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**New Museum to Present First Solo Museum Exhibition of Works by New York-based Artist Ellen Altfest**

NY, New York... This May the New Museum will feature the first solo museum presentation of the work of New York-based artist Ellen Altfest. Altfest is a figurative painter whose intimately scaled works convey a distinct approach to realism and a sustained commitment to looking. Her painstaking depictions result in paintings that expand perception while exposing overlooked or under-appreciated aspects of her subject matter. Painting from life, over a long period of time, she chooses subjects ranging from plants, rocks, logs, and gourds to a more recent fascination with the male figure. The exhibition at the New Museum will present a group of works from this latest series. "**Ellen Altfest: Head and Plant**" will be on view in the Lobby Gallery from **May 6–June 24, 2012**, and is curated by Jenny Moore, Assistant Curator.



Ellen Altfest, *Head and Plant*, 2010. Oil on canvas, 11 x 10 in (27.9 x 25.4 cm). Courtesy the artist and White Cube, London.  
Photo: Todd-White Art Photography

Folds of skin, an opened armpit, a tuft of hair, the delicate veins in the hand—discrete elements of ordinary male bodies—are intensely scrutinized and rendered in exquisite detail with immeasurable care. A universe of information lies within the shallow depth of field and thin layers of oil paint that comprise each work. This excess of information renders Altfest's figures unfamiliar and abstract, as if one were seeing these parts of the body for the first time.

Eschewing traditional compositional formats in favor of unexpected cropping and juxtapositions, Altfest creates a compelling friction in the picture plane. *Head and Plant* (2010–), as the title denotes, is a painting of a male head and a potted cactus. The conventions of portraiture are upended, however, by Altfest's decision to obstruct the face of the male figure with a plant. Instead of an identifiable visage, one is met with the confounding presence of a cactus, whose intrusion appears as matter of fact as it is absurd. *The Back* (2008–2009) depicts a body on its side, turned away from the viewer. Errant hairs, pink blemishes, and the curve of a shoulder blade serve as landmarks on this vast expanse of corporeality. With a heightened sense of realism and a narrowing of focus, Altfest reveals the extraordinary complexity of ordinary things.

**About the Artist**

Ellen Altfest was born in 1970 in New York City. She received her MFA from Yale University and attended Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in 2002. She has been awarded residencies at the Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas, where she presented a solo exhibition, and the Dorland Mountain Art Colony, Temecula, California. Her work was included in "USA Today" at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, the National Academy Museum's Annual Exhibition in New York and will be featured in "It is what it is. Or is it?" at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, Texas. She currently lives and works in New York City.

**Exhibition Support**

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**About the New Museum**

The New Museum is the only museum in New York City exclusively devoted to contemporary art. Founded in 1977, the New Museum is a center for exhibitions, information, and documentation about living artists from around the world. From its beginnings as a one-room office on Hudson Street to the inauguration of its first freestanding building on the Bowery designed by SANAA in 2007, the New Museum continues to be a place of ongoing experimentation and a hub of new art and new ideas.

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