

Betty Tompkins
Paintings and Works on Paper
1972 - 2013
Through January 25, 2014



Betty Tompkins, "Hearts", 2000, Acrylic on found cake pan, 9 x 8.5 inches

Gavlak Gallery is pleased to present our first solo exhibition with New York based painter Betty Tompkins. Included in the exhibition are paintings and works on paper from 1976 through 2013, including works on found objects and vintage book pages as well as the explicit photorealistic paintings that have recently attracted much international attention.

Tompkins was an important figure in the photorealist movement of the 1970's but largely overlooked due to the fact that she was a woman making large-scale paintings of heterosexual intercourse, imagery that until then had been reserved for male artists and viewers. These paintings made between 1969 and 1974 were practically unknown when they were exhibited together for the first time in New York in 2002 and immediately broadened the art historic canon of female identified imagery.

For her exhibition with Gavlak Gallery, Tompkins is showing works that range from early sketches for paintings to now iconic "Cunt" paintings that in a more abstract manner recall Courbet's "L'Origine du Monde". Also included is a series of "soft core" works from 1996 - 2000 that are less graphic yet provocative paintings of women in various stages of dress painted onto everyday found tools and book pages. Selecting common hand saws, shovels, axes, baking pans, and cake servers, quotidian objects that are assigned along gender lines of domestic work and construction work are painted with titillating scenes of women frolicking about in a lake, or simply posing in nature. Again recalling more erotic art historic subjects painted by Boucher through Courbet of women alone or in pairs in their private quarters or under a tree in repose "napping" together or reading, imagery that in the past were reserved for male pleasure. While it may be taken for granted today that women artists make transgressive and explicit sexual imagery, Tompkins' sexual paintings were at the forefront of the feminist movement. This discourse by women artists and philosophers addressing issues of female subjectivity and ownership of sexual imagery for their own desire and pleasure continues to be challenged and explored today by women in art and popular culture.

Betty Tompkins has had solo exhibitions at Galerie Rudolphe Janssen in Brussels (2012), Mitchell Albus Gallery in New York (2009) and with Venus Over Manhattan at the M Building Art Basel Miami Beach (2012). Selected group exhibitions include: The Lyon Biennale in 2003, "Sunset and Pussy", Marianne Boesky Gallery, NY (2013), "Grisaille" Luxembourg and Dayan, New York (2011), "Lust and Vice: The Seven Deadly Sins From Durer to Naumann", Kunstmuseum Bern, (2010 - 2011).

One of Tompkin's "Fuck" Paintings is now in the permanent collection of the Centre Pompidou/CNAC in Paris. (A satisfying postscript given that the paintings were detained by customs officials and ultimately denied entrance to France in 1973).

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