the differing social experiences of men and women than Wesselmann, even commenting that 'marriage and family life often oppress women' as well as opposing the male-centred psychoanalytical judgements made popular by Jung, but he still did not question the extent to which American experience was dominated by a white, heterosexual, male perspective or

[185] Mattern (1999), p. 60.
[186] Sarah Churchwell, *Behold, America: A History of America First and the American Dream* (London; Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), p. 24.
[187] Mattern (1999), p.57.

the extent to which this shaped American democracy.[188] Similarly, when the mood began to change in the sixties, it was a male idealisation of sexual liberation which took hold, allowing for women's bodies to become eroticised in order to symbolise the extent to which attitudes towards sex were no longer restricted by puritanical morals. Yet in the same way that Buettner had noted that democratic Athens produced art that favoured its dominant social group, Wesselmann's nudes did exactly the same. They represented the shared experience of looking at the sexualised female body as being a male prerogative that endorsed their virile, heterosexual masculinity.

Conclusion

There are many aspects of Wesselmann's work which can be related to the philosopher and aesthetician who made him think 'rationally' and 'specifically' for the first time.'[189] There is evidence which proves that Wesselmann encountered Dewey through the curriculum at Cooper Union, although he may also have had prior knowledge of pragmatist thought from his psychology degree. Perhaps the most direct impact on Wesselmann came from his teacher Marsicano, who himself had been schooled at an educational establishment co-founded by Dewey. Having been impacted by the importance of learning through doing, he had first-hand experience of how this could shape an artist's learning experience.

Dewey was certainly relevant to the New York art scene of which Wesselmann was a part and there is a case to be made for his work providing an aesthetic theory for Pop art. Most relevant is the pop artist's engagement with contemporary society as providing the impetus for aesthetic experience. Looking to

[188] Shannon Sullivan, 'Reconfiguring Gender with John Dewey: Habit, Bodies, and Cultural Change' in *Hypatia*, 15: 1 (Winter, 2000), p. 23.
[189] Oral History Interview (1984), n. p.

their contemporary environments and finding the aesthetic potential in everyday objects and popular culture echoed Dewey's belief that the everyday environment could offer a more relevant source of material for the artist than anything that could be found in galleries and museums.

Wesselmann's use of materials, such as those in his collage and assemblages, saw him making art directly from his own environment and he often maintained the context of the object's original function when he incorporated it into his pieces. However, the nude, remaining as a painted image, contrasted with these objects and created a dualism within Wesselmann's own work between art and everyday objects whilst at the same time allowing both to exist within an ordinary environment. However, it also indicated how the sexualisation of women's bodies was a feature of both art and the everyday.

Whilst Dewey did not embrace the concept of the sexual providing stimulus for undergoing *an* experience, subsequent theoreticians have argued that there is much which upholds the idea that the sexual does provide such an opportunity. Applying this theoretical approach to Wesselmann's nudes takes into consideration that the artist's personal, sexual experience may have provided the aesthetic inspiration for what he tried to convey via images of the female body, which is subtly different to an interpretation based purely on objectification. There is evidence which suggests Wesselmann's early paintings of the naked figure were initially inspired by him undergoing *an* experience which might even see him beginning to formulate an aesthetics of the erotic as part of the everyday experience of 1960s America. However, where this becomes problematic is in relation to the sexual experience being recognised as an implicitly mutual one. Subsequently, the issues which arise are in relation to how this can effectively be conveyed by an image of a

single figure without it being seen as a male experience being imposed upon a female one.

As Wesselmann's nudes moved away from representing a more intimate and experiential relationship to his model, they began to have more in common with the shared social experience of looking. Whilst not adhering to Dewey's notion that art served a democratic purpose *per se*, they reinforced what may at first seem to be a contradiction – that a democratic society most often reflects the mores of its dominant social group.

EPILOGUE

My examination of Tom Wesselmann's 1960s nudes identifies how existing research has avoided looking at his treatment of the female body as an erotic object, other than to broadly categorise it in relation to an era of sexual liberation. Despite the development of feminist theory and critique in the 1970s, and Wesselmann's work being characterised as antagonistic to the Women's Movement, it has never undergone any such methodological assessments. Whilst Wesselmann may have been challenged by individuals that he encountered personally, there is no evidence that his career was adversely affected by any published feminist critiques or media assaults. However, Wesselmann's work typified the overtly masculine representations of, and attitudes to women that were prominent in the sixties and early seventies and formed part of the cultural environment which led to the development of scholarly debates regarding the male gaze and female objectification. Unlike Miller, Wesselmann and his work was neither singled out nor actively discriminated against.

Discussions of what may have influenced Wesselmann's way of portraying the female body remain centred on Matisse. Yet Wesselmann identified numerous other artists, and literary figures, that he described as being important to him and who possibly impacted his art in ways that will be appreciated through further research. I have focused on Miller providing the most direct influence on the sexual aspects of Wesselmann's work as this was something the artist referred to but had remained unexplored. Similarly, Wesselmann's acknowledgement of Dewey's importance lent itself to further investigation and offered a fitting aesthetic theory for an artist who was capturing the everyday environment. Within the first few pages of his book, Wesselmann/Stealingworth also identified Jack Kerouac, Samuel Beckett

and Eugène Ionesco as being important enough to mention, noting that they either resonated with his search for self-identity or helped him towards using 'highly intense visual imagery', but none of these have ever been looked at in relation to the artist's work.[1] Wesselmann was also open regarding having undergone periods of Freudian psychotherapy but neither this, nor his studies in psychology, have been examined or their possible impact on his art, and may provide more insights into his creative output than is evident in the existing discourse.

Whilst the importance of Wesselmann's relationship with Claire remains central to the artist's work, it has become a slightly romanticised, and unchallenged context for explaining the sexualisation of his naked figures. As I have demonstrated, scholars appear to have ignored the visual evidence which clearly shows that Claire did not model for Wesselmann's most explicit paintings. Currently, even though Wesselmann's highly sexual nudes are not excluded from discussions of his oeuvre, they are not afforded a great deal of attention. It is unclear why this might be unless it is simply the case that they do not fit with the existing Wesselmann mythology. These works clearly require a different narrative to the longstanding one that implies that Claire was his only model and source of erotic inspiration. As I have identified, the erotic nature of Wesselmann's female nudes cannot be explained solely in relation to his marital relationship, yet they have remained contextualised in this way. Whilst I have evidenced that Wesselmann appeared to have been influenced by both literature and popular culture, I feel that further comparisons with contemporary pornography might prove fruitful.

