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OPHRAH SHEMESH *I and Thou*

February 23 – March 29, 2008 | Reception: Saturday, February 23, 6 – 8 pm

For her first solo exhibition at Freight + Volume, and her third in New York, Israeli-born Ophrah Shemesh will present a selection of new large-scale paintings that offer themselves as complex and eroticized explorations of the gaze. The arresting psychology of her pictures evokes the effects of predecessors and contemporaries alike, such as Renoir, Balthus, Kitaj and Clemente. Her emotionally-charged scenarios of women are carefully rendered using a fresco-like palette and a chalky buildup of painted surface.

Ophrah Shemesh's subjects are simultaneously submissive and empowered. She addresses notions of objectification, narcissism, and the male/female psychodynamic. Her figures appear with an ambiguously fixed stare – never directed or confrontational, but always to a third party - or to oneself looking inward. These portraits could be considered eloquent depictions of either loneliness or independence.

“Quite lightly they embody the very freedom of vision itself; for the implicit in these seemingly weightless and free-floating figures is a declaration that the sexual gaze is, in the end the liberated gaze. In the pictorial vagueness of the extremities of these figures, in their apparently arbitrary location in the undefined space of these pictures, they insist, paradoxically, on the eye’s ability to roam freely and pleasurably in space. Yet at the same time they recall to us the precision of the focused gaze.” – David Freedberg

Ophrah Shemesh's newest suite of paintings *I and Thou* are based loosely on the poignant '70s art house film *Night Porter*, a tragic love story starring Charlotte Rampling who turns tables, years later, on her Nazi captor. But these iconic male and female images only use the film as a starting point, in their almost Balthusian investigation of transcendent themes of love, strength and vulnerability, opposite attraction, domination and submission, and ultimate redemption between the sexes.

In *Does the Meeting Come About*, we see a tranquil figure, head tilted back and eyes closed, her lover's head resting on her shoulder - but her arms are bound, alluding to a narrative that is not outwardly transparent. In *I-It*, a young woman reaches towards the viewer, a cup in hand, as if making an offering of a revelation - her powerful, vacant gaze looks out to the unknown. *The Man to Whom I Say Thou* is an erotic portrayal of a woman caught in a moment between pain and ecstasy, painted with a flurry of wistful, loose brushstrokes. She lies, her mouth agape with deep red lips, and the hand that clutches at her neck could be that of a lover or her own.

Ophrah Shemesh received her BFA from the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design in Jerusalem and continued her studies at the New York School of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture (NYSS). She has had solo exhibitions at Stephen Wirtz Gallery, San Francisco, CA; Baumgartner Gallery, New York, NY; Guy McIntyre Gallery, New York, NY and Mario Diacono Gallery, Boston, MA; and has also shown in Italy and Israel. Her work has been featured in *Flash Art*, *Art In America*, *artnet.com*, *Bomb Magazine* and *ArtNews*. She currently teaches at NYSS and runs the Visual Arts Italy program in Gaeta, Italy.