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Art Basel 2023
Hall 2.1; Booth P14

June 13 – 18, 2023

Alexander Gray Associates at Art Basel 2023

Alexander Gray Associates presents recent and historical works by **Frank Bowling**, **Ricardo Brey**, **Luis Camnitzer**, **Melvin Edwards**, **Jennie C. Jones**, **Steve Locke**, **Betty Parsons**, **Joan Semmel**, and **Hugh Steers**. Featuring abstract and figurative paintings, sculptures, and works on paper, the Gallery's presentations highlight these nine artists' innovative approaches to materiality, abstraction, and representation.

For several of these artists, the early 1970s denoted a major turning point in their respective practices. Centering a process-driven approach to abstraction, *Herbert Spencer Revisited* (1974) and other *Poured Paintings* (1973–78) marked **Frank Bowling**'s artistic evolution as he moved away from the expressionist gesture of his *Map Paintings* (1967–71) to investigate the materiality of paint, itself. Works like *Herbert Spencer Revisited* positioned Bowling at the forefront of contemporary art while articulating the connection between Black identity and abstraction. The fluidity of Bowling's *Poured Paintings* is echoed in **Melvin Edwards**'s works on paper like *Texas Blues* (1974) whose seemingly spontaneous layered washes of watercolor evoke the same sense of immediacy. Referencing the multiplicity of meaning found in everyday items, Edwards's 1970s drawings depict the same components—chains and barbed wire—that define his sculptural practice, alluding to both racial oppression and industry.

During the same decade Bowling and Edwards were rearticulating the relationship between identity and abstraction, **Joan Semmel** also radically reinvented her practice. In 1974, she turned to her own body as the focus of her paintings. With this shift, she transformed her point of view from that of an observer—a viewer outside of the canvas—to that of both an observer and subject. Rendered in a near photorealist style, portraits like *Cornered Nipple* (1976) from the artist's *Self-Images* series (1974–79) capture “the feeling of self, and the experience of oneself.” This experience is amplified in recent works, which directly confront viewers with Semmel's aging form. In *Shameless* (2022), the artist presents herself in a frontal seated position to challenge the objectification and fetishization of the female figure, reclaiming her own body as a site of creative autonomy.

Additionally, the 1970s marked a pivotal moment in **Luis Camnitzer**'s artistic development as he progressed from printmaking to focus on three-dimensional works. In 1973, he began to construct *Object Boxes* (1973–80) like *John and Lillian* (1974). Presenting the viewer with an ambiguous relationship between image and text, in this and other related works Camnitzer unpacks the connection between the two, suggesting that the correlation is a spontaneous construct—a changeable narrative meant to be formed by the viewer.



Melvin Edwards, *Untitled*, c. 1974

Alexander Gray Associates



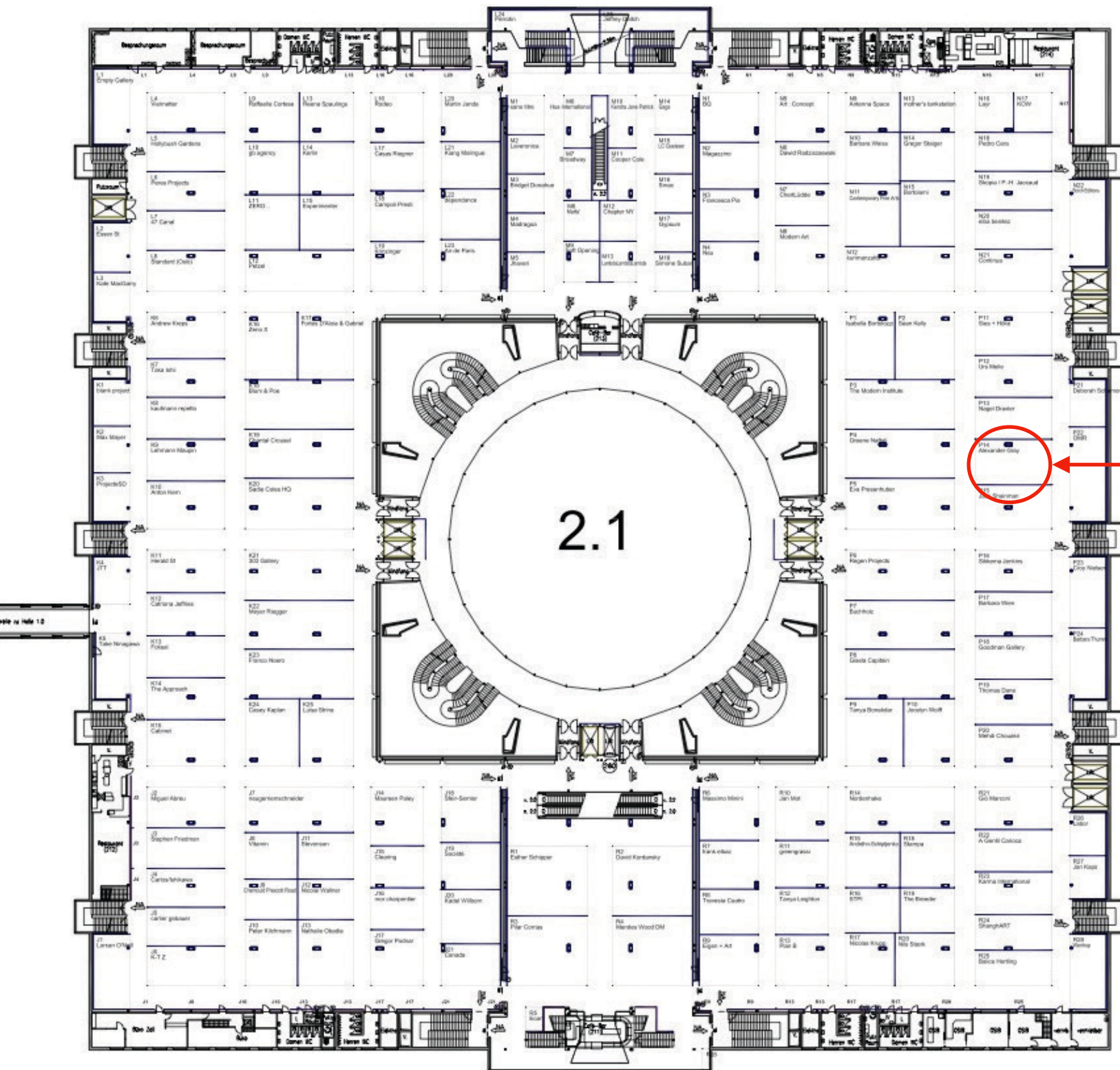
In contrast to this conceptual decoupling of object and language, **Betty Parsons** championed an emotive, painterly approach to interpret her surroundings. Influenced by the spontaneity and verve of the New York School and the expressive brushwork of Color Field Painting, in abstract canvases like *Cousins* (1967) she captured what she called the “sheer energy” and “the new spirit” of the natural world. Departing from Parson’s gestural method, **Jennie C. Jones**’s minimalist compositions employ noise-absorbing materials to explore the perception of sound within the visual arts. Composed of layered felt and acoustic panels, *Fluid Red Tone, Bass Clef* (2023) encourages viewers to anticipate the presence of sound—as the artist observes, this and other similar paintings are always “active.”

Just as Jones joins multiple components in her practice to reference different discourses and modes of perception, so too does **Ricardo Brey**. Juxtaposing a myriad of various materials and figurative and abstract imagery, his works on paper and sculptures like *Yemaya* (2022–23) interrogate the natural world while reflecting his own experience as an Afro-Cuban immigrant to Ghent, Belgium. Similarly personal, **Steve Locke**’s paintings speak to themes of male desire, vulnerability, and sexuality. Capturing intimate moments between men, *Break* (2007) and other *cruisers* paintings emerge as meditations on the gaze, mapping the relationship between identity and desire.

Further conveying the connection between identity and desire, the Gallery’s Kabinett presentation features a selection of works by **Hugh Steers** painted between 1988–92. These deeply intimate vignettes are connected by their shared imagery of men caring for one another. This care reflects, in part, Steers’s own longing for compassion and love. “It’s as if painting it will make it become real,” Steers once explained. “That painting of a man holding another man is conjuring that tenderness, that hope that someone will still care about you and will be there.” Imbuing soft glances and gestures with elegiac yearning, Steers’s men navigate a world indelibly marked by the isolation, desire, fear, and hope of the AIDS crisis.

Ultimately, the Gallery’s presentations chart an evolving global and political landscape. Responding to inequality and discrimination in contemporary society, these artists’ vibrant compositions articulate and champion new understandings and perspectives, portraying what Steers once characterized as “the humanity of a moment.”

Hugh Steers, *Black Towel*, 1988 (installation view)



Alexander Gray Associates
Hall 2.1, Booth P14

ABB 2023
Hall 2.1
Overview

Main Presentation

Joan Semmel
Frank Bowling
Melvin Edwards
Ricardo Brey
Jennie C. Jones
Steve Locke
Betty Parsons
Luis Camnitzer



Joan Semmel

Cornered Nipple, 1976

Signed and dated on recto

Oil on canvas

22 x 44 1/8 in (55.9 x 112.1 cm)

23 1/2 x 45 1/2 x 2 in framed (59.7 x 115.6 x 5.1 cm framed)

(JS294)

Price on request

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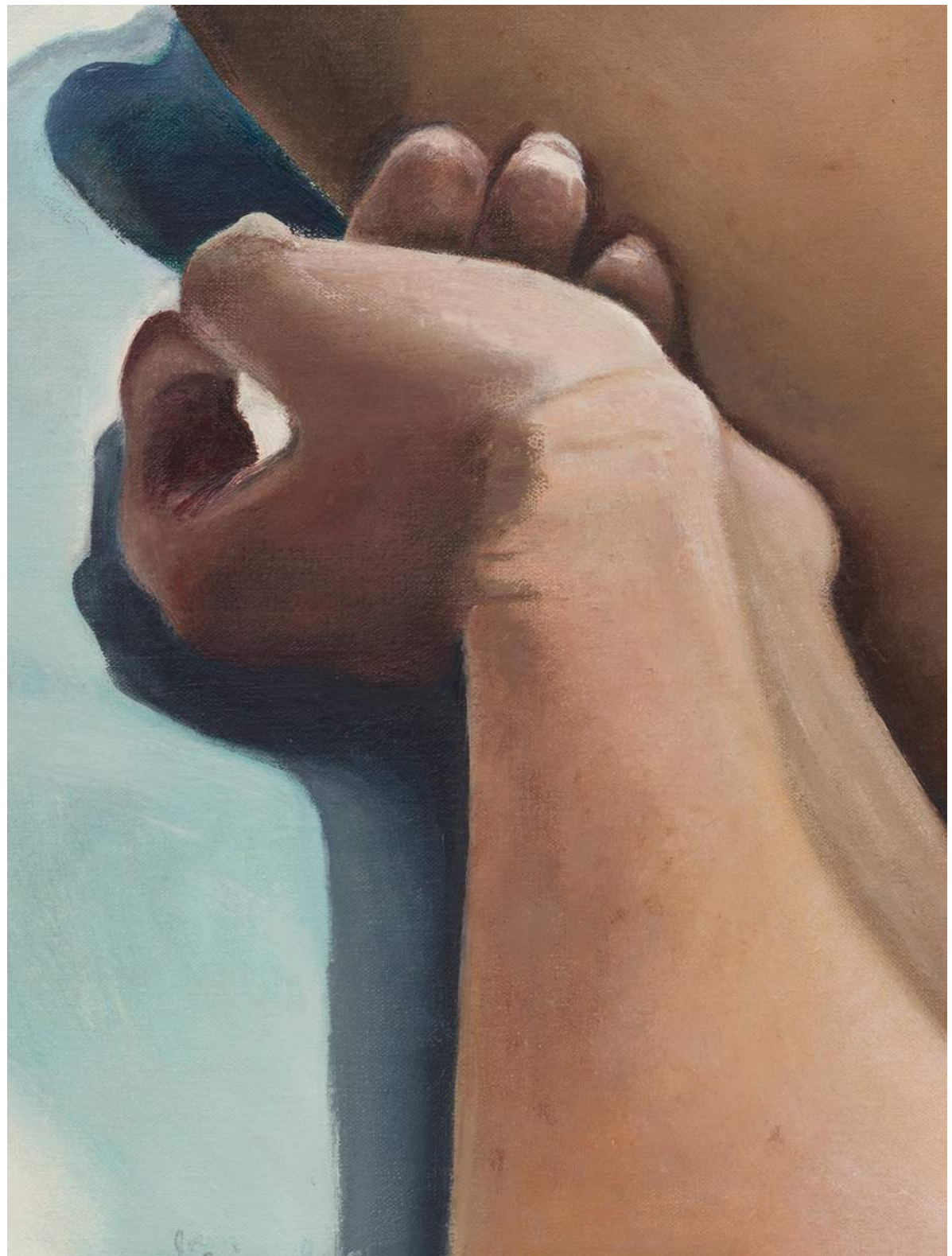
In 1974, Joan Semmel radically shifted her practice, adopting her own body as the focus of her paintings. With this shift, she transformed her point of view from that of an observer—a viewer outside of the canvas—to that of both an observer and subject. *Cornered Nipple* (1976) exemplifies this viewpoint. The canvas is part of the artist's *Self-Images* series (1974–79), a body of work where Semmel turns the perspective of her compositions to capture “the feeling of self, and the experience of oneself.” Closely cropped and painted from a photograph the artist took of herself, portraits like *Cornered Nipple* were rendered in a near photorealist style.

