

Willa Wasserman

Quickening

May 14 - June 18, 2022



Abortion was not always a crime. During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries...[abortions] were illegal only after “quickening”...

Leslie Reagan, *When Abortion Was a Crime: Women Medicine and Law in the United States: 1867–1973*

I will start with baby steps / goo goo ga ga / you don’t mean that much at all...

SPECIAL INTEREST, “(Fluid) Bound 2” from *Trust No Wave: the 2016 Demos*

François Ghebaly is proud to present *Quickening* by Willa Wasserman, the New York-based painter’s first solo exhibition at the gallery.

Quickening: a pregnant person’s first perception of fetal movements. The notion of quickening is itself ancestral; the Old English cognate for quick means quite literally “sentient” and was first in use over a millennium ago. Quickening is our earliest, and remains our only, phenomenological yardstick for incipient life. Modern medicine—with its tools pressed into service by lawmakers—has supplanted the pregnant person as the entity that perceives when a life has started. But they still feel the proverbial *kick*.

For Willa Wasserman, the maternal allegory lends both subject and atmosphere. A seasoned metalworker, Wasserman’s paintings on brass and linen often convey her visceral fascination with dreams, the psychosexual, and figures in the process of becoming. In *Reaching* (2022), the pregnant central figure is Wasserman’s own, clad in an ersatz baby bump that the painter fashioned from rags, packing tape, and an IKEA bowl. Ecstatic in gesture and flourish, the work echoes a newly expecting, freshly ‘Annunciated’ Virgin Mary (a diminutive postcard of one of Hans Memling’s less popular Annunciation scenes hangs in Wasserman’s studio).

Wasserman has long prioritized materials—especially those rooted in European art history—that gestate and evolve. Her oils and brasses age and oxidize. Her silverpoints, a medium popular among Renaissance artists and revived by 20th century Futurists, lighten and patina. The violet hue in *Umbrella in a pond* (2022) is achieved using a chemical cocktail known as En.Zo KV2B, whose active ingredients only the reagent’s creator AP McNay is privy to.

Her figures, as well, exalt in the ambient indeterminacy that permeates each work. Across the exhibition, borders are hazy and necessarily ill-defined. They coalesce in loose, spectral images that reveal very little of their subjects at any static moment, leaving space for past and future transformations. In *Twice Angel II* (2022), Wasserman’s nude sitter reclines authoritatively, almost sphinx-like beside what appears to be an older incarnation of herself. In a striking premonition, the aged figure seems posited as her own mother. And in time, the works themselves become indelible material attestations to bodies that, like their subjects, birth, erode, become. Perhaps in this sense, Wasserman’s ‘quickenings’—the reverie of stirring life—welcomes if nothing else faithful and familiar change.

Willa Wasserman (b. 1990, Evansville, IN) lives and works in New York. She gained her BFA at Macaulay Honors College at Hunter College in 2013, and received her MFA at the University of California, Los Angeles, in 2019. Recent solo exhibitions include *Downs & Ross*, New York; *Good Weather*, Chicago; *in lieu*, Los Angeles; *The Gallery at Michaels*, Santa Monica; *UCLA New Wight Gallery*, Los Angeles; and *Nothing Special*, Los Angeles. Selected group presentations include *Downs & Ross*, New York; *Adams and Ollman*, Portland, OR; *Sargent’s Daughters*, New York; and *Park View / Paul Soto*, Los Angeles. *Quickening* is her first solo exhibition with François Ghebaly.