

8 Artists Who Explore The Beauty Of The Aging Body

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Wrinkles, lines, scars, spots. There are many ways time leaves its mark on the human body. Mainstream culture typically dreads the aging process and all its defining characteristics -- gray hair, sagging skin, translucent complexion. Of course, the transformation is not optional. And it doesn't have to be detrimental either.

Artists obsessed with the human form have long illuminated the nuanced process of growing older, its complex effects on the body and on the soul. The following icons, through painting, drawing and photography, explore the process of aging while challenging the dominant, negative perception of it. From series of confrontational nude self-portraits to a photographic documentation of aging drag queens, the following images capture the many particular joys, pains, fears and thrills of the aging process.

As Betty Friedan famously said: "Aging is not 'lost youth' but a new stage of opportunity and strength." We reached out to a selection of artists who visualize this sentiment better than we ever could. Behold, the words and images of eight artists providing visibility and respect for the aging body.

2. Joan Semmel

"I painted in layers so that the evidence of age would not be erased by virtuoso paint handling. The sensuality of the flesh permeates these paintings, a sensuality that is not confined to youth. I had entered into a relationship with artist John Hardy, with whom I lived for 21 years before he passed away in 2014. These late years were empowering and rewarding in every sense, something I hoped to communicate through my work.

"The issues of the body from desire to aging, as well as those of identity and cultural imprinting, have been at the core of my concerns. The carnal nature of paint has seemed to me a perfect metaphor, the specifics of image, a necessary elaboration. The last 45 years of work, I think, reveal my ongoing interest in both process and relevance."



Transitions, 2012, Oil On Canvas. Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates, New York



Recline, 2005, Oil On Canvas. Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates, New York



Skin Patterns, 2013, Oil On Canvas. Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates, New York