Since beginning my research on Wesselmann there have been a number of developments which are worthy of mentioning and indicate an ongoing interest in

[1] Slim Stealingworth, *Tom Wesselmann* (New York: Abbeville Press, Inc., 1980), p. 13.

the artist's art historical and cultural relevance. In 2019 the Wildenstein Plattner Institute announced that they would be working alongside the Wesselmann Estate to digitise the artist's archives and produce an online catalogue raisonné. A digital corpus of Wesselmann's art has been collated and selected papers dating back to 1954 are now available online. This incorporates correspondence, photographs and a selection of 'administrative, biographical and printed material', whilst the artist's inventory records are currently restricted, and his private journals are, perhaps unsurprisingly, excluded.[2] As of May 2022, there are 2,644 unique artworks which can be viewed online including studies, sketches and drawings, and 229 prints and multiples providing a thorough overview of Wesselmann's career and demonstrating the extent to which the female nude remained central to his work throughout his life.

In 2020, it was announced that curator and art historian Susan Davidson would be editing a book commissioned by the Estate which will be published in 2023 which will provide an overview of the *Great American Nudes*. Davidson previously curated the *American Pop Icons* exhibition held at the Guggenheim Hermitage Museum in Las Vegas in 2003, which was something of a response to Lawrence Alloway's 1963 show *Six Painters and the Object*, which took place at the Guggenheim in New York. The original exhibition brought together Jim Dine, Jasper Johns, Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Rauschenberg, James Rosenquist and Andy Warhol. The 2003 exhibition saw Davidson include Wesselmann and Claus Oldenburg in what she described as 'an effort to close the gap on their omission from *Six Painters and the Object.*'[3] This indicates that there has been a concerted effort by some

[2] Wildenstein Plattner Institute https://digitalprojects.wpi.art/archive/detail/170551-administrative-biographical-and-printed-materials accessed 11 May 2022

[3] *American Pop Icons*, (exhibition catalogue, Guggenheim Hermitage Museum, Las Vegas 15 May – 2 November 2, 2003) Susan Davidson, 'Shaping Pop: From Objects to Icons at the Guggenheim' in eds. Thomas Krens and Susan Davidson (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2003), p. 13.

curators to try and restore Wesselmann's prominence as a Pop artist and this should continue.

Davidson's forthcoming book has been announced as providing a 'comprehensive study' of Wesselmann's series of work from 1961 to 1973, through an exploration of 'the range of materials employed in their creation' and it will chart his progression from 'collage elements, to fully hand-painted shaped canvases, to three-dimensional works made of molded, painted Plexiglass'.[4] Whilst this does not seem to deviate from the established preference for framing Wesselmann through his formalist practice and intentions, there will also be an accompanying essay to 'discuss(ing) the full depth and breadth of the series in the context of 1960s American art and culture'.[5] In terms of my own research, it is promising that attention will be paid to placing Wesselmann's work within its social and historical environment as this has been so under-researched.

Excluding 2020, Wesselmann has continued to exhibit regularly throughout Europe and North America. Looking at the artist's performance in the contemporary art market, it continues to be highly saleable. Whilst his work might not currently command such high prices as his Pop contemporaries Lichtenstein and Warhol, his sell-through rate over the last 3 years has been comparatively better.[6] To date, the highest amount paid for a *Great American Nude* was in 2008, when Sotheby's New

[4] 'Tom Wesselmann: The Great American Nudes, edited by Susan Davidson', 20 June 2020. News item on the Tom Wesselmann Estate website https://www.tomwesselmannestate.org/tom-wesselmann-the-great-american-nudes-edited-by-susan-davidson/ accessed 21 April 2022.2

[5] Ibid.

[6] The sell-through result for Wesselmann over the last 36 months, based on 28 lots, is currently 92.3% with 20% of artworks selling over their estimated price with an average sale price of $322k. However, when compared to Roy Lichtenstein's 16 lots, with a sell-through rate of 89.2% and average sale price of $7m, or Andy Warhol with 111 lots at a sell through rate of 85.2% and average sale of $2m, it seems that he does remain categorised as one of the peripheral pop artists. Information obtained via https://www.artsy.net/price-database accessed 22 April 2022.

York sold *#48* for $10.7 million.[7] More recently, *Great American Nude #73* was auctioned by Sotheby's in December 2021, selling at the higher end of its estimated sale price.[8]

For those who cannot afford a Wesselmann original, the luxury fashion brand Coach launched a collection of garments, leather bags and accessories in June 2022 in collaboration with the Estate. Creative director Stuart Vevers described this as bringing together 'everyday and universal references' in a 'tribute to the sense of pleasure Tom (Wesselmann) found in the process of creating'.[9] Using motifs taken from Wesselmann's paintings such as the red-lipped smiles taken from the *Mouth* series, as well as flowers, tubes of lipstick, sunglasses and other elements lifted from a selection of still lifes, *Bedroom Paintings* and *Seascapes* they adorn everything from handbags to boots, denim jackets and skirts and jewellery. The only image which alludes directly to Wesselmann's interest in the female body, and the erotic, is *Face #2* (1967) (Figs. 5.1 and 5.2) which features on a leather 'Swinger' bag. Indeed, Coach is not the only retailer to incorporate Wesselmann's work into their designs. American fashion brand Noah also borrowed from Wesselmann for their Spring/Summer 2021 collection and among the items they produced was a short sleeve shirt which had *Seascape #4* (1965) emblazoned across its back (Figs. 5.3 and 5.4).

---

[7] 'Great American Nude', *Forbes*, 28 May 2008 online edition https://www.forbes.com/2008/05/28/collecting-auctions-art-forbeslife-cx_nw_0528wesselmann.html?sh=4415dd588f6b

[8] Tom Wesselmann, *Great American Nude #73* (Lot 131) Sotheby's online catalogue for Contemporary Art Evening Auction, December 2021 https://www.sothebys.com/en/buy/auction/2021/contemporary-art-evening-auction-3/great-american-nude-73 accessed 21 April 2022.

