

CHEIM & READ

Time Out
New York
July 30–August 5, 2009

“The Female Gaze: Women Look at Women”

★★★☆☆

Cheim & Read, through Sept 19 (see Chelsea)

What is the female gaze? According to this show, it's a category as wide-ranging as it sounds, running the gamut from riotous to reserved, from racy to prim. In 41 paintings, photographs and sculptures of female subjects by female artists, we're repeatedly faced with women demurely averting their eyes, but also find ourselves the objects of scrutiny by stony-faced characters.

In the front gallery, Diane Arbus and Julia Margaret Cameron promote voyeurism through their choice of subject matter. The former offers up a delectable young blond for our consumption; Cameron, on the other hand, presents the quintessential still-waters-run-deep romantic type. Cindy Sherman skillfully mimics the slightly dopey Cameron look in her self-portrait, making her wistful character appear bland.

A graphic sex scene by Joan Semmel, rendered in lurid purples and pinks, is joined by a soft-focus



Louise Bourgeois,
Couple

Lisa Yuskavage playmate and a coupling couple by Louise Bourgeois—all boisterously embodying the main gallery's theme of reveling in looking and being looked at. Pleasure meets pain in sexually derogatory texts presented by Jenny Holzer and Marina Abramovic's self-abuse by hairbrush. The variety of approaches in this smart show, ripe with formal and conceptual connections, reinforces the idea that there's no such thing as detached viewing. —*Merrily Kerr*

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