

Exhibition of iconic “fallen paintings” to go on view
at the Worcester Art Museum

*Rarely seen early works by Polly Apfelbaum test the boundaries
between painting and sculpture.*

Worcester, MA – September 26, 2014 -- *Polly Apfelbaum – Nevermind: Work from the 90s*, which focuses on the artist’s rarely seen formative works in synthetic velvet and fabric dye, opens at the Worcester Art Museum on October 8, 2014. The exhibition includes one of Apfelbaum’s now-iconic installations, *Blow-Up* (1997), from the Museum’s collection. Supported by the Don and Mary Melville Contemporary Art Fund, the exhibition will be on view through March 1, 2015.

During the 1990s, a generation of young artists, including Apfelbaum, challenged traditional boundaries between media and the conventional parameters of painting. It was a time when art shifted away from static, self-contained objects toward experiential environments and installations responsive to the spaces they occupied. In 1992, when Apfelbaum began to work exclusively with cloth and color and to integrate her raw materials with the horizontal plane of the floor, she opened up a new conceptual and physical space for painting.

Attracted to velvet’s supple, floor-hugging form and light-catching texture, Apfelbaum found it to be the ideal ground for her growing engagement with color. “Sculpture sits on the floor, but I wondered what it would mean to have a painting on the floor,” she said. “It was a support that I thought had been ignored. And it can be an interesting place – a place that belongs to domesticity, the place where your dirty clothes go.” Apfelbaum adopted the term “fallen paintings” as a way of talking about these works as hybrids, “poised between painting and sculpture; works not so much attempting to invent new categories, but working promiscuously and improperly – poaching – in fields seemingly already well defined.”

Apfelbaum’s practice of investing abstraction with cultural content and creating a sensory link to the world was both a generational tendency and a feminist position. Her choice of velvet opened up the work to an array of associations from clothing and craft to gender and class; her task-oriented gestures of cutting, folding, and arranging had parallels in the domestic realm of repetition and routine; her titles, with their familiar cultural connections – *Cinderella* (Disney animation), *Wonderbread* (product packaging), *Blow-Up* (Antonioni film) – reinforced the emotive potential of certain color vocabularies and relationships. Perhaps indicative of the decade’s prevalence of art about the body as well as the gradual resurgence of abstract painting, Apfelbaum’s “stain” was interpreted as a gendered and subversive mark – at once asserting the abject nature of the female body while challenging the authoritative brush stroke of the painter.

During these important formative years, as Apfelbaum experimented with various applications of Sennelier liquid dyes (poured, blotted, stamped), different configurations of the stained fabric (geometric folds and patches, organic spills and splats), and a range of organizing systems of unmixed color (from isolated blots arranged like a color chart to chains and patterns of related colors), she discovered methods of creating dynamic optical, physical, and emotional experiences. The 1990s was a period of intense learning - about controlling the dye, about responding to architectural space, about the significance of cutting the fabric. "I was making the rules as I went," she recalls. In 1996, Apfelbaum arrived at her now-iconic format of overlapping hundreds of cut-out stains and embraced the arbitrary as a structure, resulting in the exhilaratingly free form and expansive palette of *Blow-Up*.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Apfelbaum was born in 1955 in Abington, Pennsylvania, and lives and works in New York City. She received a BFA from Tyler School of Art and has exhibited regularly throughout the U.S. and internationally since 1986. A mid-career survey of Apfelbaum's work in 2003 at the Institute for Contemporary Art in Philadelphia traveled through 2004. Apfelbaum was the 2013 recipient of the prestigious Rome Prize. Her work is held in the collections of the Brooklyn Museum of Art; the Dallas Museum of Art; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Museum of Modern Art, NY; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, among others. Loans courtesy of the artist and Clifton Benevento.

ABOUT THE WORCESTER ART MUSEUM:

Founded in 1898, the Worcester Art Museum serves Worcester and the broader region. The Museum houses an encyclopedic collection of paintings, sculpture, decorative arts, photography, prints, drawings, and new media. WAM's collection has historically been strongest in European and American art, and with recent acquisitions and donations, like Veronese's *Venus Disarming Cupid* and the integration of the collection from the Higgins Armory Museum, it continues to grow in strength. Symbolized by the opening of the Salisbury Street doors in 2012, the Museum continues toward its goal of accessibility for all visitors.

The Worcester Art Museum, located at 55 Salisbury Street in Worcester, Mass., is open Wednesday through Friday and Sunday from 11am to 5pm; Saturday from 10am to 5pm; and every third Thursday from 11am to 8pm. Admission is \$14 for adults, \$6 for children 4-17, \$12 for seniors 65+, \$12 for college students with ID. Members and children under 4 are free. Parking is free. For more information, visit worcesterart.org.

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