[9] 'Discover Coach X Tom Wesselmann Collection' published on DSCENE Magazines's website, 30 June 2022 https://www.designscene.net/2022/06/coach-x-tom-wesselmann.html accessed 4 October 2022.

Coach's website also features a slick 'virtual experience' which invites you to 'explore the world of Tom Wesselmann' by traversing three animated categories entitled 'Love', 'Wonder' and 'Play'.[10] Each category includes a selection of paintings which can be explored for further information, although this is by way of little more than a one-liner which aims to contextualise the artwork. *Gina's Hand* (1972) is described as an example of how Wesselmann found 'inspiration in parts of the body.'[11] However, that this is not meant to be an exercise in bringing art history to the contemporary consumer is obvious when it becomes apparent that the main method of interacting is to click on the Wesselmannesque oranges which bounce around the screen as you navigate your way through the experience. Thus, Wesselmann's graphic style and bright colours lend themselves to a fun, online experience whilst those elements lifted from his paintings make for eye-catching motifs, all of which seems in keeping with a broad understanding of Pop's relation to 1960s American consumer culture and mass-production.

All of the above indicates Wesselmann's continuing popularity and despite various explicit nudes selling at auction, there have been no re-evaluations of his work or changes to the existing myth. In 2012, a brunette version of the *Nude Masturbation* drawing dated 1968-1974, was sold by the Dorotheum auction house in Vienna.[12] In 2013, *Helen* (1966) (Fig. 3.12) was sold via Sotheby's.[13] However, neither are currently featured within the online catalogue raisonné. It also has

[10] The interactive experience is called 'The Pleasure Pursuit' whereby the visitor to the website is invited to 'Step into the world of Tom Wesselmann – a playful Pop artist who took extraordinary pleasure in the everyday' https://thepleasurepursuit.com/en_uk/experience-love accessed 4 October 2022.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Information regarding the sale of *Nude Masturbation Drawing (Brunette)* through Dorotheum on 29 November 2012 https://www.dorotheum.com/en/l/4463071/ accessed 5 November 2022
[13] Tom Wesselmann, *Helen* (Lot 290), Sotheby's online catalogue for Contemporary Day Sale, May 2013 https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2013/may-2013-contemporary-day-n08992/lot.290.html accessed 30 October 2022.

become more likely for these works to be included in publications on erotic art, than anything on Wesselmann. *Helen* appears in Edward Lucie-Smith's *Ars Erotica* (1997) in which the author noted that any condemnation of the proliferation of sexualised nudes in sixties culture was undertaken 'by people who would in other respects characterize themselves as politically and socially liberal.' [14]

The extent to which Wesselmann's nudes remain characterised as representing sixties sexual liberation is apparent in a description of *Great American Nude #91* when it was advertised for auction in May 2022 by Phillips. Within the catalogue, the image is described as 'a resolutely modern woman'.[15] With her legs held apart to maximise the display of her genitals and her tongue protruding from her mouth, this is not, and never was, a representation of any real modern woman. Instead, it stands as a male imposed fantasy of women's sexual freedom which had nothing to do with any form of female emancipation and everything to do with liberating the male libido.

If, as advised by Livingstone, one adopts the attitude that Wesselmann's art 'is what it is, no more or no less' then perhaps it is time to recognise what is clearly being represented rather than attempting to adhere to a formalist rhetoric to describe the art object. [16] Anyone approaching these works will surely see them as paintings of naked women in a variety of poses, some of which are more explicitly sexual than others. Any inherent shock value does not lay in the artist solving formal, visual problems, but in the way that he has the figure display their sexual organs.

---

[14] Lucie-Smith (1997), pp 45-46

[15] *20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale*, Sales Catalogue, Phillips, for the London auction held on 3 March 2022, p. 85. Online edition. https://content.phillips.com/auctions/UK010122/UK010122_zh_6.pdf accessed 6 October 2022.

[16] Marco Livingstone, 'Telling it like it is', in eds. Thomas Buchsteiner & Ottos Letz, *Tom Wesselmann* (Ostfilder: Cantz, 1996), p.9

In 1973, Dana Densmore wrote *Independence from Sexual Revolution* in which she highlighted the difference between male and female concepts of sexual liberation. Densmore argued that sexual 'liberation' had become a male-constructed entitlement which had been 'bestowed' upon women, and I believe that this encapsulates how Wesselmann perceived the female body.[17] Densmore continued:

> And people seem to *believe* that sexual freedom (even when it is only the freedom to actively offer oneself as a willing object) is freedom. When men say to us, "But aren't you already liberated?" what they mean is, "We *said* it was okay for you to let us fuck you, that guilt was neurotic, that chaste makes waste; you're already practically giving it away on the street, what more do you want or could you stomach?" The unarticulated assumption behind this misunderstanding is that women are purely sexual beings, bodies and sensuality, fucking machines. Therefore, freedom for women could only mean sexual freedom.[18]

What Wesselmann perhaps failed to acknowledge, and that Densmore makes clear, was that, in the latter part of the sixties, hidden 'beneath the surface of a sexually liberal ethic lay serious discontent'.[19]

The narrative surrounding Wesselmann's work, and the misconception of exactly how sexually liberated 1960s America was, needs to move on to include the social discourse regarding sex and gender in the sixties. In attempting to reconcile the discrepancies which exist between Stealingworth and Wesselmann, it is obvious

---

[17] Dana Densmore, 'Independence from the Sexual Revolution', (first publ. in *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, Issue 5, July 1971) in eds. Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine, Anita Rapone (*Radical Feminism* New York: Quadrangle, 1973), p. 110.
[18] Densmore (1973), p.111.
[19] John D'Emilio and Estelle B Friedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Harper & Row Publishers, New York: 1988), p. 302.

that his nudes, and the way in which they became increasingly sexualised during the decade, were indications of what was happening within the social, cultural and political landscape of American at that time. Challenging those aspects of the Wesselmann myth that do not stand up under scrutiny can only result in a more diverse re-evaluation of Wesselmann's work, which will acknowledge the tensions and contradictions of sexual politics in 1960s America and make for lively, contemporary, debates.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Unpublished Sources

Agrati, Peppino, letter to Tom Wesselmann dated 1 February 1971. Uncatalogued.

