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© Wardell Milan, *Turin, Claudia*, 2015. Graphite, acrylic, ink, and white pastel on paper. 42 x 57 in.

### **The Confident Line**

**George Grosz, Wardell Milan, Andy Warhol**

February 5 – March 14, 2015

David Nolan Gallery is pleased to present *The Confident Line*, a three-person show featuring George Grosz, Wardell Milan, and Andy Warhol. On view from February 5 through March 14, this trigenerational exhibition explores links between the three artists, each active in distinct historical time periods. Focusing on drawn works, the show reveals a common interest in the human figure, which in their various hands, is stylized in subtle but instantly recognizable ways.

All three adoptive New Yorkers, the artists in this exhibition are known for their socially critical work, which address and comment on particular worldviews. During the 1920s, George Grosz (1893–1959) was engaged in making works that satirized the social and political life in Weimar Republic. Conversely, Andy Warhol (1928–1987), who shared Grosz’s childlike fascination with the United States, maintained an ongoing reverence for the capitalist system. Originally established as a commercial illustrator, Warhol took as his subject matter the everyday products of consumerist society. Through the 1960s he associated himself with the counterculture movement and its unconventional followers, among them musicians, drug addicts, and drag queens. Grosz portrayed a range of society’s citizens, as in *Arbeitsloser [Unemployed]*, 1924 and *Spectators at the Boxing Match...*, 1936. Atypical subjects – and more specifically issues of gender as manifested in society – are critical to Wardell Milan’s (b. 1977) practice as well. His recent series of drawings (resembling hermaphrodites), questions established ideas about sexuality, while challenging the traditional definition of beauty.

The erotic thread that runs through Milan’s practice is echoed in the exhibition in other works by Grosz and Warhol. Grosz’s boldly expressed drawings of nude men and women, in various states

of physical contortion, form a natural precedent to Milan's "hermaphrodites." Elsewhere, the theme of the "Standing Male" is also picked up by Warhol in an important drawing from c. 1955. In turn, Warhol's close-up drawings of "unidentified" male heads suggest a link with another group of drawings by Milan. Starting in 2014, Milan developed his series of seemingly anonymous "heads" (bearing names such as Ned, Francis, and Franklin) after seeing a *New York Times Magazine* feature which included a series of photographic portraits of the American President's top advisers. Milan identified various physiognomic features that appealed to him, translating them into large-scale drawings. In this process of appropriation and reconstruction, Milan heightens his subjects' perceived emotional states, variously suggesting anguish and contemplation.

The act of appropriation – advocated by Warhol in his direct copying of commercial products, and by Grosz in his Dadaist collages of the late 1950s – forms a central role in Milan's practice. A series of ten collages in the exhibition take pages from Paolo Roversi's *Nudi* (1999), a collection of mystical images of fashion models. In his studio, Milan cuts and reworks pages from this book, following the outline of the figures with an exacto knife, occasionally shifting the silhouette to suggest multiple stances. Recalling Warhol's *Foot With Flowers* (c. 1958), Milan situates these figures within a floral setting, offering the suggestion of an exotic landscape. As a source for his series of "hermaphrodite" drawings, Milan referred to E. J. Bellocq's early 20<sup>th</sup> century photographs of prostitutes in New Orleans. In Milan's reworking the models undergo gender reassignment, gazing idly at the viewer. In these viscerally rendered works, Milan distills the human forms into near-abstract arrangements, highlighting some areas with acrylic and white pastel, while leaving other passages sketched out or blank.

This distinctive "sketching out" is a key link between the three artists and characterizes a number of works in the exhibition. Grosz perfected his free drawing style, often using a reed pen, while Warhol's achieved his confident hard outlines with the use of black ballpoint. This is the gallery's first exhibition to include works by Milan and provides a unique opportunity to see his recent work in dialogue with a historically diverse range of works by Grosz and Warhol.