

Bronx Museum presents survey of Joan Semmel's self-portraits from the last decade



Joan Semmel, *Cornered*, 2006. Oil on canvas, 48h x 58w. Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates, New York.

BRONX, NY. - [The Bronx Museum of the Arts](#) is presenting Joan Semmel—A Lucid Eye, an exhibition of 27 of Semmel's recent self-portraits, painted between 2002 and 2012, which capture the artist's personal perspective on the process of aging. For four decades Semmel has created her iconic self-portraits based on photographs of herself taken in front of mirrors, a process that has previously eluded many viewers. Joan Semmel—A Lucid Eye reveals the artist's method through a group of four paintings in which Semmel portrays herself manipulating her camera in the mirror. The exhibition, which will be on view until June 9, marks the first time the work of the Bronx native is shown in her home borough.

Born in the Bronx in 1932, Semmel lived in Spain in the 1960s where she first began showing her paintings in the professional art world. She returned to New York at a critical moment in the early 1970s that caused her to entirely rethink her career and refocus her paintings on figures which emphasized erotic themes and responded to mainstream ideas of femininity. Her self-portraiture has developed in tandem with her own perspectives on aging and she continues to be a major influence on contemporary painting today.

Though Semmel refers to her work as Feminist, she has also been known to defy characterization by simultaneously celebrating and obscuring her body and identity. Her work takes up issues of the gaze and the lens, reality and fabrication, and, in the recent works featured in *A Lucid Eye*, of age and beauty. In the self-portraits that will be on view at the Bronx Museum, Semmel confronts viewers with her own body, often nude, or her face, often looking directly into the lens that captures the mirror image which becomes her portrait.

"When I was first introduced to Semmel's work in the 1980s as a curator at the Bronx Museum, I was excited by how her paintings give us, quite literally, a new lens through which to see the female body," said Bronx Museum of the Arts Director Holly Block. "She came up in the 1970s, but her paintings speak across generational, cultural, and even gender divides, and make her an ideal artist for us to feature in our diverse Bronx community."

"Semmel's self-portraits are at their most lucid as she enters her eighties and reveals the realities of an aging body," said Sergio Bessa, Director of Curatorial and Education Programs at the Bronx Museum, who is organizing *A Lucid Eye*. "Viewers always have deeply personal reactions to her paintings, and we're excited to charge our galleries with this kind of thought provoking and response generating work."