

GAVLAK

Betty Tompkins

Sex Works / WOMEN Words, Phrases, and Stories

January 6 – February 4, 2017

Reception Saturday, January 14, from 6-8pm

Gavlak Palm Beach is pleased to present *Sex Works/WOMEN Words, Phrases, and Stories*, Betty Tompkins' third solo exhibition with the gallery. The exhibition includes a section of Betty's recent series of *WOMEN Words* paintings, along with a selection of her early works on paper. *Sex Works/WOMEN Words, Phrases, and Stories* puts pieces from the beginning of Tompkins' career in conversation with her most recent paintings, showcasing the artist's trajectory from subtly political works to more overt statements.

Tompkins is a groundbreaking, feminist artist who has, over the course of her career, repeatedly bucked conventional norms, eschewing 'safe' art in favor of creating difficult and impactful paintings, drawings, photographs, and videos. Taking as her starting point heterosexual pornography, Tompkins reclaims the medium, taking a genre typically conceived as a vehicle for subverting women, and uses it to create direct, powerful, and empowering works that are distinctly feminist. Appropriating pornographic imagery, Tompkins recasts it through an artistic lens and creates masterfully crafted paintings that assume control of and reframe the subject matter.

The centerpiece of the exhibition is an installation of 350 paintings from Betty's 1,000 painting work *WOMEN Words, Phrases, and Stories*. Each painting is of a word or phrase that Tompkins received in response to an email request for words and phrases that describe women. The full installation of 1,000 *WOMEN Words* paintings was previously on view at GAVLAK Los Angeles, after traveling from the FLAG Art Foundation in New York City. Tompkins received more than 3,500 responses to her initial query, with the most common words received being cunt, bitch, slut, and mother. Beginning in 2013, Tompkins selected 1,000 of the responses and began to paint them onto canvas. Tompkins depicted some responses simply as text, others with imagery from her earlier works, and others incorporated gestural references to what Tompkins describes as "old-boy painters," like de Kooning, Rothko and Fontana. Tompkins then installed the paintings in a confined yet fluid network, creating conversations between the works - some humorous, some disturbing. In one arrangement, Tompkins placed the phrase "Liberated women," and underneath placed "Talking, talking, talking," followed by "Will she ever shut up?" Tompkins feels the trajectory of these specific works mirrors a common experience that women have, with people first approving of you, then slowly becoming more and more critical. In other less lighthearted areas of the installation, more overtly misogynistic words form groupings: "The only thing that could make her more beautiful is my dick in her mouth," "Three hole wonder," or "Prick pit."

In addition to the *WOMEN Words* series, a group of Tompkins' drawings from the early 1970's are also on view. The series of four studies reveals the process for Tompkins' paintings, while the additional drawing, *Double Drip Mouth*, 1971, relates to the pop art movement of which influenced the artist while she was an art student.

Born in 1945 in Washington, D.C., Tompkins now lives and works in New York City and Pleasant Mount, Pennsylvania. Her work was the subject of the solo exhibition *Sex Works/WOMEN Words, Phrases, and Stories* at Gavlak, Los Angeles (2016), *WOMEN Words, Phrases, and Stories* at the FLAG Art Foundation, New York (2016), and *Real Ersatz* at the Bruce High Quality Foundation University, New York (2015). Her work was recently included in *Black Sheep Feminism: The Art of Sexual Politics*, a four-artist exhibition curated by Alison Gingeras at the Dallas Contemporary, Texas (2016), and *The Female Gaze, Part Two: Women Look at Men* at Cheim & Read, New York (2016). Tompkins' work is included in the permanent collection at the Centre Pompidou, Paris, France.

For more information concerning the exhibition, please contact Jeremy Lyon at Jeremy@gavlagallery.com, or (561) 833-0583.