Arts Council Great Britain, letter to Tom Wesselmann dated 10 December 1969. Uncatalogued.

Tom Wesselmann. *Interview with Tom Wesselmann* conducted by Jacqueline Bograd, 26 April 1968, Barbara Rose papers, 1962-circa 1969. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution:

Garbus, Marcus, letter to Tom Wesselmanm dated 23 March 1966. Uncatalogued.

Grove Press, letter to Tom Wesselmann dated 3 July 1968 signed 'Arnold'. Uncatalogued.

Livingstone, Marco, gallery walkaround, David Zwirner Gallery, London, 10 February 2016

Marck, Jan van der, letter to Tom Wesselmann dated 8 April 1968. Uncatalogued.

Moses, Iris, Gemini Smith Inc., letter to Tom Wesselmann dated 19 December 1973. Uncatalogued.

Perkins, Constance M, Occidental College, L.A., letter to Tom Wesselmann dated 7 March 1968. Uncatalogued.

Russell, John, letter to Tom Wesselmann dated 2 December 1968. Uncatalogued.

Schneemann, Carolee, email sent to author dated 30 June 2017. Permission for use provided in email by the Schneemann Foundation, 3 November 2022.

Serra, Monica email sent to author dated 18 September 2018. Permission for use provided in email by Monica Serra, 21 September 2022.

Sidney Janis Gallery, letter to Tom Wesselmann dated 2 May 1966. Uncatalogued.

Smith, Bradley, Gemini Smith Inc., letter to Tom Wesselmann dated 10 January 1974. Uncatalogued.

Smith, Bradley, Gemini Smith Inc., letter to Tom Wesselmann dated 21 January 1974. Uncatalogued.

Stephens, Danielle, Conversation with Claire Wesselmann and Jeffrey Sturges at Denver Art Museum, 9 July. Electronic copy provided by Danielle St Peter on behalf of the Denver Art Museum, permission granted by the Wesselmann Estate, 1 December 2016.

Washington Gallery of Modern Art, letter to Tom Wesselmann signed 'Alice'. Undated but kept with other correspondence from 1963. Uncatalogued.

White, Gabriel, Arts Council Great Britain, letter to Tom Wesselmann dated 25 November 1969. Uncatalogued

Published Sources

'A Search for the Vanishing Lady' in *Esquire*, July 1962, pp. 44-47

Abramson, J. A., 'Tom Wesselmann and the Gates of Horn', *Pop Art: A Critical History*, ed. Steven Henry Madoff (Berkeley and London: University of California Press,1997), pp. 349-353

Alloula, Malek, *The Colonnial Harem* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986)

Aquin, Stéphane, 'Tom Wesselmann: The World's Most Famous Unknown Artist', in *Tom Wesselmann*, ed. Stéphane Aquin, (Munich: Montreal Museum of Art and DelMonico Books for Prestel, 2012, exhibition catalogue), pp. 18-21

Artists for a Fair District Attorney (AFDA), 'Lenny Bruce Arrested', *New York Times*, 3 April 1974, p.40

Ashton, Dore, 'Art: The Human Figure', *New York Times*, 22 October 1957, p.30

Ashton, Dore, 'A Symposium on Pop Art' in ed. Steven Henry Madoff , *Pop Art: A Critical History* (University of California Press: 1997)

Atkins, Robert, 'A Censorship Time Line', *The Art Journal*, 50:3 (Autumn 1991), pp. 33-37

Attwood, William, George B. Leonard Jr., and J Robert Moskin, *The Decline of the American Male* (New York: Random House, 1958)

Bareiss, Walter and Anne K. Jones *Recent Painting USA: The Figure*, in eds. Walter Bareiss and Anne K Jones (New York: Plantin Press, 1961) (foreword)

Barnes, Albert C., 'The Barnes Foundation', *The New Republic*, 14 March 1923, pp. 65-67

Barnes, Albert C., and Violette de Mazia, *The Art of Renoir* (New York: Minton, Balch & Co, 1935, report. Philadelphia: William J Dornan, 1945)

Barr, Alfred H., *Matisse: His Art and His Public* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1975, 2nd edition, first published 1951)

Beeren, W.A.L., 'The Muse of Jan Cremer', http://www.jancremer.com/article-the-muse-of-jan-cremer.php

Beisel, Nicola, 'Morals Versus Art: Censorship, The Politics of Interpretation, and the Victorian Nude', *American Sociological Review*, 58 (April 1993), pp.145-162

Berger, John, 'Sight and Sex' in ed. Paul Barker, *Arts in Society* (London: Fontana, 1977), pp. 51-57

Berger, John, *Success and Failure of Picasso*, (London: Granta in association with Penguin:, 1992, 2nd edition, first published 1965)

Berleant, Arnold, 'The Sensuous and the Sensual in Aesthetics', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 23:2 (Winter 1964), pp185-192

Berleant, Arnold, 'What is Aesthetic Engagement?', *Contemporary Aesthetics*, Vol.11, Article 5 (30 December 2013) https://contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=684

Berube, Maurice R., 'John Dewey and the Abstract Expressionists', *Educational Theory*, 48:2, (Spring 1998), p. 216

Birnie Danzker, Jo-Anne, 'The Great American Nude' in *Tom Wesselmann: 1959 – 1993*, eds. Thomas Buchsteiner & Otto Letze (Cantz: Ostfildern, 1996), pp. 17-21

Board, Marilyn Lincoln, 'Constructing Myths and Ideologies in Matisse's Odalisques', *Genders*, Vol 5 (July 1989), pp 21-49

Bock-Weiss, Catherine, *Henri Matisse: Modernist Against the Grain*, (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009)

Bondil, Nathalie, 'Tom Wesselmann's Bombshells: An Art Named Desire', in ed. Stéphane Aquin, *Tom Wesselmann* (Munich: Montreal Museum of Art and DelMonico Books for Prestel, 2012, exhibition catalogue), pp. 17-18

Brennan, Marcia, *Modernism's Masculine Subjects: Matisse, the New York School, and Post-Painterly Abstraction* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2004)

Brenton, Myron, *The American Male: A Penetrating Look at the Masculinity Crisis*, (New York: Coward-McCann Inc, 1966)

