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example, the sensual, if more "academic" view is mysteriously enveloped by a flamboyantly open-ended echo of the same figurative pose done in the gestural manner. The resulting effect is of a fairly surreal and slowly read maze of cascading limbs and internal rhythms. Not to mention that the painter also renders brilliantly the sensation of turning in one's sleep.

For the sake of discussion it seemed relevant to mention the likes of Pearstein and Porter. For both, the former coolly and clinically, the latter warmly and expansively, have pursued their vision of the figure in a manner that approaches pure abstraction; Pearstein's patient overlay of complex figurative arrangements makes one practically forget the figure, while Porter's bold, contiguous brushwork lets abstract passages of paint reveal the figure. Semmel, on the other hand, uses her considerable bag of skills—her deftly executed passages of paint and line, dramatic foreshortening, nimble perspective through the use of warm and cool colors, and her juicy sense of light in general—to illustrate a more direct and immediate connection to her body. As simple as it sounds, prevalent issues like the body's placement have a way of making abstract tendencies seem like child's play.

If there is a drawback to Semmel's method, it is in the inescapable sense that her point of view is more or less guided by a viewpoint, i.e., a photographic frame. One feels that she works from photographs (Looking Glasses, a locker-room painting in which she is seen photographing herself in a mirror, would seem to bear this out, although there are other reasons to think so), and this brings a certain detachment back into play. One thinks, unfortunately, of the budding photographer's second conceptual breakthrough when, realizing that outer perception can be guided to include the self, a picture of feet is taken. This type of thought tends to cheapen Semmel's entire effort, reducing her painterly bravado and mind-teasing hybrids to a contrivance meant to veil their plain point of departure. But, for all that, Semmel's paintings explore the kinds of regions only paint can find, the inexorable regions of viruses and fragile, fugitive vision. The paintings are involving, and their "point of view" withstands scrutiny. Passing praise for the wonderfully diverting exhibit of student work in the upstairs alcove.

Through the Object's Eye: Paintings by Joan Semmel
Swiss Poster Art from the CIBA-GEIGY Collection
The University Art Gallery, SUNY, both shows through April 12

WEIGHED AGAINST THE WEALTH of international styles it parades and dimly plunders, the evolution of Swiss poster art during this century is a tame adventure indeed, and this retrospective offers but a secondary history of poster graphics. Naturally, it's a handsome exhibit and there's nothing to dislike. Oddly, or perhaps not, given the current absorption rate of appropriation, this show's century's worth of poster art could pass for the Idy advertising pages of this month's Vanity Fair. An ad for Davos is an ad for Davos no matter the style. Political and social urgency are plainly absent from the show—bless their lucky Swiss stars—and aside from the odd environmental pitch, as in Saw Our Water, circa 1961, there isn't much to grasp beyond the visual courtesies of general advertising. A wry cry of sanity was heard from one poster in particular: the bold red words "LESS NOISE" (in German) blasting at a harsh angle from the ears of a cowering woman. Suffering is truly relative.

A more engaging body of work is found upstairs in the University gallery, in Joan Semmel's large figurative paintings from 1974 to the present.

Ostensibly, these paintings are about the nude figure; more importantly, they are about point of view. In all but her latest works, which explore women looking at other women in a "locker-room" series, the perspective Semmel presents is that of the artist looking at herself from the torso down in a variety of recumbent attitudes—just as one would see one's lower extremities. Semmel's head is thus not depicted, but is instead suggestively replaced by the entirety of the canvas, which visually represents her singular point of view. Captured simultaneously in this point of view, and summed up nicely in a pair of early titles, Mr Without Mirrors and Inhabit/Inhabited, is the notion of the observer and the observed, a self-contained and self-controlled aperture that deconstructs the typical isolation of the female nude—particularly as it has been interpreted by male artists and society in general—and that invests the candid sensuality of Semmel's nudes with an aura of autonomous mental activity. Hence the show's title, which could have been "Through the Sex Object's Eye."

This aura, of an active-objective, subjective-ingredient, is further pursued through Semmel's sure handling of contrasting styles and painting techniques. Basically, Semmel presents two traditional approaches, and then a third involving their conjunction. In her earlier work we are given a precisely gauged, closed and academic realism akin to say, Phillip Pearlstein's. In her most recent work, which is also more exuberant thematically, we are given a painterily, gestural realism in common with say, Fairfield Porter's. Ann in between these depictions approaches, representing more than a confused transition, are a group of works that combine the disparate approaches to form compelling hybrids. In Tumors, for