“The Female Gaze: Women Look at Women”

Chelim & 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 rictus to reserved, from raunchy 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, Danie Aube and Julia Margaret Cameron present 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 woman—what we've come to call the 'perfect woman.'

A gingery sex scene by Foujita, rendered in lurid purples and pinks, is joined by a soft-focus 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