

# Joan Semmel

## *Continuities*

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Press Release

Xavier Hufkens and Alexander Gray Associates present *Continuities*, an exhibition of recent paintings by Joan Semmel (b. 1932). Conceived with the artist as a single presentation across Brussels and New York, the exhibition's structure mirrors the paintings' own logic, playing with doubling and immediacy to extend the act of seeing across continents.

Semmel paints her own body as an authored image—internalized rather than observed. In her nineties, that act carries weight. While the aging female form is routinely edited from view, these canvases place it squarely at the center, without apology or disguise. Her compositions do not treat the body as symbol, memory, or ideal. Works such as *Here I Am* (2025) reject any impulse to memorialize or prettify. Saturated hues move across flesh in broad passages; contours blur and reassert themselves. In *Red Breast* (2025), bold strokes and thin washes keep figure and ground in continual exchange as Semmel's body emerges from and dissolves into its surroundings.

These paintings draw on strategies that have long shaped Semmel's work—the cropping and emotive color of her 1970s canvases and the multiple figures of her *Overlays* (1992–1996) and *Shifting Image* compositions (2006–2013). In works such as *Partners* (2024) and *Fleshed Out* (2025), layering allows more than one version of the figure to remain visible, as if the body echoes across the surface. In others, color and paint handling create that sense of movement without doubling the form outright. “The earlier images are still present for me,” Semmel has said. “They're something I can move through, not something I'm revisiting.”

Presenting this work simultaneously in Brussels and New York gives the paintings' structure a physical dimension. Viewers encounter related compositions in two distinct locations. That simultaneity extends the paintings' insistence on multiplicity and presence. The dual presentation also acknowledges the long dialogue between Europe and America that has shaped feminist thought and visual culture for more than half a century, insisting on connection and the sustaining power of cultural exchange.

Rather than positioning the two venues in opposition, *Continuities* treats them as continuous. What emerges is a single experience spanning two cities: installations that mirror one another, doubling made physical, and presence that reaches across the ocean to meet itself.

Semmel's work has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions, including *In the Flesh*, The Jewish Museum, New York (2025); *Skin in the Game*, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, PA (2021), traveled to Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY (2022); and *Joan Semmel: A Lucid Eye*, The Bronx Museum of the Arts, NY (2013). Her work has been featured in numerous group exhibitions, including *Sixties Surreal*, Whitney Museum of American Art (2025); *Get in the Game: Sports, Art, Culture*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, CA (2024), traveled to Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, AR (2025), and Pérez Art Museum Miami, FL (2026); *Capturing the Moment*, Tate Modern, London, United Kingdom (2023); and *Women Painting Women*, The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, TX (2022). Semmel's work is in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, IL; Brooklyn Museum, NY; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA; The Jewish Museum, NY; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; The Museum of Modern Art, NY; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C.; Tate Modern, London, United Kingdom; and Whitney Museum of American Art, NY, among others. She is the recipient of numerous awards and grants, including the Women's Caucus for Art Lifetime Achievement Award (2013), Anonymous Was a Woman (2008), and National Endowment for the Arts awards (1985 and 1980). She is Professor Emeritus of Painting at Rutgers University. Joan Semmel is represented by Xavier Hufkens, Brussels, and Alexander Gray Associates, New York.

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