

“The Woodmans”

GALLERY DIET
174 NW 23rd Street
February 17–March 31

This exhibition presents the prodigious output of the talented Woodman family—parents George and Betty, son Charlie, and daughter Francesca, who committed suicide at the age of twenty-two and is arguably the most famous. Rather than underscoring the familial, the assemblage of work here shifts the discussion to the formal, specifically each artist’s penchant for troubling medium-specificity. For instance, Betty’s freestanding ceramic pieces function as both paintings and sculptures. Rendered on the upright, flat side of the two fragmented pieces of *Spring in Athens*, 2011, is a Greek black-figure vase filled with flowers painted in vivid greens, reds, and purples; the obverses of these flat surfaces elegantly morph into sculptural ceramic vases that are just as bold. Charles’s *Table of Elements*, 2012, is a digital video loop playing on two side-by-side displays that blur the line between painting and film. Each channel presents the same natural scene from slightly different vantage points—the movement of clouds, for example, is shown slightly sped up, creating the feel of a moving John Constable cloud painting.

George’s black-and-white photographs of nude women are often embellished with oil paint, usually sparingly. In *Shanti: In the Mirror with a Mirror*, 2006, bands of green, yellow, and red echo some of his early paintings exploring color. In Francesca’s two self-portraits, each known as *Untitled (New York)*, 1979–80, her celebrated use of long exposure creates a tension between stillness and movement that has often been described as a marker of the artist’s emotional state. Indeed, Francesca’s suicide often haunts the critical discourse on her work and also on that of her family, particularly George’s; clearly, biography remains a powerful lens through which the art world gauges an artist’s—and in this case a family’s—output. This exhibition, however, suggests readings that, while not necessarily divorced from authorship, are also not intimately tied to it.



View of “The Woodmans,” 2012.

— Alpesh Kantilal Patel