COMMUNICATIONS & MARKETING

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VMFA

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Tom Wesselmann's Pop Art Makes a Statement
Bold pieces investigate an idealized, popular America

American artist Tom Wesselmann (1931-2004) is one of the leading figures in the American Pop Art movement with a career spanning more than four decades. Opening April 6, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts offers the first comprehensive North American retrospective of Wesselmann's work. VMFA is the only East Coast venue for this exhibition.

Wesselmann and his contemporaries – Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and James Rosenquist – forged the Pop Art movement by creating large scale, dynamic compositions, experimenting with new media, and using images from everyday popular culture. Humor, sensuality, and innovation were common elements of the Pop Art movement.

Made famous by his *Great American Nudes*, Wesselmann reinterpreted the history of art and past definitions of beauty, seeking to canonize a new American beauty in bold color. Wesselmann continued to reinvent himself and produce highly original work long after the Pop Art movement peaked.

The exhibition will feature additional works from the artist's most significant series, including his earliest metal pieces using laser steel-cutting, abstract collages, and innovative still lifes. Some of the objects included in the exhibition have never before been publicly exhibited. VMFA's permanent collection already includes two major Wesselmann paintings.

Bedroom Painting #39, 1978. Oil on canvas, 96"H x 117½"W, 243.7 cm x 298.3 cm. Gift of Sydney and Frances Lewis. Photo: Ron Jennings © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts/Estate of Tom Wesselmann/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

"The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts has never hosted such a large scale exhibition of Pop Art," Director Alex Nyerges said. "Some of Wesselmann's works are massive, and our 12,000 square foot special exhibition galleries will perfectly showcase this important retrospective. Virginians are very familiar with this movement because of our rich Sydney and Frances Lewis Collection of mid to late 20th century art."

Nathalie Bondil, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts' director and chief curator said, "This retrospective demonstrates that Tom Wesselmann's work should not be viewed with a 'literal' focus but rather a 'literary' one – to paraphrase the artist. Like others of the Pop generation, he thought of his art as a re-reading of art history. His complex way of playing with the intensity of his images, making them jostle with each other, reveals the great intellectual effort that went into their making.

More

The obsessive concern with contrast is an interesting aspect of his oeuvre, as he plays with the ambiguity of the subject to emphasize the form and vice versa."

Organized chronologically, the exhibition follows the development of Wesselmann's work, series by series, from the earliest abstract collages to the *Great American Nudes* and still lifes of his Pop period, to the cut-steel drawings and *Sunset Nudes* of his late work. The exhibition will also investigate the ways in which the works of Titian, Goya, Manet and, most importantly, Matisse, inspired Wesselmann in his exploration of beauty, history, and popular culture.

This exhibition was initiated and produced by the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA), under the direction of Director and Chief Curator Nathalie Bondil and the curators, Curator of Contemporary Art Stéphane Aquin, MMFA, and art historian Marco Livingstone, London. The exhibition loans come from a wide variety of leading public and private collections, including: Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; Virginia Museum of Fine Arts; Mugrabi Collection; Berardo Collection; Robert B. Mayer Family Collection, Chicago; Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation, Los Angeles, as well as from the Estate of Tom Wesselmann, New York. *Pop Art and Beyond: Tom Wesselmann* is organized by the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts with the full support of the Estate of Tom Wesselmann, New York.

Related Programs
Programs will include an opening talk about the exhibition by Stéphane Aquin, Montreal Museum of Art's curator on April 18; the preschool program *Young @ Art: Pop Goes the Artist* featuring a story and art activity on Tuesdays and Thursdays in April; the youth program *After-School Art Club: Pop Art Prints* on April 18; *Writing in the Galleries: Writing by Design* on May 7; *Wesselmann 101* on May 16, and *Saturdays in the Studio: Pop Art Studio* on May 18.

In addition, Wesselmann's wife, Claire, and Jeffrey Sturges, the Wesselmann studio manager, will host a discussion after the film *Tom Wesselmann: I Only Want to Paint* (2010) on June 7. Sturges will also host a free talk about Wesselmann's innovations on June 8.

About *Pop Art and Beyond: Tom Wesselmann*
- TITLE: *Pop Art and Beyond: Tom Wesselmann*
- DATES: April 6, 2013 – July 28, 2013
- NUMBER OF OBJECTS: Approximately 150
- CURATORS: Stéphane Aquin, Curator of Contemporary Art, MMFA and Marco Livingstone, Art Historian, London
- VMFA COORDINATING CURATOR: John B. Ravenal, Sydney and Frances Lewis Family Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art
- TICKETS: $15, $12 for seniors 65+, students with ID, adult groups of 10+, and youth ages 7 – 17. The exhibition includes some graphic content. Parental discretion is advised.
- ITINERARY: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (May 19 – Oct. 7, 2012); VMFA is the only East Coast venue.
- RESTAURANTS AND VMFA SHOP: Pop art is a rich source of inspiration for retro merchandise and evocative food and cocktails in Amuse restaurant and Best Café.

- CATALOGUE: The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts has published, in both English and French, a major 204-page catalogue under the general editorship of Stéphane Aquin Curator of Contemporary Art, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. *Tom Wesselmann* examines the work of Tom Wesselmann alongside Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol, and sheds new light on his distinctive contributions to art history. He explored a variety of techniques including collage, painting, bas-relief, still lifes, laser-cut landscapes, and three-dimensional nudes. Wesselmann's forceful compositions exude cool objectification and rich sensuality, and exemplify the shift in cultural paradigms, between the old world and the new that began in the 1960s. While famous for his Great American Nude series and still lifes of the early 1960s, Wesselmann also wrote country music. Including scholarly essays and numerous illustrations, this monograph reveals the astonishing visual impact and superb aesthetic quality of Wesselmann's work. $65 hardcover.
- SPONSOR: The Sydney and Frances Lewis Endowment Fund. The Banner Exhibition Program at VMFA is supported by the Julia Louise Reynolds Fund.
- MEDIA PARTNERS: CBS6, *Style Weekly*, RVANews

About the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts
VMFA's permanent collection encompasses more than 33,000 works of art spanning 5,000 years of world history. Its collections of Art Nouveau and Art Deco, English silver, Fabergé, and the art of South Asia are among the finest in the nation. With acclaimed holdings in American, British Sporting, Impressionist and Post-Impressionist, and Modern and Contemporary art – and additional strengths in African, Ancient, East Asian, and European – VMFA ranks as one of the top comprehensive art museums in the United States. Programs include educational activities and studio classes for all ages, plus fun after-hours events. VMFA's Statewide Partnership program includes traveling exhibitions, artist and teacher workshops, and lectures across the Commonwealth. VMFA is open 365 days a year and general admission is always free. For additional information, telephone 804-340-1400 or visit www.vmfa.museum.

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