Curator Helen Molesworth highlights Semmel’s singular technique evinced in the artist’s work of this period: “In the midst of second-wave Feminism and the Women’s Art Movement, Semmel devised an ingenious method to ‘liberate’ the female nude. In place of come-hither seduction or erotic submission, she proposed female self-regard and embodied agency....(T)he nude no longer appears as an idealized fantasy, allegorical figure, or landscape of desire but rather as the self-apprehended body of a specific woman.” In *Cornered Nipple* and other paintings in the series, Semmel challenges the objectification and fetishization of the female form by reclaiming her own body as a site of creative autonomy. “When you look at yourself, you’re not looking at the whole body, you see it in fragments,” she explained. “I was interested in how you experience the body rather than an image of an ideal.”

Related canvases from Semmel’s *Self-Images* series are in the permanent collections of the Brooklyn Museum, New York; Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, VA; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Rose Art Museum, Waltham, MA; Tate Collection, London, UK; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Joan Semmel, *Cornered Nipple*, 1976 (installation view)

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Joan Semmel, *Cornered Nipple*, 1976 (detail)



Joan Semmel

Tunnel Vision, 2022

Signed and dated on recto

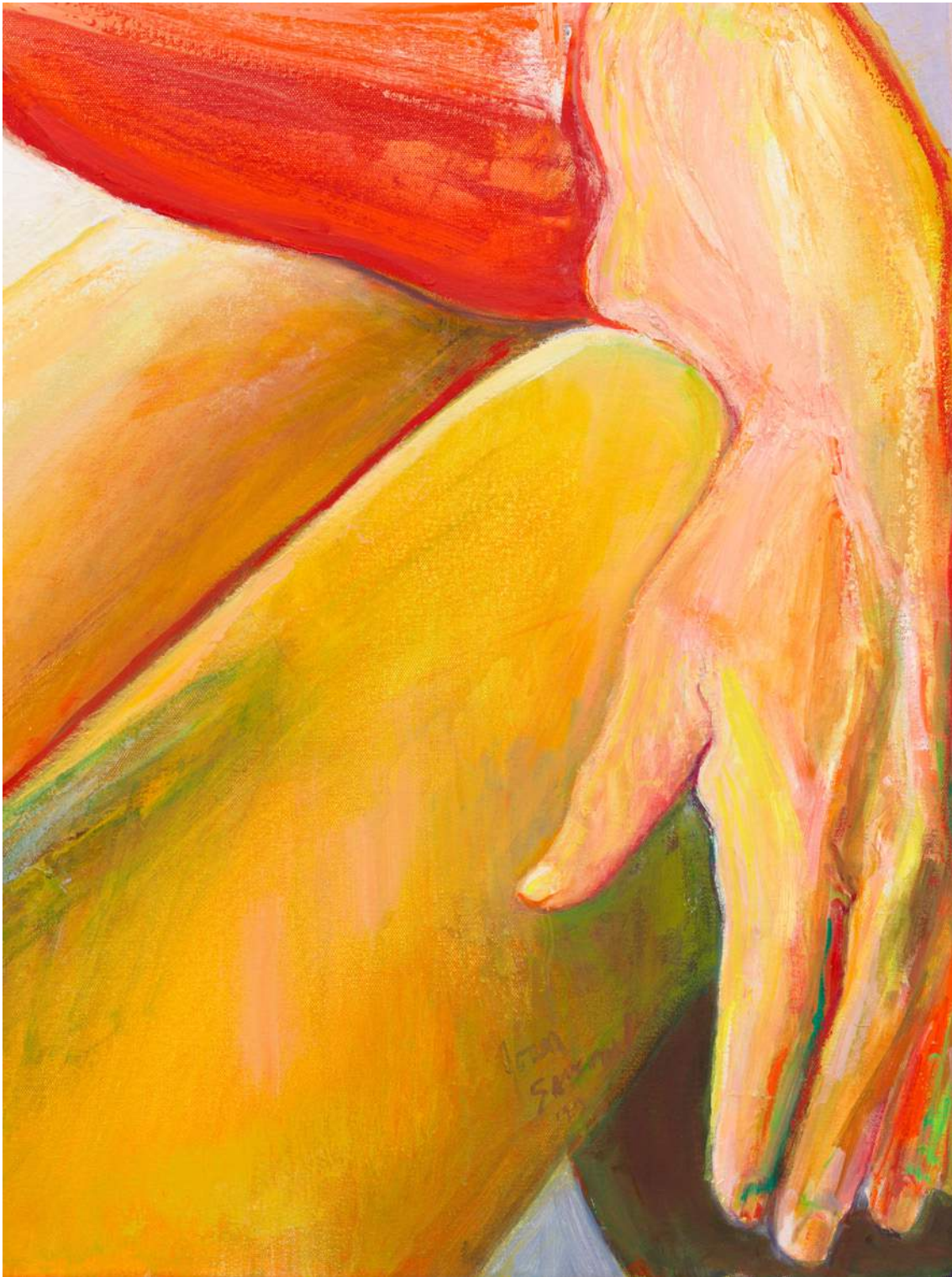
Oil on canvas

24 x 30 (61 x 76.2 cm)

25 3/4 x 31 1/2 x 2 1/4 in framed (65.4 x 80 x 5.7 cm framed)

(JS472)

Sold



Since the 1970s, Joan Semmel has centered her practice around representations of the body from the female perspective, often taking her own body as subject. In recent paintings like *Tunnel Vision* (2022), her body fills the canvas in a manner that echoes the in-camera cropping of the photographs she takes as the basis for her compositions. As in Semmel's early *Sex Paintings* (1971) and *Erotic Series* (1972), the abstract use of color in *Tunnel Vision* serves as a means of distinguishing her nude figures from the realm of pornography. At this later stage in life, she says, "You're still dealing with sexuality, but it's not about seduction... The colors are the seduction here." In *Tunnel Vision* Semmel's body is distorted not only by the acid yellow and reddish-orange tones of her skin, but also by the distinct way in which it is cropped—as though the viewer is peering over the artist's shoulder. Emerging from Semmel's near sixty-year commitment to bodily autonomy, this canvas and other related works ultimately challenge the objectification and fetishization of female sexuality.

Joan Semmel, *Tunnel Vision*, 2022 (installation view)



Joan Semmel

Shameless, 2022

Signed and dated on recto

Oil on canvas

60 x 48 x 2 in (152.4 x 121.9 x 5.1 cm)

61 1/2 x 49 1/2 x 2 7/8 in framed

(156.2 x 125.7 x 7.3 cm framed)

(JS471)

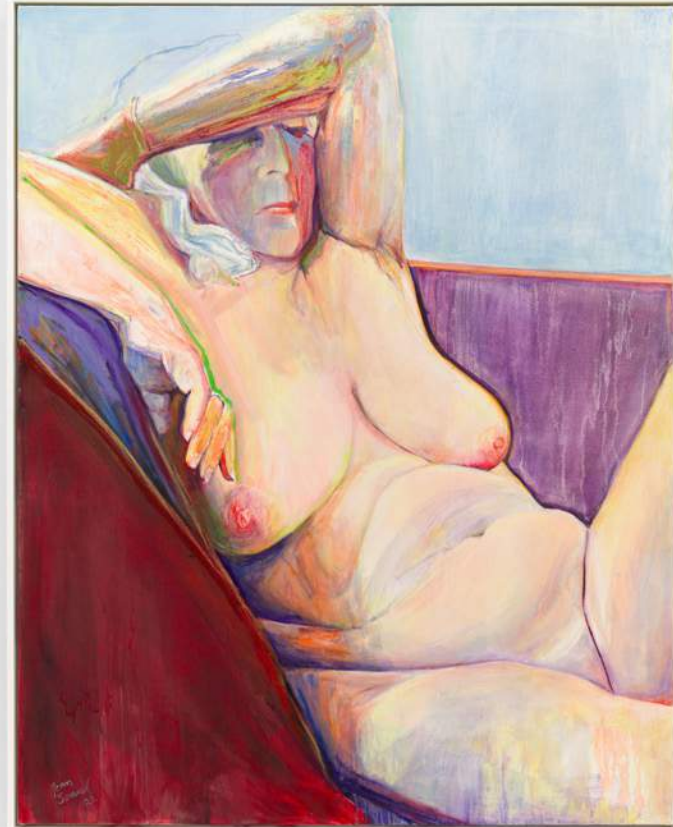
\$225,000

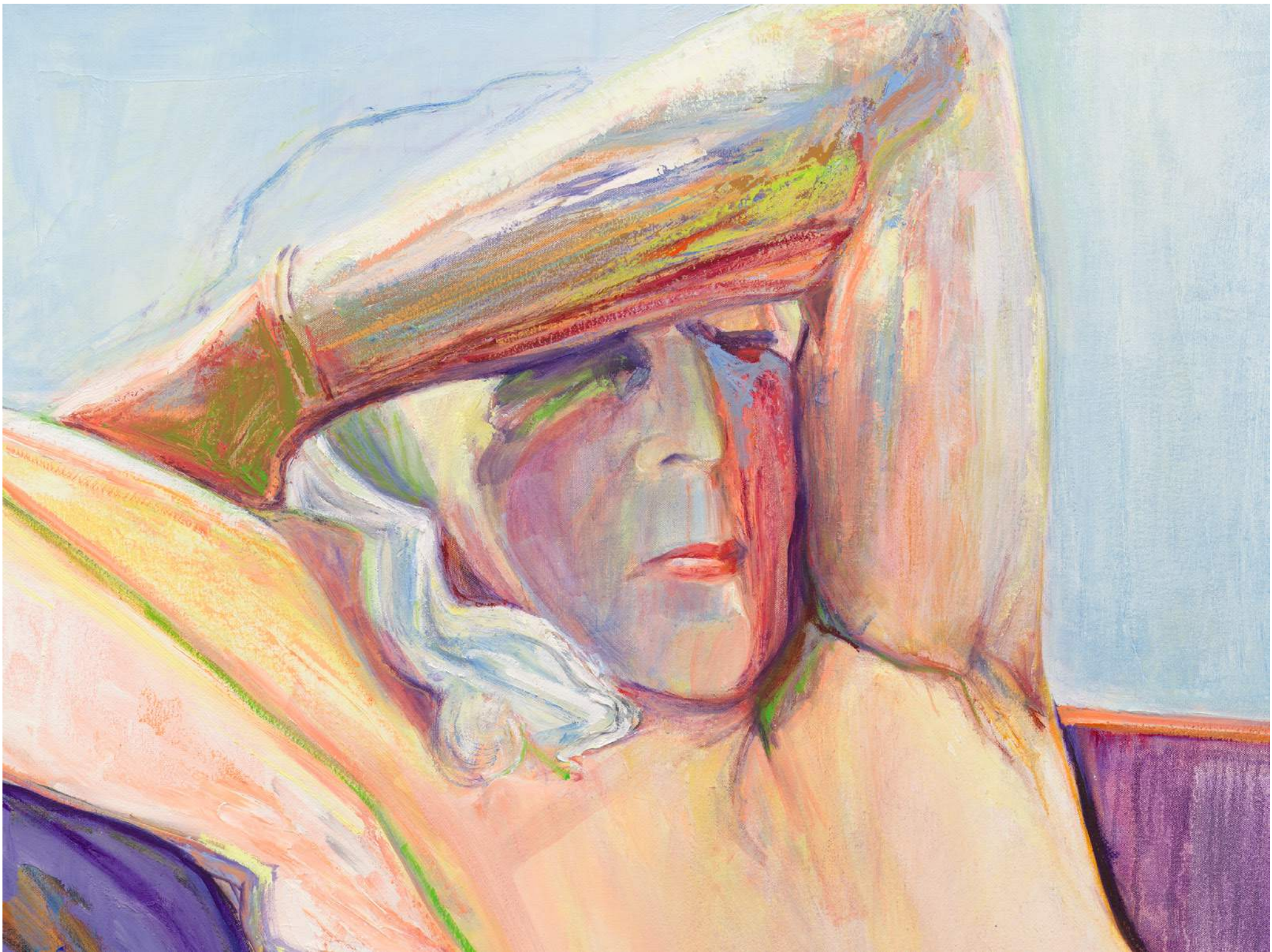
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In recent paintings like *Shameless* (2022), Semmel's engagement with the nude form has led to interpretations of the aging female body. At this later stage in life Semmel says, "We all have some difficulty in confronting our aging physical selves... so when you are painting yourself in that position, it really means that you have to say, 'I'm doing this and I'm not going to make it pretty. I'm not going to hide it, disguise it, no face-lifts. It's going to be really the way I see it.' It's the natural evolution of a person." As in her early *Sex Paintings* (1971) and *Erotic Series* (1972), the abstract use of color in *Shameless* serves for the artist as a means of distinguishing her nude figures from the realm of pornography and developing her signature approach to the nude form. She reflects, "The use of nudity and sexuality were the problem areas around which the element of shame came into play and so I had to deal with...it in terms of my own life."

