



475 Park Avenue at 57th Street, New York, New York 10022  
Tel: (212) 355-4545 Fax: (212) 355-4547 [www.forumgallery.com](http://www.forumgallery.com)

Robert Fishko, *Director*

**TOM WESSELMANN**

[1931 – 2004]

*Study for Drop Out*, 1981

liquitex on paper

3 1/2 x 5 1/4 inches

signed and dated lower left

"Wesselmann 81"



**Provenance**

The Artist

Galerie Hafenrichter und Fluegel, Germany

Forum Gallery, New York, NY

**Exhibited**

*Tom Wesselmann*, Forum Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, February 15 - April 5, 2008

**Note**

Bold, punchy and alluring, *Study for Drop Out* exemplifies Tom Wesselmann's iconic Pop art aesthetic. Executed in 1981, this Liquitex work on paper belongs to the American artist's celebrated series of Drop-outs. Initiated some twenty years earlier in 1965 with an early cycle of Seascapes, Wesselmann's Drop-outs innovatively employ negative space to invoke the female form. Exemplifying the artist's eroticized and simplified pictorial syntax, the nude's features have been entirely reduced to a sweep of blonde

hair, pouted lips, and rounded nipples. Through this intriguing interplay between positive and negative space, abstraction and figuration, Wesselmann succeeds in producing a powerful composition that far surpasses the classic Pop imagery of his contemporary moment. As art historian Constance W. Glenn has remarked, Wesselmann was “a surprisingly sophisticated draughtsman with a great gift for a long, expansive Matisse-inspired line” [Constance W. Glenn, ‘Wesselmann and Drawing’ in: Exh. Cat., Rome, Museo d’Arte Contemporanea Roma, *Tom Wesselmann*, 2005, p. 237]. Indeed, the voluptuously rendered forms in *Study for Drop Out* are deeply reminiscent of Matisse’s prolific body of painted odalisques.

That examples of Wesselmann’s Drop-outs reside in notable museum collections – from Tate, London, to the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York – is testament to their great importance within his oeuvre. At once a product and celebration of its time, Wesselmann’s iconography was largely driven by the language of consumerism. Conjuring the visual vocabulary and amplified scale of billboard advertisements, the artist’s pictorial style engaged with an image saturated era of rising commercialism in America. Compelled by the reductive forms and instantaneous decipherability of advertising, in an age where sexuality was increasingly being used to sell products, Wesselmann developed a unique pictorial syntax for his nudes comprising soft curving lines and simplified anatomical shapes. In this way, works such as the present seamlessly meld the traditional motif of the classical odalisque, as exemplified by artists such as Titian, Ingres and Velázquez, with the thoroughly contemporary American visual culture of pin-up girls and erotica. As curator John Wilmerding attests, “One of [Wesselmann’s] special achievements was to make the classic nude both contemporary and American” [John Wilmerding, Exh. Cat., New York, Maxwell Davidson Gallery, *Tom Wesselmann: Drop-out*, n.p.].

Working in stark contrast to the New York School of Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, and Mark Rothko, Wesselmann struck out against the emotive and gestural abstraction that had come to define ‘authenticity’ for that generation. In a decisive break with Abstract Expressionism, Wesselmann looked not to inner-emotion and sentiment as a source of inspiration, but rather to the visual, fast-paced and dazzling world around him. One of the leading proponents of the Pop art movement alongside Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein, Wesselmann sought to convey the excitement and evolutions of the modern day through a triumphant return to figurative art.