

THE ART NEWSPAPER

From magazine cut-outs to brand-name billboards, gallery show offers a peek into Tom Wesselmann's estate

An exhibition at Mitchell-Innes & Nash includes his familiar Pop works as well as lesser-known pieces

by [GABRIELLA ANGELETI](#) | 19 April 2016



Tom Wesselmann, *Great American Nude #53* (1964)

Although he worked in a studio near Cooper Union right up until his death in 2004, the American Pop artist Tom Wesselmann has not had a major show in New York for more than a decade—until this week, when a dozen works drawn from the artist's estate go on view at the Mitchell-Innes & Nash gallery (21 April-28 May). The show includes some of Wesselmann's most familiar series, such as the reclining nudes, feet, nipples and a bodiless smoking mouth, but it also aims to reintroduce lesser-known pieces. The selection underscores "the complexity and diversity of his work, which remains somewhat unfamiliar", according to Jeffrey Sturges, the manager of the artist's estate.

One such work is *Interior #2* (1964), a collaged poster of Chicago, with acrylic paint and assemblage including a working fan, a clock and a fluorescent light. With its grey and industrial



Tom Wesselmann, Interior #2 (1964)



Tom Wesselmann, Three Step (2003). Photo: courtesy of the Estate of Tom Wesselmann and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, NY. © Estate of Tom Wesselmann/VAGA, New York

look, “it’s not immediately obvious that an artist known for nudes once did something like this”, Sturges says.

Around the same time, Wesselmann began to work with large-scale canvases. He created slides of his studies and projected them onto a canvas to build his ideal composition. Larger canvases meant larger collage material, and the artist who “used to cut out magazines, posters, and dig through the trash”, Sturges says, wrote to corporations like Brillo and Coca-Cola to purchase their billboards to use in his work. For the 10ft tall, mixed-media work titled *Great American Nude #53* (1964), the roses on the upper-left hand corner and the woman’s mouth were isolated from a Four Roses Whiskey billboard Wesselmann sourced that same year.

Three Step (2003) depicts a Mondrian-like design, and shows the laser-cutting techniques that Wesselmann began to use in the 1980s. The artist and his wife, model and muse, Claire, often spent the summer in the Catskills Mountains in upstate New York. There, Wesselmann conceived the designs that would be fabricated with the help of the design firm Lippincott. “These sometimes formalist but often abstract works were, more or less, a way for him to return to the artists that he once admired, like Kooning and Pollock”, Sturges says.

This show is the first survey of Wesselmann’s work in New York since a posthumous works-on-paper retrospective at the Maxwell Davidson Gallery in 2005. It follows a touring retrospective titled *Beyond Pop Art: Tom Wesselmann*, that started at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts in 2012, and travelled to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, the Denver Art Museum and the Cincinnati Art Museum.