In contrast to other recent self-portraits that closely crop the figure's form or are depicted with the body's back to the viewer, in *Shameless* Semmel presents herself in a frontal seated position with her left arm collapsed over her head rendered in thick expressive brushstrokes. This gestural technique recalls the artist's early training in the 1950s as an Abstract Expressionist. With paintings like *Shameless*, Semmel synthesizes her longstanding engagement with content and form to illuminate aging and memory through the act of painting, insisting through her chosen subject that "the flesh permits us to fully experience our common humanity."

Joan Semmel, *Shameless*, 2022 (installation view)





Joan Semmel, *Shameless*, 2022 (detail)



Frank Bowling, *Herbert Spencer Revisited*, 1974 (detail)



Frank Bowling

Herbert Spencer Revisited, 1974

Signed, titled, and dated on verso

Acrylic on canvas

76 x 46 in (193 x 116.8 cm)

78 x 48 x 2 1/4 in framed (198.1 x 121.9 x 5.7 cm framed)
(FBO166)

Price on request

For over five decades, Frank Bowling has created abstract paintings that interweave autobiography, geopolitics, and formal concerns. After moving to New York in the 1960s, Bowling began his series of *Poured Paintings* (1973–78). Centering a process-driven approach to abstraction, *Herbert Spencer Revisited* (1974) and other paintings from this body of work marked Bowling's artistic evolution as he moved away from the expressionist gesture of his *Map Paintings* (1967–71) to investigate the materiality of paint, itself. Championed by the influential art critic Clement Greenberg and supported by fellow Black abstractionists, these works—with their roiling eddies and lapping waves of color—positioned Bowling at the forefront of contemporary art while articulating the connection between Black identity and abstraction.

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Bowling created his *Poured Paintings* by allowing acrylic to fall from great heights and cascade down the canvas via a custom-built tilting apparatus. The critic and writer Mel Gooding observed, "In effect the painting made itself with a minimum of assistance from the painter. In their thrilling unpredictability ... these poured paintings have about them something very close to the free-form excitement of contemporaneous New York jazz." Evoking this exuberance, *Herbert Spencer Revisited* features luminescent slides of greens, pinks and reds framed by rivulets of yellow acrylic. At once structured and spontaneous, the work's quasi-improvisational construction questions the limits of abstraction.

At the same time, *Herbert Spencer Revisited* builds on concepts established in Bowling's earlier series of *Map Paintings*, which reoriented the globe to forward narratives around the Global South. The title and earthy color palette of the canvas refers to English philosopher and sociologist Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) who coined the term "survival of the fittest" to explain evolutionary theory. Here, Bowling alludes to Spencer's vision to address the struggle for survival, bringing the composition into conversation with the socio-political concerns and cultural shifts that were reshaping contemporary societies across the globe.

Frank Bowling, *Herbert Spencer Revisited*, 1974 (detail)





Frank Bowling, *Herbert Spencer Revisited*, 1974 (installation view)



Melvin Edwards, Untitled, c. 1974 (detail)



Melvin Edwards

Untitled, c. 1974

Watercolor and ink on orange construction paper

19 x 12 1/2 in (48.3 x 31.8 cm)

26 3/8 x 19 7/8 x 1 1/2 in framed (67 x 50.5 x 3.8 cm framed)
(ME1341)

\$50,000; ex. framing

While best known as a sculptor, Melvin Edwards has always maintained a drawing practice. Guided by his father's friend, the painter George Gilbert, Edwards taught himself how to draw at a young age. This interest ultimately led Edwards to initially study painting while pursuing a degree in fine arts at the University of Southern California (USC). Although Edwards would quickly shift to sculptural assemblage, his commitment to drawing never wavered.

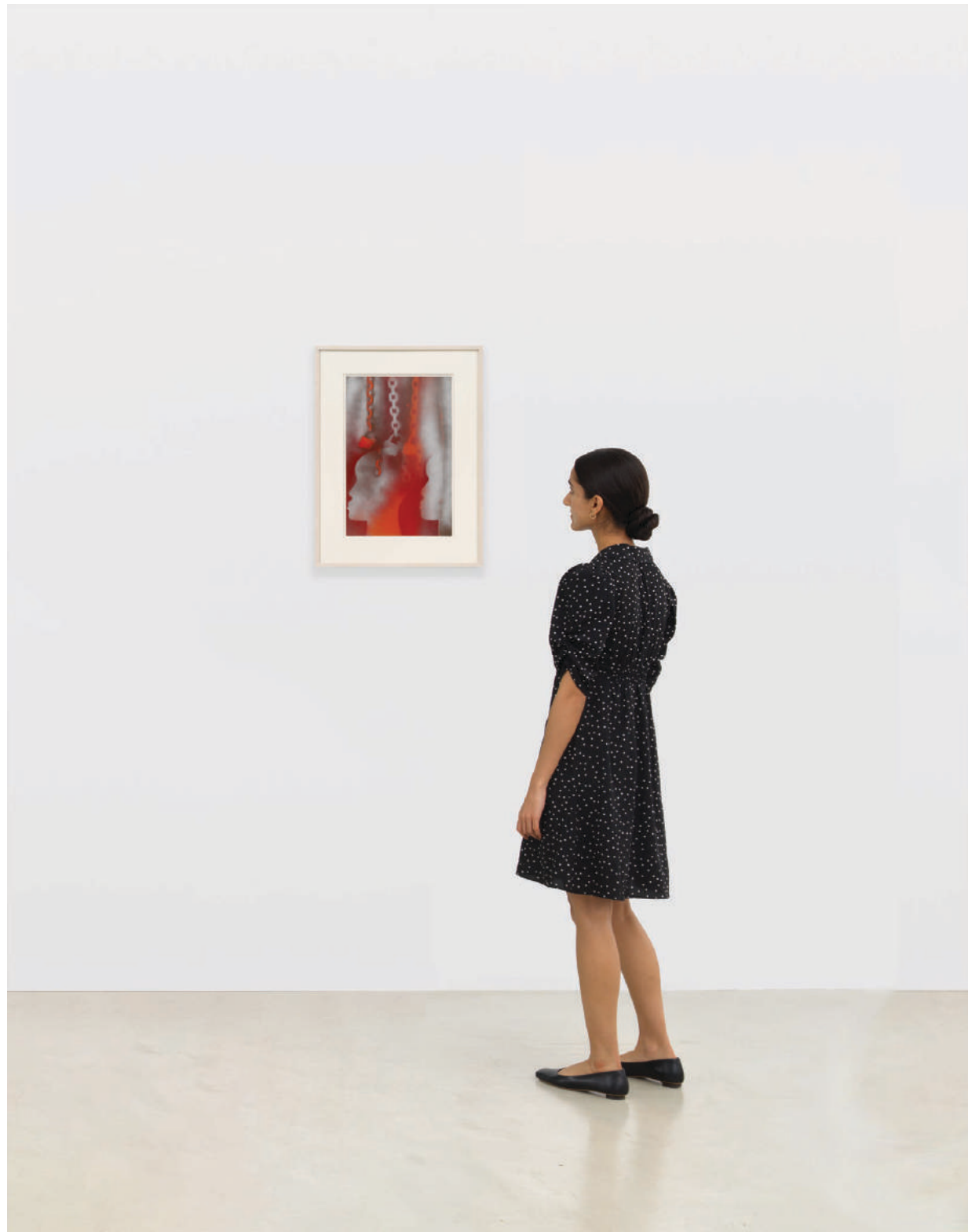
Edwards created this c.1974 drawing by using watercolor and spray paint to imprint the negative of two elements, chains and barbed wire. Employing both to great effect in his one-person exhibition of barbed wire installations at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1970, these materials have come to define his practice. The artist's translation of these sculptural components into graphic elements speaks to his minimalist understanding of his installations as "drawings in space." At the same time, his use of these materials also serves as a conceptual language that connects the people, cultures, and histories of the African Diaspora. Referencing the multiplicity of meaning found in everyday items, Edwards's compositions depicting these devices—occasionally with figurative profiles—are polyvocal, alluding to both racial oppression and industry.

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Adapting a similar sense of color to that of the vivid, abstract murals of Smokehouse Associates (1968–1970) in Harlem, the artist's 1970s watercolors juxtapose loops of chain and barbed wire against undulating, fluid grounds. Allowing these outlines to sometimes be interrupted by drips, sprays, and splatters of vibrant pigment, Edwards creates a destabilizing disjunction between the ephemeral quality of the pictured material and its use. This disjunction is primarily a result of the artist's approach to color, which he described as instinctual and recalls that of his peers in the 1970s. Black abstractionists like Frank Bowling and Jack Whitten developed alternative compositional methods that introduced chance and happenstance into the painterly process. The gestural verve of Bowling's *Poured Paintings* (1973–1978), a series characterized by brightly colored spills and rivulets of acrylic paint, is echoed in Edwards's drawings, whose seemingly spontaneous layered washes of watercolor evoke the same sense of immediacy.

Ultimately, while the palette and lyricism of these drawings at first appears to stand in contrast to the concentrated intensity of Edwards's welded steel sculptures, together, these disparate works find commonality in their emphasis on the aesthetic qualities and complex historical meanings embedded in utilitarian objects. For Edwards, his works on paper use the potential and power of abstraction to invite competing narratives of oppression and violence that relate to both autobiographical and socio-political concerns.

