

Tom Wesselmann (1931 - 2004)

Great American Nude #81, 1966

Acrylic on canvas

53 by 66 inches (134.6 x 167.6 cm)



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Signed, titled and, dated "Wesselmann 66" on lower right, and "G.A.N. #81 Wesselmann 1966" on verso

Provenance: Sidney Janis Gallery, New York
 Leon Kraushar, New York, 1966
 Galerie Thomas, Munich
 Private collection, Belgium
 Private collection, United States

While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information provided above, confirmation of these facts may not always be possible due to the unavailability of primary sources. Please be advised that the work of art described above is subject to changes in availability and price without prior notice.

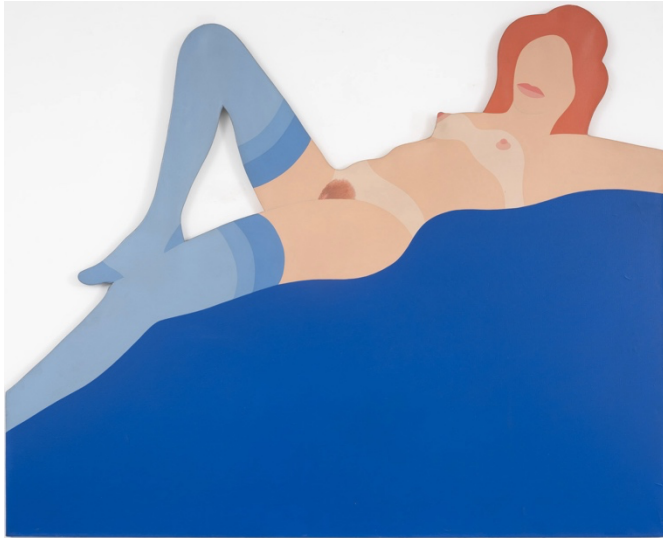
EDWARD TYLER NAHEM

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Tom Wesselmann's iconic *Great American Nudes* stand as seminal manifestations of the Pop Art sensibility. *Great American Nude #81*, 1966, with its vibrant palette and suggestive curves, exemplifies the artist's significant role in the visual culture of the latter half of the 20th century. Art historian Sam Hunter notes that the title for *The Great American Nude* series was an outgrowth of Wesselmann's "gag-humor days when standard topics of parody were *The Great American Novel* and *The Great American Dream*. But the theme also captured

something of the collective spirit of satire at a time of a newly dissenting avant-garde, and it connects the banal imagery of Pop Art to the empty, inflated Minimalist forms in that turbulent sixties era." (Sam Hunter, *Tom Wesselmann*, New York, 1994, p. 18).

The present work depicts a nude woman reclining, with portions of her body isolated and cropped for a focused presentation of her form. Its use of lines and color speaks to Wesselmann's significant impact on the crucial period when Pop artists rejected the visual modes of Abstract Expressionism while employing imagery redolent of American identity. Acknowledging commercial graphics and technological innovation allowed Wesselmann and his contemporaries to manifest a new type of American art. There is an idealized ambition to Wesselmann's style and a truly innovative mastery in his symbolic appropriation of the nude.

Great American Nude #81 portrays a carefully composed, anonymous female form, stripped down in its simplicity, curves, and visual boundaries. The composition itself consists of very few

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elements: the smooth, flat surface of the figure, a limited color palette that allows for a delineated representation of her skin, hair, and smile, and an abstract series of curves and shapes that focus deliberately on her form. The absence of detailed facial features and the focus on her anatomy strip the subject down to the essential parts of a classical nude and imbue it with electric sensuality. The subject of *Great American Nude #81*, like many works from the series, which ran from the early 1960s to the early 1970s, was the artist's wife, Claire Wesselmann. This association lends the work an added sense of familiarity and adoration that comes from the dialogue between artist and subject in what is a distinctly modern, sensuous, and joyful work of art.

Similar works to *Great American Nude #81* can be found in museum collections around the world, including *Great American Nude, 47*, 1963, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and *Great American Nude, #57*, 1964, The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.



Tom Wesselmann, *Great American Nude, 47*, 1963, The Museum of Modern Art, New York



Tom Wesselmann, *Great American Nude, #57*, 1964, The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York