

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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PRESS RELEASE

**Suellen Rocca: Bare Shouldered Beauty
Works from 1965 to 1969**

September 9 – October 22, 2016

Opening: Thursday, September 8, 6:00 to 8:00 PM

Matthew Marks is pleased to announce **Suellen Rocca: Bare Shouldered Beauty, Works from 1965 to 1969**, the next exhibition in his gallery at 523 West 24th Street. The first one-person exhibition of the artist's work in New York, it includes twenty-four paintings, drawings, and objects from the years Rocca showed with the Hairy Who, a group of six Chicago-based artists who organized five now-legendary exhibitions between 1966 and 1969. Several works from these Hairy Who exhibitions are on view.

Suellen Rocca's work is characterized by an ecstatic approach to representation, mixing human figures with wordplay and vernacular imagery. It is notable for its unique visual language: a vocabulary of pictographic imagery inspired by advertisements, consumer catalogues, and children's activity books. In *Bare Shouldered Beauty and the Pink Creature*, a ten-foot-wide diptych from 1965, feminine silhouettes share the canvas with an array of engagement rings, ice cream cones, television sets, and dresses. Rocca strived to capture what she calls "the cultural icons of beauty and romance expressed by the media that promised happiness to young women of that generation. This was the culture that surrounded me."

In 1965 Rocca was a twenty-two-year-old newlywed and mother, as well as a recent graduate of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Her work radiates enthusiasm for these new experiences, an enthusiasm tinged with longing — for consumer products, exotic travel, and bodily sensations. Fingers stroke towels, handbags, and palm trees, while couples dance the cha-cha. Her 1969 painting *Lamp Poem*, framed with a ruffle of white fabric, seems to coo about a curvaceous lamp: "Ohh," "Ahh," "Mmm."

Rocca traces these unusual juxtapositions to the imagery she encountered in her kindergarten workbooks, which she describes as "a man with a hat, a house, a dog — expressed as simple line drawings — so surreal in their incongruity and change in scale." She also cites ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics and visionary modern artists such as Marc Chagall. With such a wide range of influences, Rocca's work is simultaneously of its time and out of time. This quality has made it a touchstone not only for her fellow Chicago Imagists but also for a new generation of artists now discovering her work.

In September the gallery is publishing the first monograph on Suellen Rocca's work, featuring full-color reproductions of more than fifty works, essays by Dan Nadel and Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer, and a narrative chronology illustrated with historical photos and ephemera from the artist's personal archive.

Suellen Rocca was born in Chicago in 1943. She graduated from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1964 and co-founded the Hairy Who with five former classmates the following year. Since 2006 she has been director of the Art Exhibition and Visiting Artists Program at Elmhurst College in Illinois and curator of the college's collection of Chicago Imagist art, the largest public collection of its kind. Her work has been shown in solo and group exhibitions across the US, most recently "What Nerve! Alternative Figures in American Art" (2014–15) at the RISD Museum and at Matthew Marks Gallery, NY. Rocca lives and works in Romeoville, IL.

Suellen Rocca: Bare Shouldered Beauty, Works from 1965 to 1969 is on view at 523 West 24th Street from September 9 to October 22, 2016, Tuesday through Saturday, from 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM.

For additional information, please contact Ted Turner at 212-243-0200 or ted@matthewmarks.com.