Briggs, Patricia, 'Matisse's Odalisques and the Photographic Académie', *History of Photography*, 31:40 (January 2008), pp. 365-383

Buckley, Thomas, 'Lenny Bruce and 2 Café Owners Go on Trial in Obscenity Case' *New York Times*, 17 June 1964, p. 46

Buckley, Thomas, '100 fight arrest of Lenny Bruce' *New York Times*, 14 June 1964, p. 75

Buettner, Stewart, 'John Dewey and The Visual Arts in America', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 33:4 (Summer 1975), p.385

Canaday, John, 'Back to the Nude', *Horizon* 5:7 (1963), p. 29

Canaday, John, 'Art: From Clean Fun to Plain Smut', *New York Times*, 7 January 1964, p. 31

Canaday, John, 'The Trammels of False Emphasis', *New York Times*, 4 October 1966, p.53 (1966a)

Canaday, John, 'This Way to the Big Erotic Art Show', New York Times, 9 October 1966, Section D, p. 27

Churchwell, Sarah, *Behold, America: A History of America First and the American Dream* (London; Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018)

Conley, Kevin, 'The Most Famous Pop Artist You Don't Know', *New York Times, Style Magazine*, 22 August 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/22/t-magazine/art/tom-wesselmann-pop-artist-profile.html?searchResultPosition=1

Cooper Union Art School, course catalogue, 1956-1957

Corn, Wanda M, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915 – 1935* (University of California Press; Berkley, Los Angeles, London; 1999)

'Court Sees Trend to Make It Censor', *New York Times*, 9 December 1965, p. 28

Cox, Kenyon, 'Cubists and Futurists are Making Insanity Pay', *New York Times* Magazine Section, Part Six, 16 March 1913, p.1

Davidson, Susan, 'Shaping Pop: From Objects to Icons at the Guggenheim', in eds. Thomas Krens and Susan Davidson (New York Guggenheim Museum Publications 2003, exhibition catalogue), pp. 12-20

Dearborn, Mary V, *The Happiest Man Alive: A Biography of Henry Miller* (London: Harper Collins, 1991)

DeForest, John William, 'The Great American Novel', *The Nation*, VI:131, (9 January 1868), pp. 27-29

Densmore, Dana, 'Independence from Sexual Liberation' in eds. Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine, Anita Rapone, *Radical Feminism* (New York: Quadrangle, 1973), 107-118

Dewey, John, *Art as Experience*, (New York; Perigree Books,1980, first publ. 1934)

Dewey, John, 'Foreword' in eds. Albert C Barnes and Violette de Mazia, *The Art of Renoir*, (Philadelphia: William J Dornan, 1944), pp. vii-x

Dewey, John, 'The Educational Function of a Museum of Decorative Arts', *Chronicle of the Museum for the Arts of Decoration of Cooper Union,* 1:3, (April 1937), pp. 93-99

Dewey, John, *A Common Faith* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991, 2nd edition, first publ. 1934)

'Discover Coach X Tom Wesselmann Collection', DSCENE, 30 June 2022, https://www.designscene.net/2022/06/coach-x-tom-wesselmann.html

Dorotheum, *Contemporary Art Sale*, 29 November 2012, Tom Wesselmann, *Nude Masturbation Drawing (Brunette)* https://www.dorotheum.com/en/l/4463071/

Drake, Ervin, 'The Second Sexual Revolution', *Time*, 24 January 1964, p. 54

Duncan, Carol, 'Virility and Domination in Early 20th Century Vanguard Painting' in eds. Norma Broude and Mary D Garrard, *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany* (Routledge, New York; 1982), p. 293. Originally published in *Artforum* December 1973.

Duncan, Ray, 'The Funk Esthetics of Nastiness', *Los Angeles Times*

Edgar, Natalie, 'Tom Wesselmann', *ArtNews*, 60:8, (December 1961), p. 56

D'Emilio, John and Estelle B Friedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Harper & Row Publishers, New York: 1988)

Elderfield, John, *Pleasuring Painting: Matisse's Feminine Representations*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995)

Escoffier, Jeffrey, 'Pornography, Perversity and the Sexual Revolution', in eds. Gert Hekma & Alain Giami, *Sexual Revolutions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 54-59

Finn, Robin, 'Public Lives; Still Plain-Spoken, Still Writing, and Still Busy', *New York Times*. 18 June 2003, Section B, p. 2

Flam, Jack, *Matisse: The Man and His Art 1869 - 1918* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986)

Fraterrigo, Elizabeth, *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2009)

Friedan, Betty, *The Feminine Mystique*, (London: Penguin Books, 1992, first publ. 1963)

Geldzhaler, Henry, 'Happenings: Theater by Painters', *The Hudson Review*, 18: 4 (Winter, 1965-66), pp 581-586

Glenn, Constance, 'Nudes in Context', in ed. Stéphane Aquin, *Tom Wesselmann* (Munich: Montreal Museum of Art and DelMonico Books for Prestel, 2012, exhibition catalogue), p. 25 – 29

Glueck, Grace, 'Art People', *New York Times*, 14 November 1980, Section C,. p. 21

Goldstein, Andrew, 'Reinventing the Nude', *Gagosian Quarterly* (Summer 2017) https://gagosian.com/quarterly/2017/05/01/reinventing-nude/

Gorfinkel, Elena, *Lewd Looks: American Sexploitation Cinema in the 1960s* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Scholarship Online, 2018)

Graham, Fred P, 'High Court Voids Obscenity Charge in 3 Test Cases; Rules 10 'Girlie' Magazines Are Not Lewd – Decision Includes Two Books', *New York Times*, (9 May 1967), pp 1 and 22

Granger, David A., *John Dewey, Robert Pirsig, and the Art of Living: Revisioning Aesthetic Education* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006)

Greenberg, Clement, 'Avant Garde and Kitsch', *Partisan Review*, 6:5 (Fall 1939), pp. 34 - 49

Greenberg, Clement, *Matisse* (New York: Harry N Abrams, Inc. in association with Pocket Books Inc., 1953)

Greer, Germaine, *The Female Eunuch* (London: Flamingo, 1999, first publ.1970)

