

Aggressive Women, 1977-2025
Paintings by Katherine Sherwood
September 5 – October 11

Press Release

The George Adams Gallery is pleased to present *Aggressive Women*, an exhibition of portraits of female saints and dominatrixes by Katherine Sherwood. The exhibition features over 70 works in found frames, dating from 1977 to 2025, hung salon style as it was originally shown in 1978.

Begun in 1977 and first exhibited at the Gallery Paule Anglim in San Francisco, the series currently numbers some 70 works. While this country's abiding puritanical and patriarchal values would praise the saints and damn the women from engaging in BDSM as transgressive sinners, Sherwood rejects this. The two categories of women can also be seen as representations of stages in Sherwood's life converging during a moment of self-discovery, not just of her sexuality, but of herself as an artist and feminist.

In 1975, after graduating from UC Davis with its funk art aesthetics and disdain for formal training, Sherwood became embedded in the punk scenes of San Francisco and New York's East Village, where she expanded on her earliest paintings, a feminist take on traditional Christian iconography with a self-taught approach to figuration.

The earliest images of *Aggressive Women* were taken from black and white personal ads in the 1970s BDSM magazine *Aggressive Women* as well as prayer cards from her days at an all-girls Catholic high school. Between 1977 and 1978, Sherwood created over 70 paintings that were later displayed in beat-up, thrift store frames and hung in salon style at Gallery Paule Anglim in San Francisco. The presentation was met with uncomfortable silence by the mainstream art press.

Returning to the work nearly five decades later, Sherwood – known for her paintings that explore disability – repainted and “cripped” the original figures. These newest works depict signs of disability – prosthetics, canes, wheelchairs – and reflect her own experience as well as build on her recent *Pandemic Madonnas* series in which she reimaged Madonna and Child icons as proud and resilient people with disabilities.

Katherine Sherwood was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1952. She received a BA from the University of California, Davis, in 1975, and an MFA from the San Francisco Art Institute in 1979. She taught at UC Berkeley for over thirty years until retiring in 2011. Sherwood has exhibited internationally and has been the recipient of several awards, including an NEA Artist Fellowship in 1989, a Pollock-Krasner Grant in 1998, a Guggenheim Fellowship Award in 2005, and a Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant in 2006. She continues to be an activist for disability rights and social justice, founding and teaching the course Art, Medicine and Disability at UC Berkeley for over a decade, as well as playing an active role at the Creative Growth Art Center in Oakland, CA, which supports art created by adults who have physical or intellectual disabilities. Her work is in public collections including the Ford Foundation, New York; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, California. Sherwood lives and works in Rodeo, California.

'Aggressive Women', on view through October 11, is accompanied by an illustrated brochure with an essay by Lucy Zimmerman. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 10-6. For images and further information, please contact Isaiah Acosta ia@georgeadamsgallery.com

ACCESSIBILITY

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The gallery has a rail-mounted chair lift on the back staircase leading directly to the exhibition. For visitors who use manual wheelchairs and are comfortable transferring to the chair lift, gallery staff are available to assist with the transfer and to carry manual wheelchairs down the stairs.

There is a ramp available at the front entrance to navigate the three steps. For ramp & mobility assistance, call 212-564-8480.