Melvin Edwards, Untitled, c. 1974 (installation view)





Melvin Edwards

Texas Blues, 1974

Signed, titled, and dated on verso

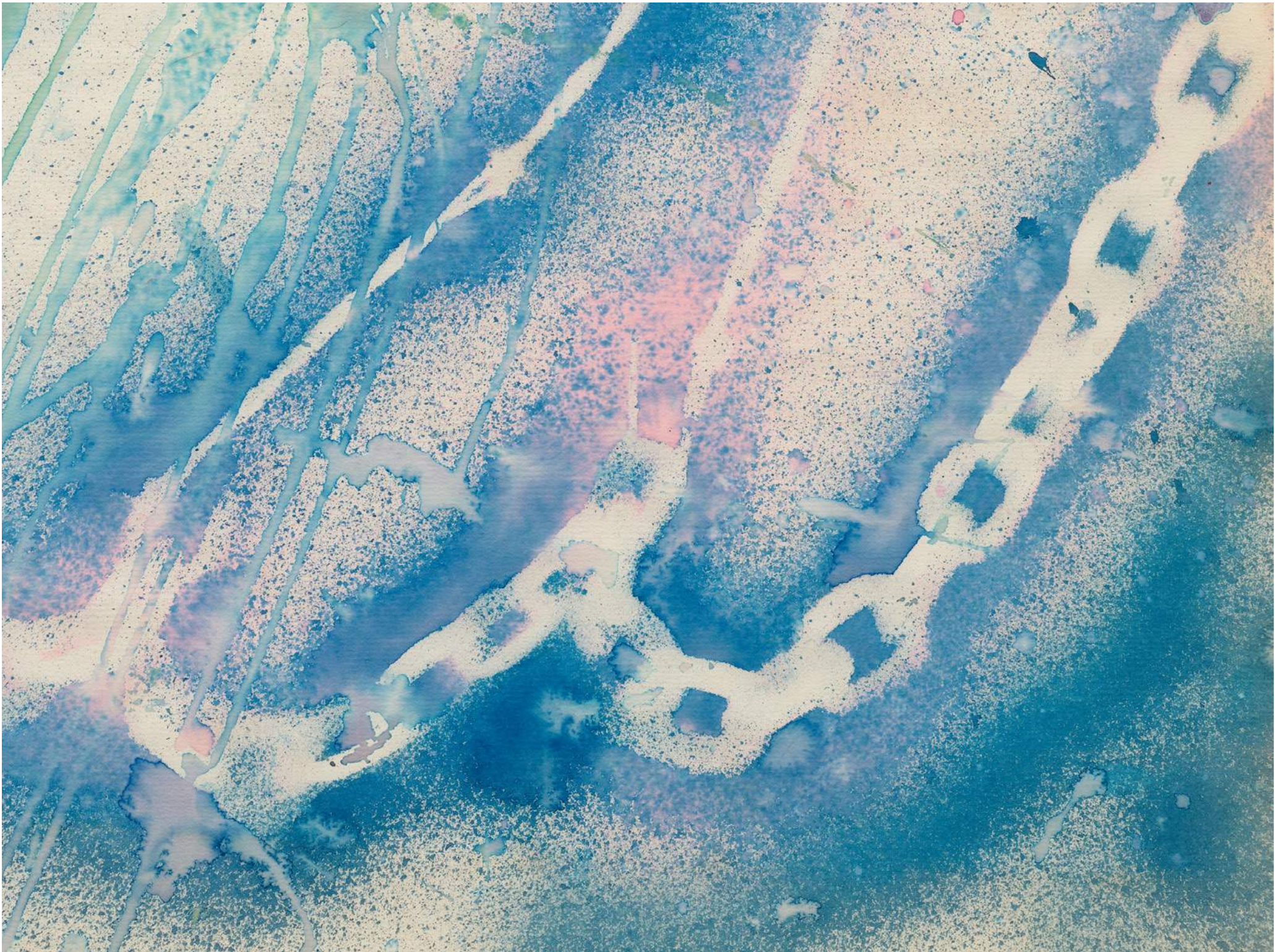
Watercolor and ink on paper

18 7/8 x 25 1/8 in (47.9 x 63.8 cm)

21 1/8 x 27 x 1 5/8 in framed (53.7 x 68.6 x 4.1 cm framed)

(ME1514)

\$50,000; ex. framing; On reserve



Melvin Edwards, *Texas Blues*, 1974 (detail)



Melvin Edwards

Eastern Angle, 1993

Dated on verso

Welded steel

11 x 9 x 9 in (27.9 x 22.9 x 22.9 cm)

(ME113)

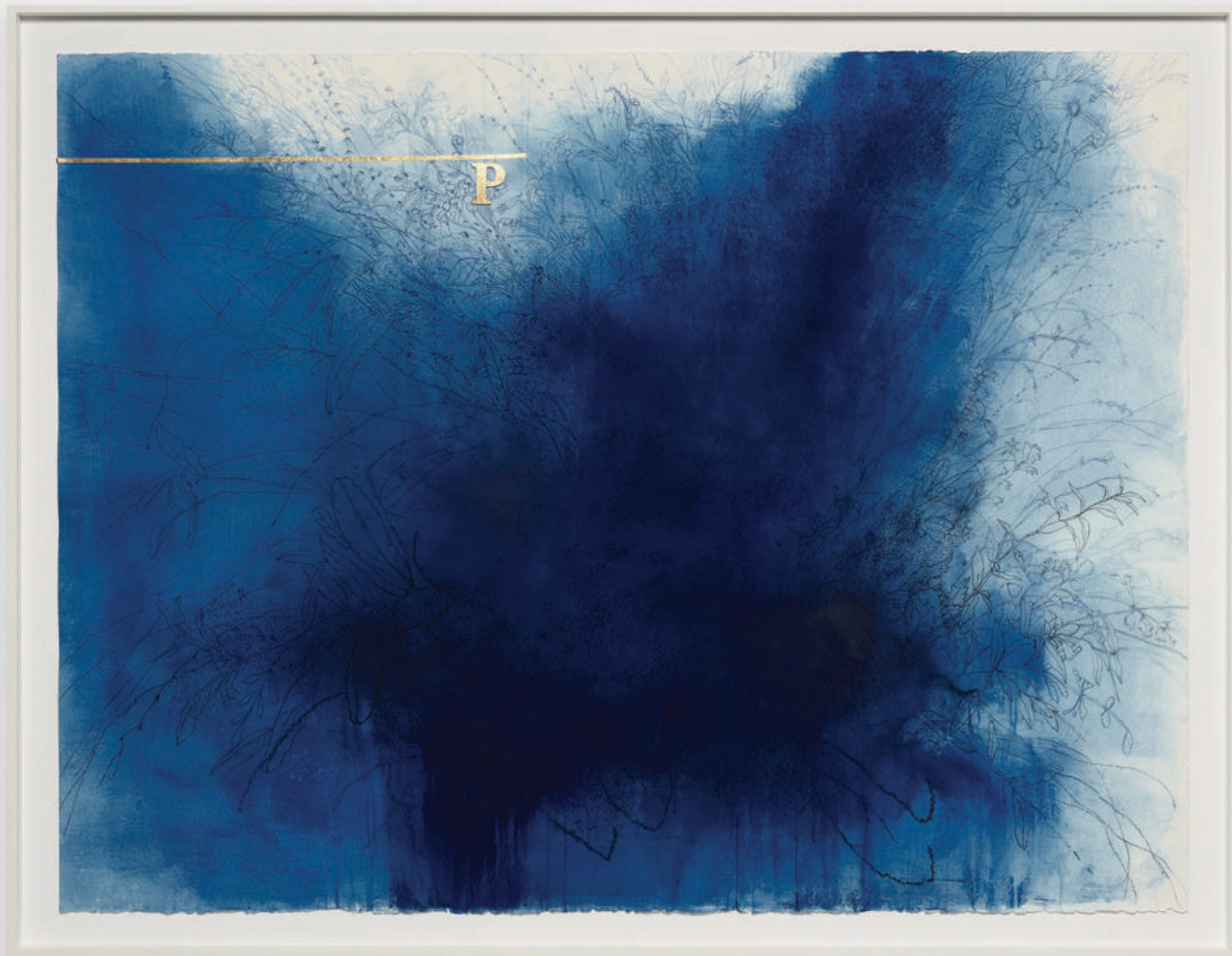
\$175,000

Melvin Edwards's sculptures reflect his engagement with the history of race, labor, and violence, as well as with themes of the African Diaspora. His work is distinguished by its formal simplicity and powerful materiality. *Eastern Angle* (1993), whose title refers to the artist's 1993 trip to Japan, is part of Edwards's celebrated series of *Lynch Fragments*. The series spans three periods: the early 1960s, when Edwards responded to racial violence in the United States; the early 1970s, when his activism concerning the Vietnam War motivated him to return to the series; and from 1978 to the present, when he began honoring individuals, exploring notions of nostalgia, and investigating his personal interest in African culture.

Eastern Angle boasts a tangled amalgamation of screws, horseshoes, hooks, and nails. The formal dynamism of the work invites conflicting readings of brutality and industry. Capitalizing on the multivalent potential of materials to evoke competing narratives, Edwards welds together disparate histories of creation and oppression to critically reflect on America's past and the complicated legacy of the African Diaspora. He ultimately summarizes, "In other words, the meaning of the form, or the meaning of the element within a work, is affected by what the context is, what form is next to it, what form is under it or hidden by it."



Melvin Edwards, *Eastern Angle*, 1993 (side view)



Ricardo Brey

Flash of Azure, 2022

Mixed media on Arches paper

47 5/8 x 63 in (121 x 160 cm)

53 1/8 x 68 7/8 x 2 in framed (135 x 175 x 5 cm framed)

(RBR406)

\$30,000; ex. framing

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Constrained to his studio in Ghent, Belgium during the Covid-19 pandemic, Ricardo Brey created a series of blue works on paper. Ranging in hue from cerulean to lapis lazuli, Brey associated the color with the sky and sea—symbols of freedom and, at the time, an unattainable expansiveness.

Inspired by various species of trees and botanical illustrations, works like *Flash of Azure* (2022) and *Ambrosie* (2022) expand on Brey's decades-long examination of the natural world. Here, Brey brings together floral elements with organic rhizomatic forms of budding tree branches whose limbs spread outwards beneath thin washes of pigment. This approach mirrors the fluidity with which the artist moves between traditional painterly and non-traditional mediums. The lyricism of these compositions recalls the Dutch etched landscapes by Rembrandt. At the same time, the expansive plume of blue in these works pushes the viewer to consider not only the uncontrollableness of the natural world, but also the disastrous uncontainability of human-induced climate change.

Meanwhile, Brey continues to view nature as a source of hope for the future, maintaining that it “and life in general, is quite resilient. No matter how hard you try, a weed will always come back—it is their essence to hold their ground, to stand up, to survive.”

Ricardo Brey, *Flash of Azure*, 2022 (detail)





Ricardo Brey
Ambrosie, 2022
Mixed media on Arches paper
47 5/8 x 63 in (121 x 160 cm)
53 1/8 x 68 7/8 x 2 in framed (135 x 175 x 5 cm framed)
(RBR407)

\$30,000; ex. framing



Ricardo Brey, *Ambrosie*, 2022 (detail)



Ricardo Brey

Rose, 2021

Mixed media

23 5/8 x 5 7/8 x 38 1/4 in (60 x 14.9 x 97.2 cm)

(RBR345)

\$35,000

Ricardo Brey's *Adrift* series (2014–present) spans a breadth of media, techniques, and styles, and is conceptually-driven by diverse subject matter. In sculptures from this body of work like *Rose* (2021), Brey presents a replica of an archaic *kore* head—referring to free-standing sculptures of females that began to appear in the Archaic period in Greece—suspended from the wall by a wood column, flanked by two artificial red roses. In *Rose*, as in many of Brey's sculptural works, human and animal faces are reminiscent of Gargoyle-like architectural protrusions. Moreover, *Rose* reflects Brey's decades-long engagement with assemblage and found materials while also embodying his signature sense of hybridity. Here, he continues to investigate seemingly oppositional aspects of the human experience, signaling an ongoing condition for the artist: what he refers to as “a double existence.”



