

# Art in America

EXHIBITIONS THE LOOKOUT  
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## Joan Semmel

at Alexander Gray Associates,  
through May 16  
510 West 26th Street

"Across Five Decades" surveys the arc of octogenarian painter Joan Semmel's career, from her richly hued abstractions of the '60s created in Franco's Spain to her recent depictions of the aging female body. An untitled work from the "Sex Paintings" series (1971), made in New York soon after she discovered the feminist movement, sets the tone. In the explicit scene a male figure's sketchily rendered face is buried deep in the crotch of a woman depicted from the neck down. Semmel would soon reverse the gaze of the headless body, working photorealistically from self-portraits taken looking down at her own figure; the examples from the '70s and '80s that show this distorted, unidealized point of view remain provocative today. *Centered*, 2002, is the first and best example of her method of working from "selfies" taken in mirrors. Here the artist crouches, her body partly fragmented and doubled at the reflective surface (perhaps an aquarium?), her posture roughly echoed by an eternally young (headless) statue behind her.