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What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries in September

'Can You See Me Now? Painting the Aging Body'

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Being an old woman can be a paradox: You've lived for decades and accomplished a lot, but society seems to have no place for you, to the point where you feel invisible. This could be why Alice Neel created one of her most memorable works, a nude self-portrait, at 80: to show the world she was still there.

"Can You See Me Now? Painting the Aging Body" is animated by a similar impulse. The exhibition focuses on depictions of older women made by women, in the process highlighting how rare it is to see such images. I'd love to see a bigger version of this show, but the 13 works here are somber and celebratory, defiant and introspective, capturing a range of experiences.

My favorites use the materiality of paint to render aging flesh. Clarity Haynes's "Brenda" (2020) emphasizes the soft, curving lines and veins of the torso of her sitter, Brenda Goodman, whose "Double Portrait" (2006), depicting herself and her partner, has layers of oil paint encrusted like dried skin. There's a theatricality to Joan Semmel's introspective "Skin Patterns" (2013) — don't miss her solo show across the street, at Alexander Gray Associates — that resonates surprisingly with Samantha Nye's paintings of women in her life that mimic Playboy covers.



Samantha Nye, "Entertainment for Men, Mommom as July 1982," from 2012. Credit...Samantha Nye, via Ryan Lee, New York

"Entertainment for Men — Mommom as July 1982" (2012) features Nye's topless grandmother tangled with a telephone. Her skin is marked by wrinkles and freckles, while her belly and hips bulge, but they don't register as flaws: She looks human and delighted to be playing this part. *JILLIAN STEINHAUER*

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