Ricardo Brey

Yemaya, 2022–2023

Mixed media

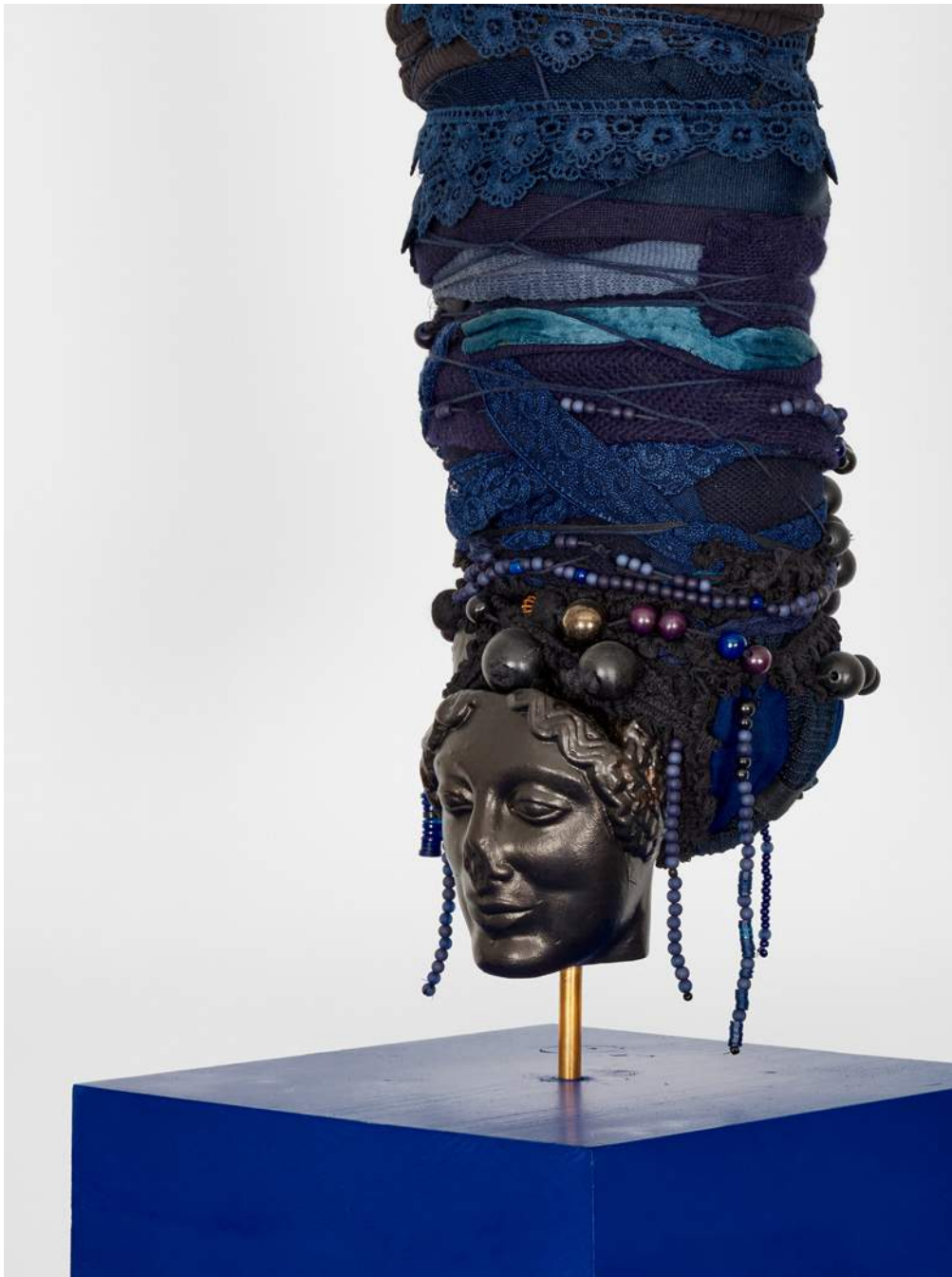
31 7/8 x 11 5/8 x 11 5/8 in (81 x 29.5 x 29.5 cm)

(RBR395)

\$35,000

Building on Ricardo Brey's series of *Kouros* sculptures (2012–present)—referring to the *kouroi* of antiquity were free-standing sculptures of nude male youths that began to appear in the Archaic period in Greece—*Yemaya* (2022–23) incorporates a *kore*, a female figure. The work's title derives from Yemonja, the Yoruban goddess of water and mother of all deities, or orisha of the Ogun River. Yemonja's prevalence in surrounding islands and coastal areas of Cuba, Trinidad, and Brazil, served as reminder of her ability to nurture and insinuate hope in disparate countries impacted by the transatlantic slave trade. In Brey's native Cuba, Yemonja was creolized as Yemaya.

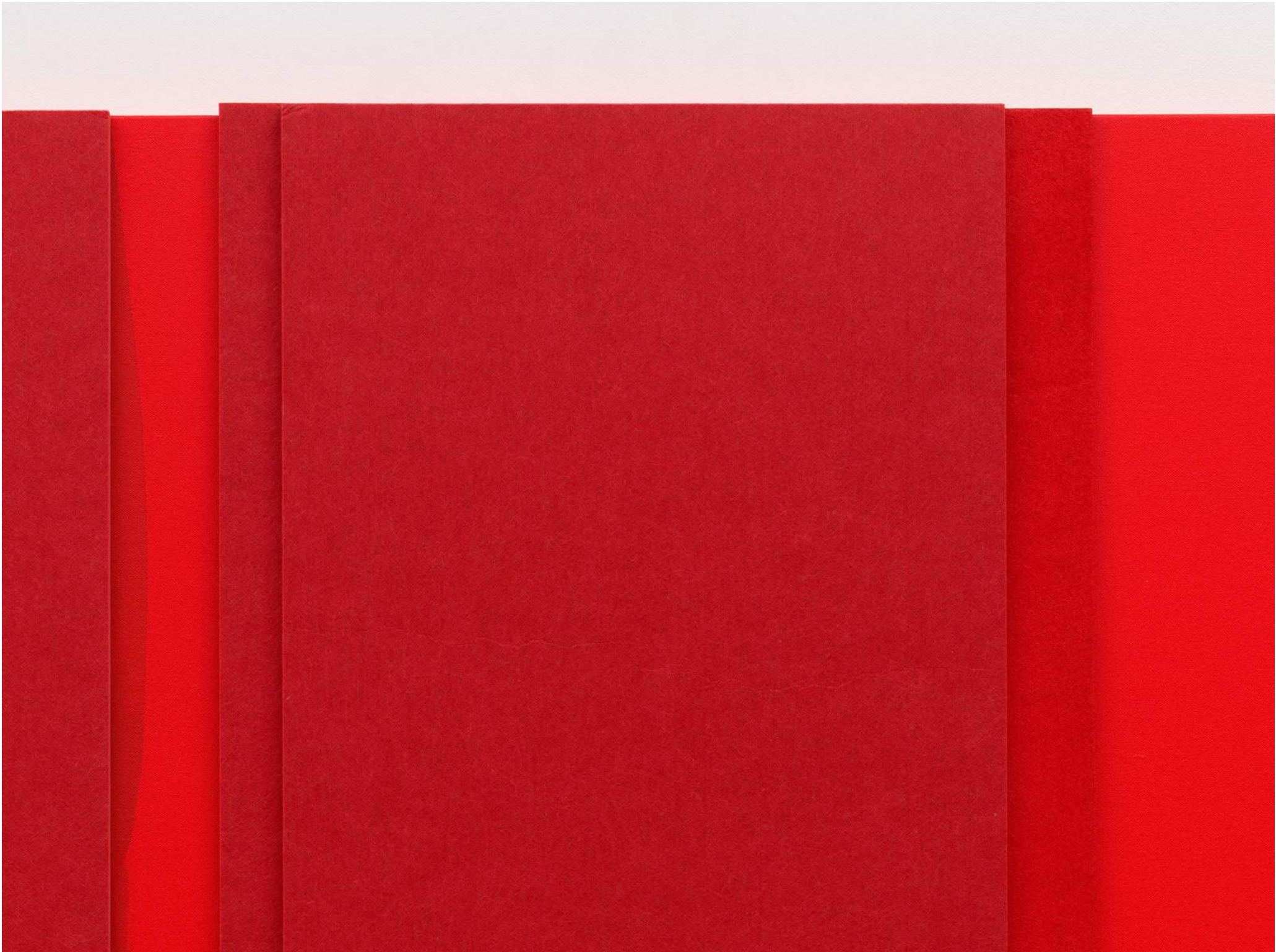
Like Brey's *Kouros* sculptures, *Yemaya* is composed of blue fabrics, lace, cords, beads, and chain assembled carefully on a mounted replica of a *kore* head (from the Acropolis of Athens). Refuting reductive binarisms, *Yemaya* and other related sculptures by the artist surmount divisions between myths, religions, and systems of thought and value to champion a holistic approach to understanding the human condition. Art historian Arie Hartog concludes that Brey's work takes "its place simultaneously inside and outside the Western European art world—a paradoxical situation that arises from the current status of international art."



Ricardo Brey, *Yemaya*, 2022-2023 (detail)



Ricardo Brey, *Yemaya*, 2022-2023 (alternate view)



Jennie C. Jones, *Fluid Red Tone, Bass Clef*, 2023 (detail)



Jennie C. Jones

Fluid Red Tone, Bass Clef, 2023

Signed and dated on verso

Acrylic, acoustic panel, and architectural felt on canvas

48 1/2 x 48 x 2 3/4 in (123.2 x 121.9 x 7 cm)

(JCJ198)

\$90,000

In Jennie C. Jones's *Acoustic Paintings*, she continues to explore the perception of sound within the visual arts. Composed of layered felt and acoustic panels, *Fluid Red Tone, Bass Clef* (2023) subverts the flat formalism of minimalist painting. Transforming its reductive geometry into something far more expansive and immersive, the work physically and aurally extends outwards to actively engage viewers. Encouraging viewers to anticipate the presence of sound, Jones states that this and other similar paintings are always “active.” She explains, “I always say they’re active even when there’s no sound in the room; they are affecting the subtlest of sounds in the space—dampening and absorbing even the human voice.”

Like the intervals of jazz, the related bright and muted tones of *Fluid Red Tone, Bass Clef* hit moments of dissonance and harmony through their repetition and variation. Central to Jones's work since the 1990s is the uncovering of hidden histories of the avant-garde—in particular, bringing to light the contributions made by artists of color, specifically to modernism and minimalism. Her usage of the absorber panels and primary color tones subtly echoes this preoccupation with recovering histories while also serving to physically alter sound.



Jennie C. Jones, *Fluid Red Tone, Bass Clef*, 2023 (side view)



Jennie C. Jones, *Fluid Red Tone, Bass Clef*, 2023 (installation view)