Grose, Francis, *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (London: S. Hooper, 1788, 2nd edition)

Gurley Brown, Helen, *Sex and the Single Girl*, (Fort Lee; Barricade Books, 2003 first publ. 1962)

Hess, Thomas B, 'Pinup and Icon', in eds. Thomas B. Hess, Thomas B and Linda Nochlin, *Woman as Sex Object: Studies in Erotic Art, 1730-1970* (Great Britain: Allen Lane, 1973), pp. 223-224

Herzig, Rebecca M, *Plucked: A History of Hair Removal* (New York: University Press, 2015)

Hildebrand, David, *Dewey: A Beginner's Guide*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2008)

Hoby, Hermione, 'Great American Nudes artist Tom Wesselmann was no sexist, say the women in his life' in *The Guardian* 19 January 2016,

https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/jan/19/great-american-nudes-artist-tom-wesselmann-not-sexist-daughter-wife-model-interview

Hildebrand, David, *Dewey: A Beginner's Guide*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2008)

Hunter, Sam, *Tom Wesselmann*, (New York: Rizzoli Publishing, 1994)

Isaak, Jo Anne, *Feminism & Contemporary Art: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996)

Jacobsen, Leon, '*Art as Experience* and American Visual Art Today' ,*The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 19:2 (Winter 1960), p. 117

Jay, Timothy, *Cursing in America: A psycholinguistic study of dirty language in the courts, in the movies, in the schoolyards and on the streets* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company,1992)

Johnson, Margaret Hess, 'John Dewey's Socially Instrumental Practice at the Barnes Foundation and the Role of "Transferred Values" in Aesthetic Experience', *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 46:2 (Summer 2012) pp 43 – 57

Jong, Erica, *The Devil at Large: Erica Jong on Henry Miller* (New York: Grove Press, 1994)

Kaprow, Allan, 'The Legacy of Jackson Pollock (1958)', in ed. Jeff Kelley, *Allan Kaprow: Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, expanded edn.), pp. 1-9

Kaprow, Allan 'Notes on the Creation of a Total Art (1958)', in ed. Jeff Kelley, *Allan Kaprow: Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, expanded edn.), p. 12

Kaprow, Allan 'Happenings in the New York Art Scene (1961)' in ed. Jeff Kelley *Allan Kaprow: Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press,1993, expanded edn.), pp. 15-26,

Kaprow, Allan 'The Artist as a Man of the World (1964)' in ed. Jeff Kelley *Allan Kaprow: Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, expanded edn.), pp. 46-58

Kaprow, Allan, 'Preface – On the Way to Un-Art (2001)' in ed. Jeff Kelley, *Allan Kaprow: Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, expanded edn.), pp. xxvii-xxix

Katz, Al, 'Free Discussion v. Final Decision: Moral and Artistic Controversy and the *Tropic of Cancer* Trials', *The Yale Law Journal*, 79:2 (December 1969), pp. 209-252

Kelley, Jeff, 'Introduction', *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, expanded edn.), pp. xi-xxvi

Kramer, Hilton, 'Form, Fantasy and the Nude', *New York Times*, 11 February 1968, section D., p. 5

Kramer, Hilton, 'The New Deluge of Erotic Art', *New York Times*, 28 August 1966

Krauss, Rosalind, 'In the Name of Picasso' in *October*, Vol. 16 (Spring 1981), pp. 5-22

Donald, Kuspit, *Mel Ramos: Pop Art Fantasies, the Complete Paintings* (New York: Watson-Guptill Publications, 2004)

Latteier, Carolyn, *Breasts: The Women's Perspective on an American Obsession* (New York and London: Harrington Park Press, 1998)

Lawrence, Barbara, '---- Isn't a Dirty Word', *New York Times*, 27 October 1973, p. 31

Lippard, Lucy, *Pop Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1966)

Lippard, Lucy, 'Eros Presumptive', *The Hudson Review*, 20:1, Spring 1967, pp. 91-99

Livingstone, Marco, 'Tom Wesselmann, Man of Steel', in ed. Stéphane Aquin, *Tom Wesselmann* (Munich: Montreal Museum of Art and DelMonico Books for Prestel, 2012, exhibition catalogue), pp. 42 – 47

Livingstone, Marco, 'Telling It Like It Is' in eds. Thomas Buchsteiner and Otto Letze, *Tom Wesselmann*, (Ostfildern: Cantz, 1996), pp. 9-16

Lebensztejn, Jean-Claude, 'Eight Statements on Henri Matisse', *Art in America*, 63:4 (July/August 1975), pp. 67-76

Lobel, Michael, 'Another Wesselmann', *Tom Wesselmann* (New York: Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 2016, exhibition catalogue), pp. 100 – 120

Lucie-Smith, Edward, *Ars Erotica: An Arousing History of Erotic Art* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997)

Madoff, Steven Henry, 'Wham! Blam! How Pop Art Stormed the High-Art Citadel and What the Critics Said', in ed. Steven Henry Madoff, *Pop Art: A Critical History* (Berkeley & London: University of California Press, 1997), pp xiii-xx

McCarthy, David, 'Tom Wesselmann and the Americanization of the Nude', *Smithsonian Studies in American Art*, 4:3 (Summer/Autumn 1990), p102-127

McCarthy, David, *The Nude in American Painting 1950 – 1980* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge; 1998)

MacChesney, Clara T, 'A Talk with Matisse, Leader of the Post-Impressionists', *New York Times*, 9 March 1913, Section M, p. 12

Matisse, Henri, 'Notes of a Painter (1908)' in ed. Jack Flam *Matisse on Art* (New York: Dutton, 1978, first publ, 1973)

Mattern, Mark, 'John Dewey, Art and Public Life', *Journal of Politics*, 61.01 (1999), pp.54-55

Menocal, Richard de, 'Color is the Key to a Bright New World', *House and Garden*, 103:3 (March 1953), pp84-99

Meyerowitz, Joanne, 'Women, Cheesecake and Borderline Material: Responses to Girlie Pictures in the Mid-Twentieth-Century U.S.', *Journal of Women's History*, 8:3 (Fall 1996), pp. 9-35

Miller, Henry, *Tropic of Cancer*, (Flamingo, London; 1993, first publ. 1934)

