

Joan Semmel (112 Greene Street Exhibition Space): Most recently known for nudescapes of her own flesh, Joan Semmel has turned to painting cleverly observed portraits of family, friends and associates. Or rather, what she does is to translate photographs of her subjects onto canvas, working with color photocopies made from slides. Her method is to paint heads in close, realistic detail, with clothes, interiors, etc., handled in a less focused, more Expressionist manner. She's produced some very good work, notably the portrait of her teen-age daughter, "Patty," in which colors and lighting are beautifully handled, including a frazzle of sun-struck hair that hangs down the girl's back.

In some of the canvases, Semmel uses her subjects as caught by the camera in momentary attitudes and expressions, instead of the more generalized demeanor of sitters asked to hold a pose. Thus, in a long, multipaneled painting, a group of faculty associates sits around a conference table in various stages of attention, ranging from sharp interest to terminal boredom. The effect is hilarious. In other paintings, the camera's aid is less evident, such as "Florida Interior," a sad-sweet rendition of an aging man (and background woman) in a very pastel condominium. She uses paint well, and she gets tellingly close to her subjects. (Through May 26.)