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Jennie C. Jones

Gray, Fade, Static, 2023

Signed and dated on verso

Acrylic, acoustic panel, and architectural felt on canvas

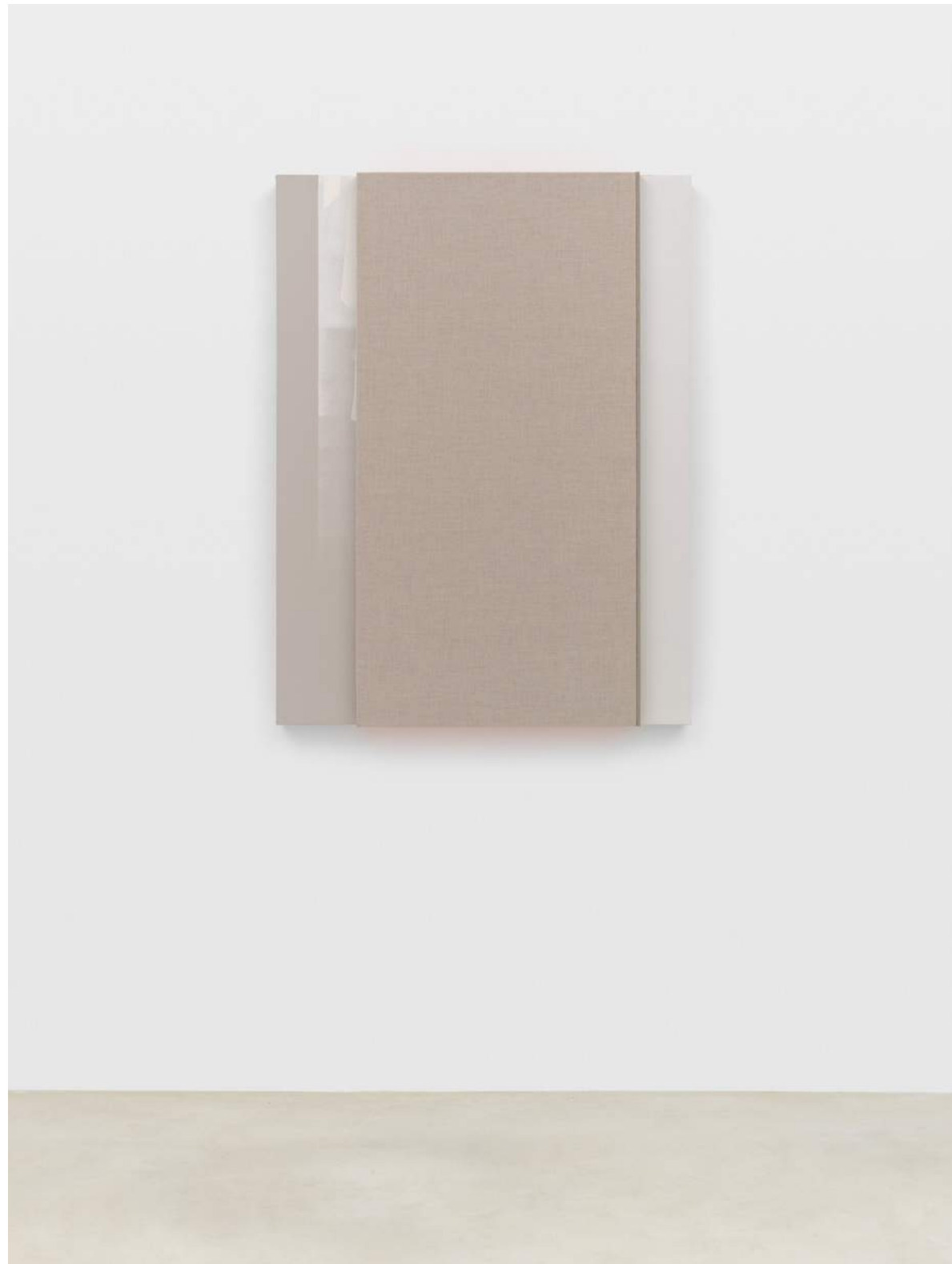
48 x 36 1/8 x 3 1/8 in (121.9 x 91.8 x 7.9 cm)

(JCJ205)

\$75,000

In *Gray, Fade, Static*, Jones layers acoustic panels and architectural felt on a gray canvas, subverting the flat formalism of minimalist painting. Pushing against the idea that this gesture is a reductive one, the artist explains that the labor of creating evenly saturated surfaces—removing the hand—is actually a “maximalist process.” Ultimately challenging the connection between minimalism and the reductive, Jones queries, “Reduced from what? The idea of lack can be turned on its head in order to be perceived as pure potential and opportunity. That maybe relates directly to African American improvisation and creative utility, to working inventively with spare means.”

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Jennie C. Jones, *Gray, Fade, Static*, 2023 (installation view)



Jennie C. Jones, *Gray, Fade, Static*, 2023 (detail)



Steve Locke

The Anxiety of Influence #9, 2023

Signed, titled, and dated on verso

Oil on panel

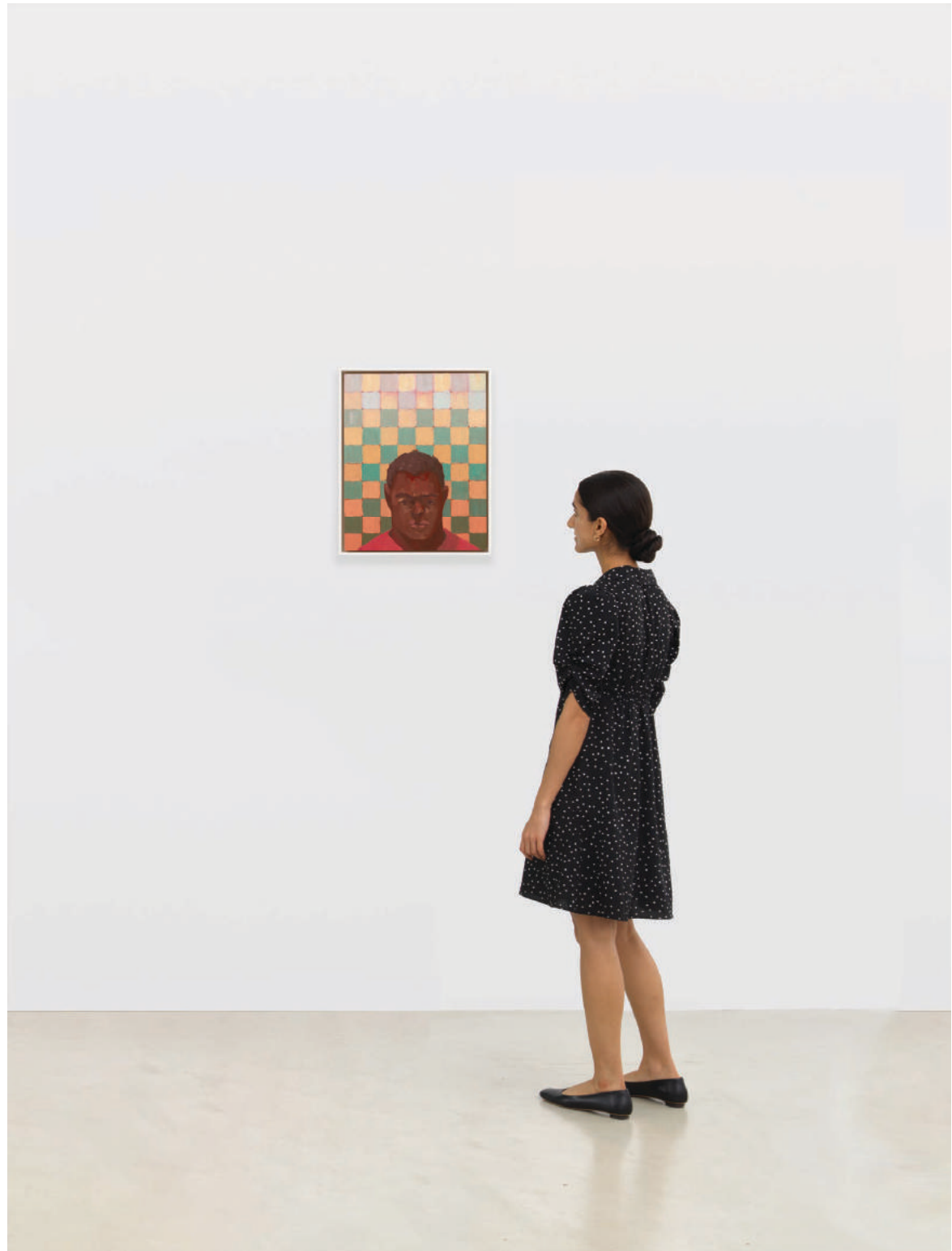
20 x 16 in (50.8 x 40.6 cm)

22 1/4 x 17 1/4 x 2 3/8 in framed (56.5 x 43.8 x 6 cm framed)
(SLO716)

\$20,000

Steve Locke began his series of portraits entitled *The Anxiety of Influence*—including works like *The Anxiety of Influence #9 (2023)*—in 2020 at the beginning of the Covid-19 global pandemic. Isolated in his apartment alone, Locke returned to portraiture as a way to reorient himself and regain a sense of control and autonomy in the face of the uncertain and tumultuous state of the world. “The self-portrait is a way for me to get my bearings, to remember who and what I am. I also think of them as statements of intent,” Locke explains. “In each of the *Anxiety* paintings, I am reviewing what is at stake for me as a figurative artist and putting those concerns front and center. The work privileges observation over photography; employs a systemic approach to color; and affirms the importance of illusion in figurative painting. They are paintings that have me literally against the wall of the modernist grid which is a prison and a site of endless chromatic opportunities. They are the paintings that have occupied me during the covid lockdown, enabling me to search for a way out when there was nowhere to go.”

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Steve Locke, *The Anxiety of Influence #9*, 2023 (installation view)



Betty Parsons, *Cousins*, 1967 (detail)

Alexander Gray Associates



Betty Parsons

Cousins, 1967

Titled and dated on verso

Acrylic on canvas

43 1/2 x 36 5/8 in (110.49 x 93.34 cm)

(BP276)

\$135,000

Initially trained as a sculptor and watercolorist, Betty Parsons began painting abstractly in the late 1940s to capture what she called the “sheer energy” or “the new spirit” of her surroundings. In *Cousins* (1967), a watery field of bright orange emphasizes Parsons’s loose brushstrokes while a cluster of burnt red, olive-green, and blue layered orb-like forms surrounded in gray blotches populate the center of the composition in an effect of dynamic and interwoven color.

Influenced by the spontaneity and verve of the New York School and the emotive, gestural brushwork of Color Field Painting, Parsons developed her own unique mode of abstraction, explaining that she was interested not in capturing what something “looked like,” but rather “what it made me feel.” Throughout her career, Parsons continued to experiment with abstraction and refine her approach to color as she reaffirmed her commitment to capturing what she referred to as the “sheer energy” of a scene or composition.



Betty Parsons, *St. Jean – Cap Ferrat*, 1960 and *Title Unknown*, 1958 (installation view)

Betty Parsons Works on Paper

St. Jean – Cap Ferrat (1960) and this untitled (1958) work come from one of the notebooks and sketchbooks that Betty Parsons filled over the course of her career, their edges bearing the line of holes characteristic of spiral binding. These sketchbooks were Parsons's constant companions throughout her travels and played a fundamental part in her artmaking practice. As art historian Lisa Peters has observed, her sketchbooks "provided a forum for Parsons to work out her visual ideas, reflect on her experiences, summon memories, and capture emotions."

Beginning in the late 1940s Parsons developed her own unique mode of abstraction, explaining that she was interested not in capturing what something "looked like," but rather "what it made me feel." This approach can be seen in both works which boast bold colors, biomorphic shapes, and dynamic brushstrokes. The dual compositions of island-like forms on near-monochromatic backgrounds ultimately emerges as a recurring visual motif throughout the 1960s and 1970s, when Parsons continued to experiment with abstraction and refine her approach to color as she reaffirmed her commitment to capturing what she referred to as the "sheer energy" of a scene or composition.



Betty Parsons

St. Jean – Cap Ferrat, 1960

Signed and dated on recto

Gouache on paper

13 7/8 x 10 7/8 in (35.2 x 27.6 cm)

23 3/8 x 20 1/4 x 1 1/2 in framed

(59.4 x 51.4 x 3.8 cm framed)

(BP019)

\$18,000; Framing: \$325

Alexander Gray Associates



Betty Parsons

Title Unknown, 1958

Signed and dated on recto

Gouache on paper

13 7/8 x 10 5/8 in (35.2 x 27 cm)

23 3/8 x 20 1/8 x 1 1/2 in framed

(59.4 x 51.1 x 3.8 cm framed)

(BP527)

\$18,000; Framing: \$325



Betty Parsons, Title Unknown, 1958 (detail)