Miller, Henry, 'Obscenity and the Law of Reflection' *Kentucky Law Journal*, 51:4, (1963), pp 577-590 (Originally published in Yonkers: Alicat Book Shop/Hunt Turner, 1945)

Millett, Kate, *Sexual Politics*, (London: Virago, 1977, first publ. 1970)

Minioudaki, Kalliopi, 'Pop's Ladies and Bad Girls: Axell, Pauline Boty and Rosalyn Drexler', *Oxford Art Journal*, 30:3, (October 2007), pp. 402-430

Monks, Peter Rolfe, 'Renewal of Sexual Symbols and Metaphors in Works by Larry Rivers', *Literature in North Queensland*, 19:1 (1991), pp. 117-125

Moskin, J Robert, 'Why Do Women Dominate Him?' in eds. William Attwood, George B. Leonard Jr., and J Robert Moskin, *The Decline of the American Male* (Random House, New York: 1958), pp.3-24

Mulvey, Laura, 'Fears, Fanstasies and the Male Unconscious *or* 'You Don't Know What's Happening, Do You, Mr. Jones?'' in ed. Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures: Language, Discourse, Society* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), p.7.

Munsil, Mary Kelllie, 'The Body in the Prison-House of Language: Henry Miller, Pornography and Feminism', *Critical Essays on Henry Miller*, ed. Ronald Gottesman (New York: G. K. Hall, 1992), pp. 285-296

Museum of Modern Art, press release no. 61, for release 23 May 1962 https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_press-release_326278.pdf?_ga=2.36137440.1742825530.1667472333-1124968385.1666869286

Nead, Lynda, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (London & New York: Routledge, 1992)

Nouveau Musée National de Monaco press release for exhibition Tom Wesselmann: La promesse du bonheur, June 2018

O'Brian, John, *Ruthless Hedonism: The American Reception of Matisse,* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999)

O'Doherty, Brian, 'Pop' Show by Tom Wesselmann is Revisited', *New York Times,* 28 November 1962, p36

Oever, Roel van den, *Mama's Boy: Momism and Homophobia in Postwar American Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012)

Oldenburg, Claes, 'I am for an art…', *Environments, Situations, Spaces*, (New York: Martha Jackson Gallery, 1961, exhibition catalogue), n. p.

Oral history interview with Tom Wesselmann, 3 January – 8 February 1984, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution conducted by Irving Sandler https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-tom-wesselmann-12439

Palumbo, Allison, 'Finding the Feminine: Rethinking Henry Miller's Tropics Trilogy', *Nexus: The International Henry Miller Journa*l, Vol. 7 (Winter 2010), pp.145-176

Parascandola, John, 'Quarantining Women: Venereal Disease and Rapid Treatment Centers in World War II America', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine,* 82:3 (Fall 2009), pp. 431-459

Pfister, Joel, 'A Usable American Literature', *American Literary History,* 20:3 (Summer 2008), p. 579-588

Phillips, London, *20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale,* 3 March 2022, Tom Wesselmann, *Great American Nude #91* https://content.phillips.com/auctions/UK010122/UK010122_zh_6.pdf

Plessix Gray, Francine du, 'The House that Pop Art Built', *House and Garden*, 127:5 (May 1965), pp. 158-164

Playboy, 1:1, December 1951, p.3

Ratcliff, Carter, 'The Erotic Dimension in American Art' in eds. Christos M. Joachimides and Norman Rosenthal, *American Art in the 20th Century: Painting and Sculpture 1913 - 1993* (London and Berlin: Prestel-Verlag & Royal Academy of Arts, 1993)

Richardson, John Adkins, 'Dada, Camp, and the Mode Called Pop', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism,* 24:4 (Summer 1966), pp. 549-558

Rorabaugh, W. J., *Berkeley at War: The 1960s* (Oxford University Press, 1989)

Rose, Barbara, 'Filthy Pictures: Some Chapters in the History of Taste' in *Autocritique: Essays on Art and Anti-art, 1963-1987* (New York: Weidenfield & Nicolson, 1988)

Rose, Barbara, The Politics of Art, Part I', *Artforum*, 6:6 (1968), pp. 31-32

Rose, Barbara, 'Problems of Criticism V: The Politics of Art, Part II', *Artforum*, 7:5 (January 1969), pp.44-49

Rose, Barbara, *Claes Oldenburg* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1970)

Rublowsky, John with photographs by Ken Heyman, *Pop Art*, (Basic Books, Inc. New York, 1965)

Sagarin, Edward, *The Anatomy of Dirty Words*, (New York: Lyle Stuart, 1962)

Schjeldahl, Peter, 'Pop Goes the Playmate's Sister', *New York Times*, 19 April 1970, Section D, p.21

Schlesinger, Arthur, 'The Crisis of American Masculinity', *Esquire*, 50:5, (November 1958), pp. 62-65

Schmidt, Dana Adams, 'Art by American Seized in London', *New York Times*, 21 September 1966, p 44

Schneemann, Carolee, 'The Obscene Body/Politic', *Art Journal*, 50:4, (Winter1991), pp. 28-35

Selz, Peter, 'A Symposium on Pop Art' in ed. Steven Henry Madoff, *Pop Art: A Critical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 65-81

Selz, Peter, 'Pop Goes the Artist', *Partisan Review* 30:2 (1963), p. 315

Shusterman, Richard, 'Somaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 57:3, (Summer 1999), pp. 299-313

Shusterman, Richard, 'Aesthetic Experience: From Analysis to Eros', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 64:2 (Spring 2006), pp. 271-229

Silver, Kenneth E, 'Retour l'ordre' in *Art in America*, 75:6 (June 1987), p. 111-167

Sotheby's, *Contemporary Art Evening Auction*, 14 May 2008, Tom Wesselmann, *Great American Nude #48* https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2008/contemporary-art-evening-auction-n08441/lot.50.html

Sotheby's, *Contemporary Day Sale*, 15 May 2013, Tom Wesselmann, *Helen* https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2013/may-2013-contemporary-day-n08992/lot.290.html

Sotheby's, *Contemporary Curated*, 24 September 2014, Tom Wesselmann, *Untitled (Drawing of Helen)* https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2014/contemporary-curated-n09196/lot.127.html

