

For ART021 Shanghai, David Kordansky Gallery presents a two-person booth of sculptures by the renowned American artist Betty Woodman (1930-2018) alongside new paintings by Joel Mesler made in response to Woodman's work. The presentation foregrounds the genre-defying synthesis of painterly invention, sculptural experimentation, and art historical revisionism that characterizes her ceramic vessels over the course of a six-decade-plus career. Similarly, the presentation will highlight Mesler's continual evolution as an artist, demonstrating the breadth of his references and his ability to transpose his passions and reflections into sharp, optically rich compositions that bridge personal and collective concerns.

Produced between 2011 and 2016, the three sculptures by Woodman exemplify the ways in which she recast the perspectival and chromatic advances of modernist painting not only in a three-dimensional format, but in a material that had long been categorized as a mainstay of applied or decorative art. She reconnected the radicalism of twentieth-century aesthetics to its roots in countless other periods and a global array of traditions. Despite her visionary ambition, Woodman's work makes immediate appeals to viewers in the here and now: the act of circling vessels like the ones in this presentation often reveals two markedly different experiences of representation, abstraction, and negative space. Also on full view here is Woodman's sly ability to rupture the third wall between artist and audience, with painted images of vases and flowers appearing on the vessels in a variety of permutations and opening up conceptual spaces in which the domestic world comes fully alive as a site of daily transformation.

Mesler's paintings, including those made especially for this occasion, also find him breaking down the kinds of barriers that often separate an artist from their art. Recent works have found Mesler using his own past and present as springboards from which to explore a complex network of intersections between humor, pathos, text and image. Here, Mesler shifts his focus to absorb the influence and implications of another artist's work on and for his own, taking Woodman's ethos to heart as he reimagines her sculptures against images

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of banana-leaf patterned wallpaper, a stand-in for both the pitfalls that beset him as a younger man and the potential that arose from them. Like Woodman, Mesler observes how the qualities of the objects he is studying filter through his vocabulary, and he discovers commonalities as well as surprising distinctions. In one case, Mesler renders the bold, expressive linework that animates one of Woodman's sculptures as a snake on a leopard-print background, cross-wiring images of wildness and familiarity, and fusing symbols of risk and reverence.

Betty Woodman was the subject of numerous museum solo exhibitions during her lifetime, including a 2006 retrospective at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York—the first time the museum dedicated an exhibition to a living female artist. She was also the subject of solo exhibitions at K11 Art Foundation, Hong Kong (2018); the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (2016); Museo Marino Marini, Florence (2015); Gardiner Museum, Toronto (2011); American Academy in Rome (2010); Palazzo Pitti, Giardino di Boboli, Florence, Italy (2009); and Denver Art Museum (2006). Recent group exhibitions include The Flames: The Living Art of Ceramics, Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris (2021); Less is a Bore: Maximalist Art & Design, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (2019); and Liverpool Biennial, England (2016). Woodman's work is in numerous permanent collections worldwide, including the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Museu Nacional do Azulejo, Lisbon, Portugal; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, Japan; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; and World Ceramic Center, Incheon, Korea. She lived and worked in Boulder, Colorado; Antella, Italy; and New York.

Joel Mesler (b. 1974, Los Angeles) has been the subject of recent solo exhibitions at David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles (2021); Lévy Gorvy, Hong Kong (2021); Harper's Books, East Hampton, New York (2020); and Simon Lee, London (2018). Mesler lives and works in East Hampton, New York.