Luis Camnitzer

John and Lillian, 1974

Signed and dated on verso

Mixed media

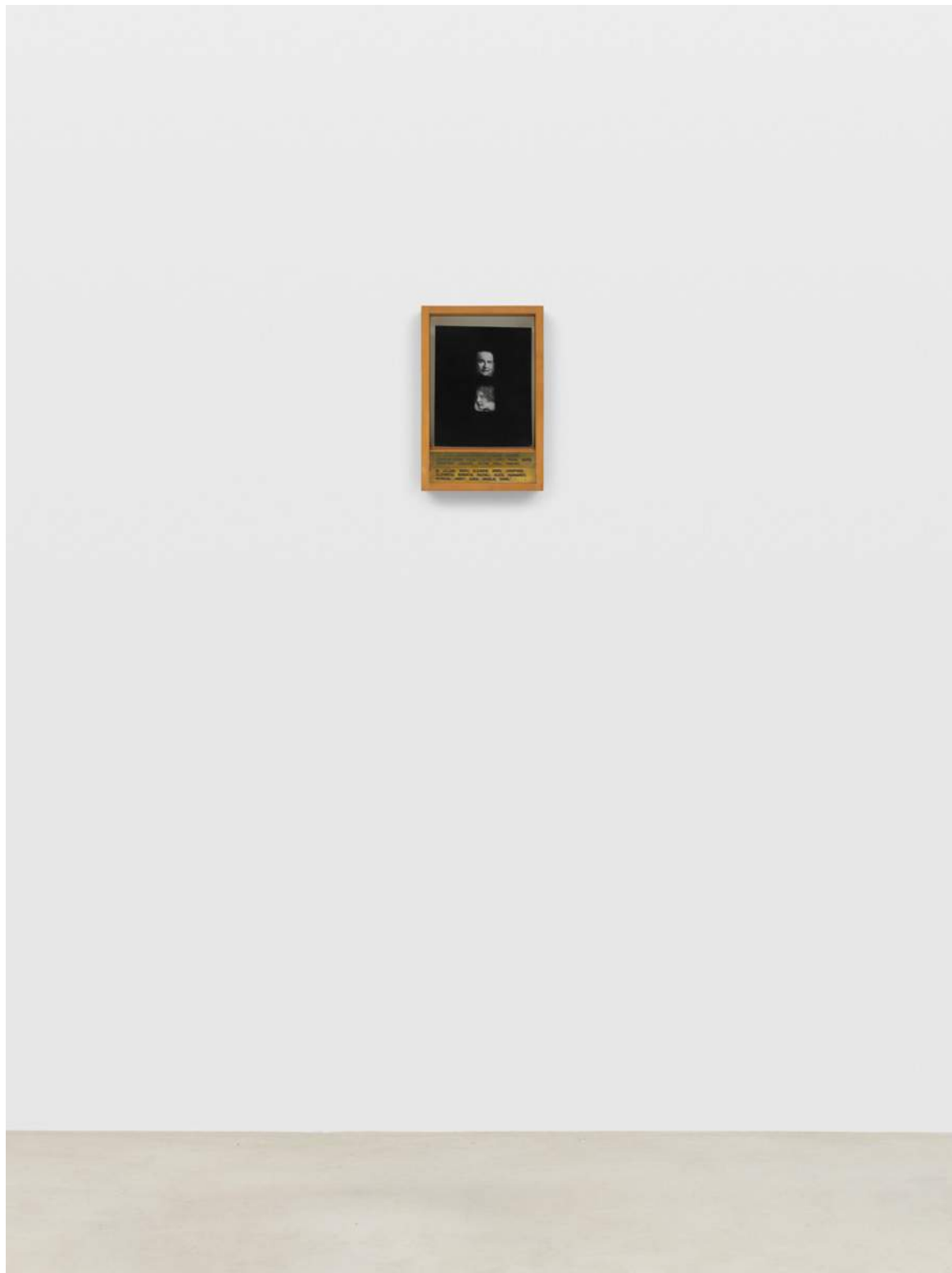
15 x 9 7/8 x 2 in (38.1 x 25.1 x 5.1 cm)

(LC435)

\$55,000

John and Lillian (1974) is one of Luis Camnitzer's *Object Boxes* (1973–80), which present the viewer with an ambiguous relationship between image and text. In *John and Lillian*, Camnitzer juxtaposes the faces of F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald set against a black background, situated above a brass plaque bearing two lists of names. Camnitzer explains that "The names are totally arbitrary and [serve as] an invitation to keep adding to the list." As with the rest of the *Object Boxes*, the work points to the possibility of multiple meanings of a single object or phrase, suggesting how reality can be defined by ambiguity. The connection between the language and object remains a spontaneous construct, a narrative assembled by the viewer themselves.

Alexander Gray Associates



Luis Camnitzer, *John and Lillian*, 1974 (installation view)

Hugh Steers (b.1962–d.1995) was born in Washington, D.C., and trained in painting at Yale University, New Haven, CT and Parsons School of Art and Design, New York, NY. Before his death at 32 from AIDS-related complications, Steers created allegorical images of everyday life that captured the emotional and political tenor of New York in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Embracing representational painting and figuration at a time when such approaches were deemed unfashionable, his intimate compositions are poignant symbols of life under the specter of AIDS.

Deeply influenced by art history, Steers mined the Western canon for inspiration to create intimate, surreal, and compelling paintings filled with elements that paid homage to disparate artists, including El Greco, Édouard Vuillard, Edward Hopper, and Paul Cadmus. In an interview shortly before his death, the artist expanded on his approach, musing: “I think I’m in the tradition of a certain kind of American artist—artists whose work embodies a certain gorgeous bleakness. Edward Hopper, Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline—they all had this austere beauty to them. They found beauty in the most brutal forms. I think that’s what characterizes America, the atmosphere, its culture, its cities and landscape. They all have that soft glow of brutality.”

Dedicated to capturing the “soft glow of brutality,” Steers’s compositions communicate joy even in the face of despair. At the same time, by painting mundane moments imbued with a disconcerting charge, his paintings invite ambiguous narratives of mortality, defiance, and compassion. For Steers, such narratives reflected his own desires. As he explained, “I would like to be able to act or have someone care about me the way some of the people in my paintings act or care about each other. It’s as if painting it will make it become real.”

Transforming prosaic scenes and spaces into tableaux suffused with longing, loneliness, fear, and eroticism, Steers’s work inhabits a melancholy architecture of intense emotion. His images—sensuous and unsettling—gain new resonance in a contemporary art landscape informed by a return to figuration and a critical reappraisal of art from the 1980s and early 1990s.

Hugh Steers’s paintings have been featured in *Every Moment Counts—AIDS and its Feelings* at the Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Høvikoddenm Norway (2022); *Any distance between us* at RISD Museum, Providence, RI (2021); *AIDS at Home: Art and Everyday Activism* at the Museum of the City of New York, NY (2017) and *Art AIDS America*, curated by Jonathan Katz and Rock Hushka, at the Tacoma Art Museum, WA (2015); West Hollywood Library and One Archives Gallery and Museum, Los Angeles, CA (2015); Zuckerman Museum of Art, Kennesaw, GA (2016); Bronx Museum of the Arts, NY (2016); and Alphawood Foundation, Chicago, IL (2016). His work has also been exhibited at ANOTHER SPACE, New York, NY (2023); David Zwirner, Paris, France (2021); the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY (2013); New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, NY (1994); Richard Anderson, New York, NY (1992); Midtown Galleries, New York, NY (1992); Denver Art Museum, CO (1991); Albright-Knox Gallery, Buffalo, NY (1988); and the Drawing Center, New York, NY (1987), among others. Steers’s work is in private and public art collections, including the Denver Art Museum, CO; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; Minneapolis Institute of Art, MN; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; Walker Art Center, Minnesota, MN; and Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT; among others. In 1989, Steers received a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Fellowship. A comprehensive monographic catalogue of Steers’s work was published by Visual AIDS in 2015.



Hugh Steers, c.1985



Hugh Steers, *Futon Couch*, 1991 (detail)



Hugh Steers

Futon Couch, 1991

Signed, titled, and dated on verso

Oil on canvas

56 x 60 in (142.24 x 152.4 cm)

57 1/2 x 61 5/8 x 3 1/8 in framed (146.1 x 156.5 x 7.9 cm framed)
(EHS027)

Sold

In *Futon Couch* (1991), Steers depicts two men sitting on a futon in a spartan apartment, one embracing the other. Presenting viewers with an ambiguous scene, suggesting, but not fully defining a narrative, the composition invites readings of companionship and affection.

Steers's choice of subject was not merely a means of contextualizing and documenting the realities of life and death experienced during the AIDS epidemic, but also a personal reckoning with his own battle. As Steers expanded before his death, "I would like to be able to act or have someone care about me the way some of the people in my paintings act or care about each other. It's as if painting it will make it become real. That painting of a man holding another man is conjuring that tenderness, that hope that someone will still care about you and will be there." A study in tenderness, *Futon Couch* reflects Steers's own hunger for compassion in the midst of so much anger, hatred, and fear.



Hugh Steers

Black Towel, 1988

Signed, titled, and dated on verso

Oil on canvas

39 3/4 x 47 1/2 in (101 x 120.7 cm)

43 1/4 x 51 1/8 x 3 1/4 in framed (109.9 x 129.9 x 8.3 cm framed)

(EHS051)

\$110,000

Alexander Gray Associates

Painted a year after Hugh Steers received his positive HIV diagnosis, *Black Towel* (1988) depicts two men in a kitchen. Recalling the intimate domestic scenes of Post-Impressionists like Pierre Bonnard and Édouard Vuillard—two of Steers's influences—the composition is at once playful and doleful. Tangled in the same, sinuous black fabric, one figure hides a flyswatter as though he will teasingly hit his companion. At the same time, the thick black fabric he and his partner are wrapped in alludes to mourning, functioning almost as a shroud.

Ultimately, the ambiguous image underscores Steers's personal reckoning with the AIDS crisis. Forced to confront his mortality, compositions like *Black Towel* allowed the artist to articulate his own needs in the midst of the epidemic. "I would like to be able to act or have someone care about me the way some of the people in my paintings act or care about each other," Steers explained before his death from AIDS-related complications in 1995. "It's as if painting it will make it become real. That painting of a man holding another man is conjuring that tenderness, that hope that someone will still care about you and will be there."

Hugh Steers, *Black Towel*, 1988 (installation view)





Hugh Steers, *Bath Curtain*, 1992 (detail)



Hugh Steers

Bath Curtain, 1992

Signed, titled, and dated on verso

Oil on canvas

64 x 72 in (162.6 x 182.9 cm)

65 7/8 x 73 3/4 x 2 5/8 in framed

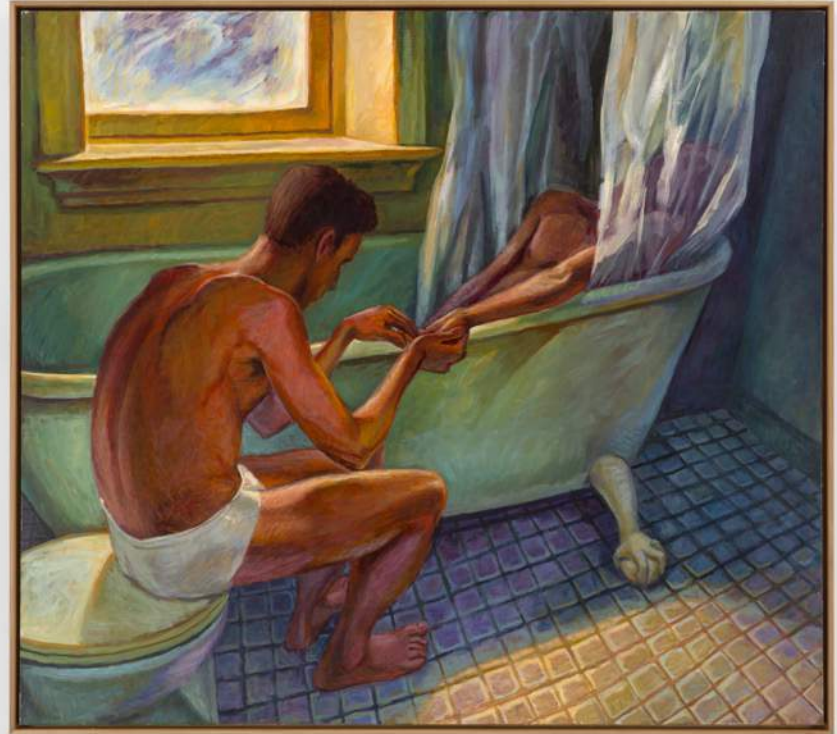
(167.3 x 187.3 x 6.7 cm framed)

(EHS015)

\$160,000; Museum Designated

In Hugh Steers's *Bath Curtain* (1992), a man lies in a bathtub, his head slumped backward and resting on the edge of the tub. His face is obscured behind a semi-transparent shower curtain as though he already wears a funeral shroud. Another male figure, semi-nude, is seated on the edge of the commode next to the bathtub, stroking the figure's outstretched palm. Steers's borrowed bathtub imagery from the Post-Impressionist Pierre Bonnard. Creating bathtub and bathroom scenes, the artist underscored the havoc AIDS wrought in even the most private of sphere by emphasizing the vulnerability of his figures as they navigated the grim realities of illness. At the same time, for Steers, bathrooms—spaces that are simultaneously sterile and dirty, private and universal—typified the disease. As he argued, "it ties in with the illness. The bathrooms represent culture and instinct in collision ... America, has a horror of it and an obsession with cleanliness and mortality."