Sotheby's, *Contemporary Evening Auction*, 18 November 2021, Tom Wesselmann, *Great American Nude #73* https://www.sothebys.com/en/buy/auction/2021/contemporary-art-evening-auction-3/great-american-nude-73

Stealingworth, Slim, *Tom Wesselmann* (New York: Abbeville Press Inc., 1980)

Stein, Sarah, 'Sarah Stein's Notes, 1908' in ed. Jack Flam *Matisse on Art* (New York, Dutton, 1978, first publ. 1973)

'Still Life', *Time*, 95:16, (20 April 1970), p. 57

Sullivan, Shannon, 'Reconfiguring Gender with John Dewey: Habit, Bodies, and Cultural Change', *Hypatia*, 15:1 (Winter, 2000), pp. 23-42

Swenson, G. R., 'Wesselmann: The Honest Nude', *Art and Artists*, 1:2 (May 1966), pp. 54-56

Tarasoff, Sabrina, 'Tom Wesselmann at Almine Rech, Paris', *Mousse Magazine*, December 2016 https://www.moussemagazine.it/magazine/tom-wesselmann-at-almine-rech-paris

Tallack, Douglas, *Twentieth-Century America: The Intellectual and Cultural Context* (London and New York: Longman, 1996, 3rd edition)

Tekiner, Deniz, 'Formalist Art Criticism and the Politics of Meaning', *Social Justice*, 33:2 (2006), pp. 31-44

Ténèze, Annabelle, 'Tom Wesselmann's Challenge: Painting Along with the History of Art', ed. Stéphane Aquin, *Tom Wesselmann* (Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, DelMonico Books, 2012, exhibition catalogue), pp. 30 – 36

'The Playmate as Fine Art', *Playboy*, 14:1, (January 1967), pp. 148-149

'The Slashed Venus', *Manchester Courier*, 13 March 1914, p. 9

'Think Clean', *Time*, 89:9, 3 March 1967, p.p. 76 – 82

Tillim, Sidney, 'Further Observations on the Pop Phenomenon' in ed. Steven Henry Madoff, *Pop Art: A Critical History*, (Berkeley, CA and London: University of California Press, 1997), p.138. Originally published in *Artforum*, (November 1965)

'Tom Wesselmann: Pleasure Painter' in *Avant Garde*, Volume 5 (1968), pp. 24-28

Treasures from the Cooper Union Museum (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1967)

U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774-1875, Statues at Large, 42nd Congress, 3 March 1873. Chap. CCLVIII – *An Act for the Suppression of Trade in, and the Circulation of, obscene Literature and Articles of immoral Use* https://memory.loc.gov/cgibin/ampage?collId=llsl&fileName=017/llsl017.db&recNum=0639

'U.S. to Find Work for 3,500 Artists', in *New York Times*, 4 October 1935, Section L, p. 23

Walleston, Aimee, 'Wife and Muse: Claire Wesselmann on Tom Wesselmann', *Art in America*, 8 December 2009 https://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/interviews/claire-wesselman/

Vree, Freddy de, 'The New York Period' at http://www.jancremer.com/article-the-new-york-period-of-Jan-cremer.php

Weinraub, Judith, 'Germaine Greer – Opinions That May Shock the Faithful ', *New York Times*, 22 March 1971

Whiting, Cecile, *A Taste for Pop* (Cambridge University Press: 1997)

Wiehe, Vernon R. and Ann L. Richards, *Intimate Betrayal: Understanding and responding to the trauma of acquaintance rape* (Thousand Oaks, CA:SAGE Publications, Inc., 1995)

Willard, Charlotte, 'In the Art Galleries', *New York Post*, 21 May 1966, magazine section, p. 14

Wilmerding, John, *Tom Wesselmann: His Voice and Vision* (New York, Rizzoli International Publications: 2008)

Wilmerding, John, *The Pop Object: The Still Life Tradition in Pop Art*, (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2013, exhibition catalogue)

Wolfe, Bernard, 'Henry Miller: a candid conversation with the venerable maverick of American letters', *Playboy*, 11:9 (September 1964), pp. 77-90

'WPA Federal Art Project' in *Current History (1916-1940)* 48:4 (1938), p. 68

Yalom, Marilyn, *A History of the Breast* (London: Harper Collins, 1997)

Broadcasts & Videos

'MacArthur, Gimbel and MacCaffrey Receive Awards at the West Side Association of Commerce Dinner',WNYC Radio, 15 November 1961

'Cooper Union Museum – Interview with Dr Richer P Wunder', WNYC Radio, 5 July 1968.

Ruth Gurin Bowman 'Interview with Nicholas Marsicano', *Views on Art*, WNYC Radio, 10 April 1973.

Balderdash and Piffle, BBC2, series 1, episode 5, 30 January 2006

Susan Stamberg, 'A Tale of Two Sisters and their Serious Eye for Art – Interview with Karen Levitov and Katy Rothkopf', *Weekend Edition*, National Public Radio, 25 June 2011.

In Conversation: Tom Wesselmann, Brenda Schmahmann, Julian Solms and Jeffrey Sturges at Almine-Rech Gallery, Paris, 4 November 2016 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RgzCf8q75pA

Websites

Evergreen Review https://evergreenreview.com/about

Black Mountain College http://www.blackmountaincollege.org/history/

Barnes Foundation https://collection.barnesfoundation.org/

Tom Wesselmann Estate https://www.tomwesselmannestate.org/tom-wesselmann-the-great-american-nudes-edited-by-susan-davidson/

Wildenstein Plattner Institute https://digitalprojects.wpi.art/archive/detail/170551-administrative-biographical-and-printed-materials

Artsy price database https://www.artsy.net/price-database

Coach https://uk.coach.com/coach-x-tom-wesselmann-swinger-20/CA227.html?dwvar_color=B4%2FBK#gclid=Cj0KCQjw-fmZBhDtARIsAH6H8qhFug496_8T4-Ui0N5iQcYj1_J6Dk04YfjfQqWIPwi6I5LQJl9IQKsaAsTtEALw_wcB&gclsrc=aw.ds&start=19

The Pleasure Pursuit – Immersive Tom Wesselmann Experience https://thepleasurepursuit.com/en_uk/experience-love

IMDb movie database https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0062711/characters/nm0000404