Alexander Gray Associates



Hugh Steers, *Bath Curtain*, 1992 (installation view)



Hugh Steers

Red & White Sheet, 1988

Signed, titled, and dated on verso

Oil on gessoed paper

13 1/4 x 11 in (33.7 x 27.9 cm)

20 1/8 x 17 3/4 x 1 1/2 in framed

(51.1 x 45.1 x 3.8 cm framed)

(EHS136)

\$25,000; Framing: \$300

Hugh Steers's *Red & White Sheet* (1988) features a seated nude man wrapped in fabric who cowers from his dressed companion. Painted a year after Steers was diagnosed with HIV, the work on paper reflects his feelings of vulnerability and fear as he was forced to confront the realities and uncertainties of life under the specter of AIDS. Loosely swathed in a material whose red and white stripes recall those of the American flag, Steers's figure's flinching form—which is literally being stripped bare—reveals the artist's frustration and anger with the United States government's response to the AIDS crisis.



Hugh Steers

Undress, 1992

Signed, titled, and dated on verso

Oil on gessoed paper

13 3/8 x 10 3/4 in (34 x 27.3 cm)

20 x 17 5/8 x 1 1/2 in framed (50.8 x 44.8 x 3.8 cm framed)

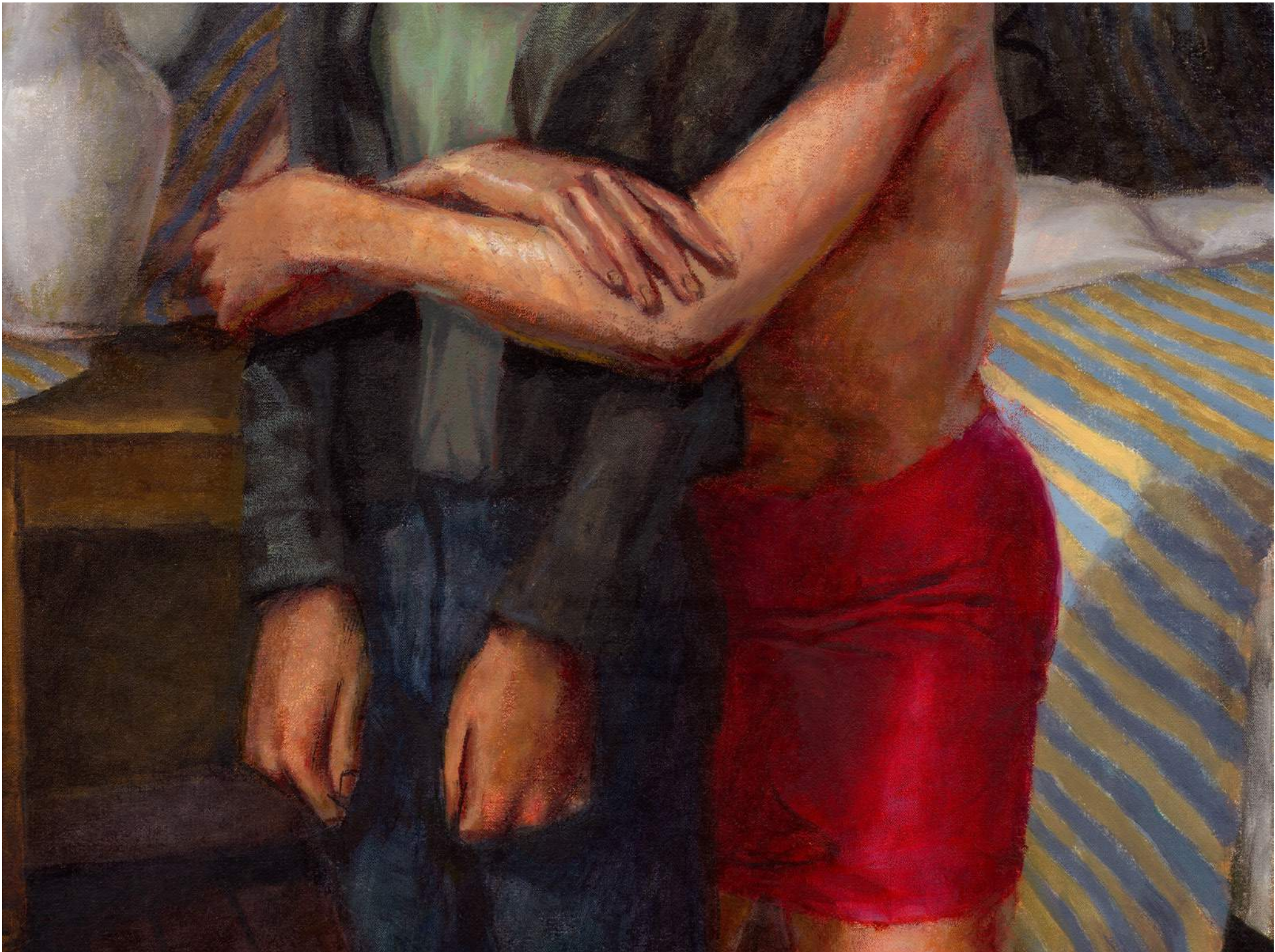
(EHS174)

\$25,000; Framing: \$300

Steers's painterly finesse was grounded in the history of Western art, and he once described his practice as "allegorical realism" created "to draw the viewer in through the lure of a comfortably recognizable style and then confront him with a subject matter of a challenging nature." Recalling the intimate domestic scenes of Post-Impressionist painters like Édouard Vuillard and Pierre Bonnard, *Undress* (1992) depicts a woman unrobing in front a mirror.



Hugh Steers, *Undress*, 1992 and *Red & White Sheet*, 1988 (installation view)



Hugh Steers, *High-Heeled Embrace*, 1989 (detail)

Alexander Gray Associates



Hugh Steers

High-Heeled Embrace, 1989

Signed, titled, and dated on verso

Oil on canvas

50 x 40 in (127 x 101.6 cm)

52 x 42 x 3 1/4 in framed

(132.1 x 106.7 x 8.3 cm framed)

(EHS046)

\$110,000

In *High-Heeled Embrace* (1989), Hugh Steers depicts a semi-clothed man in high heels embracing a man from behind. Steers often included heels in his paintings, which he identified as signifiers of a “sexual quality.” At once empowering and precarious, heels represented both Steers’s evolving queer identity and the unstable emotional, social, and political landscape he found himself navigating as an HIV positive man. As the writer Justin Spring muses, “By including some erotically charged detail—a platform wedgie, a satin cape—... [Steers] reminds us that disease itself is a secondary concern ... rather than the immediate cause of drama. Moreover, he suggests that ... there’s a complex emotional conflict going on here: beyond mere anger, a lingering desire for something transcendent; below the outer layer of bitterness, a core of romantic longing.”

Expressing the poignant reality of living in a time when love and death were inextricably linked for gay men, Steers’s image of an embrace evokes narratives of desire, companionship, and illness. For Steers, this choice of subject matter was not merely a means of contextualizing and documenting the realities of life and death experienced during the AIDS epidemic, but also a personal reckoning with his own battle.

Alexander Gray Associates



Hugh Steers, *High-Heeled Embrace*, 1989 (installation view)



Hugh Steers

Untitled, c. 1987

Oil and charcoal on paper

30 x 22 1/4 in (76.2 x 56.5 cm)

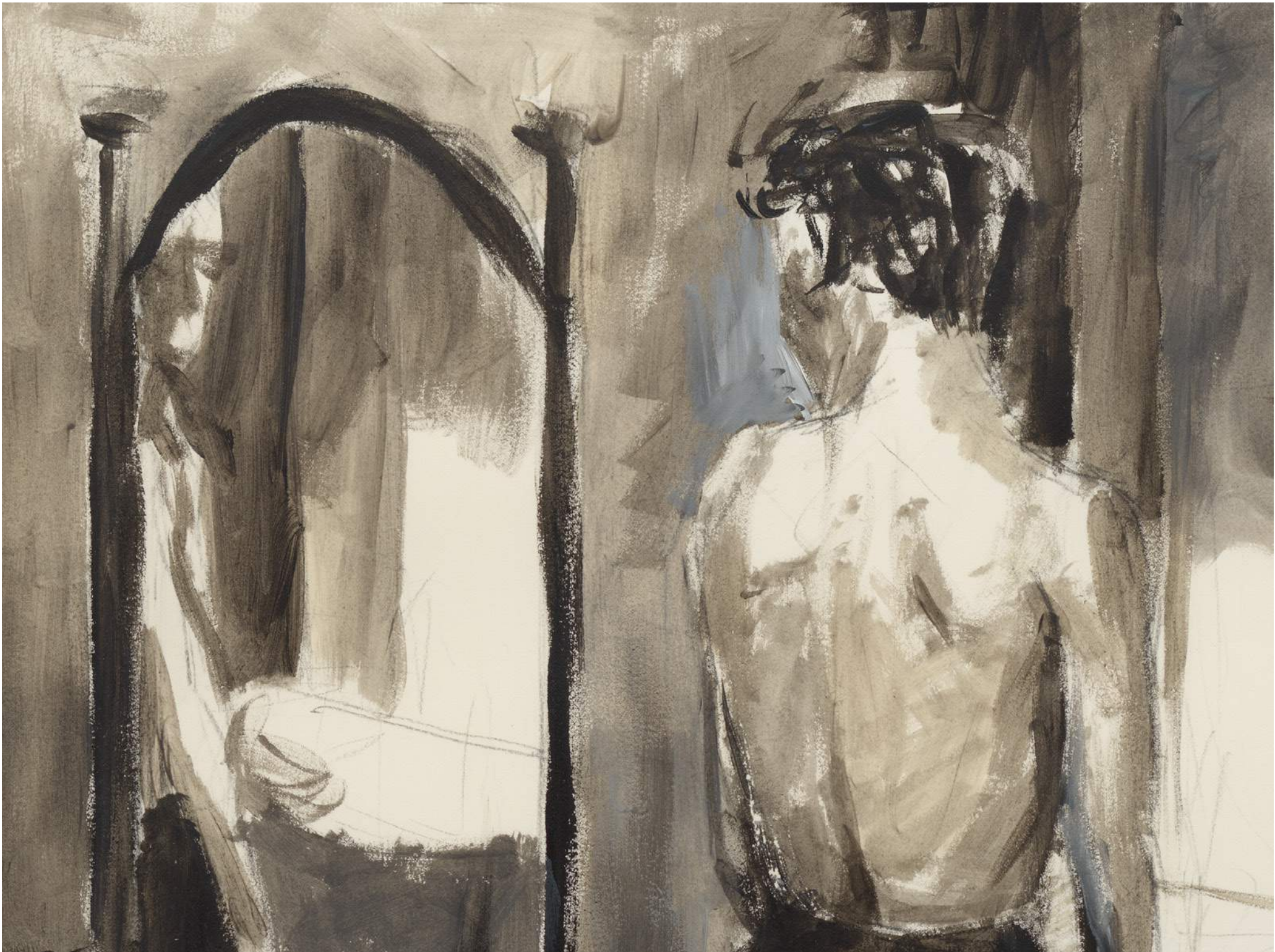
33 7/8 x 29 1/4 x 1 5/8 in framed

(86 x 74.3 x 4.1 cm framed)

(EHS267)

\$30,000; Framing: \$400

Hugh Steers's subject matter often speaks to the devastation of the AIDS crisis. The artist maintained a commitment to figuration throughout his career, cut dramatically short by AIDS at the age of 32. His painterly finesse was grounded in the history of Western art, and he once described his work as "allegorical realism" created "to draw the viewer in through the lure of a comfortably recognizable style and then confront him with a subject matter of a challenging nature." Often recalling the intimate domestic scenes of Post-Impressionist painters like Édouard Vuillard and Pierre Bonnard, this untitled work on paper (ca. 1987) depicts a partially dressed man examining his body in a full-length mirror while a seated man gazes upon him.



Hugh Steers, Untitled, c. 1987 (detail)

