

# Self-image

The women whose portraits are represented at a Downtown gallery draw out the concept of the art form

## REVIEW

By Nancy Salem

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A self-portrait is a trip into the soul of an artist. And what a wild and thought-provoking ride it can be. Curator Suzanne Sbarge at Downtown's 516 Arts cast a net for female artists' images of themselves and got work that expands not only the concept of the self-portrait but the meaning of self.

There's not a weak piece in the show, titled "Eye to I," each one a highly personal expression of femininity and identity. The accomplished lineup of 10 artists, from the celebrated Lalla Essaydi of New York City to Albuquerque's wonderful Jennifer Nehrbass, takes viewers to unexpected places, smiling all the way.

Nehrbass was the standout at the University of New Mexico's juried graduate exhibition last year. The fine-arts grad manages to steal the show again, and in some august company.

### SEE THE

#### WORK

**What:** "Eye to I: Self Portraits by Women Artists" and "Mapping Bodies: The Art and Artifice of Science"

**Where:** 516 Arts, 516 Central Ave. S.W., 242-1445

**When:** Through March 24

**Hours:** Tuesday through Saturday, 12.5 p.m.

**How much?** Free

image of a proper young woman dangling limp by a red string. She's very real in a surreal setting, her form and fashion just right.

Another Nehrbass painting, "Emerald Lake," is monumental and amazing. Twin women pose in the buff in a desolate, misty forest of a mountain lake. The details are fascinating: the small differences in the women, their mysterious striped hats and, a Nehrbass signature, the oh-so-right jewelry and shoes.

Again, Nehrbass mixes impressionist and realist technique with surreal content. The juxtapositions give her pieces impact and mystery.

Nehrbass is a star, definitely an artist to watch. Susan Byrnes of Dayton, Ohio, kept me parked a long time in front of her sculpture "Support System." It's a cast-iron brassiere, hard and heavy but built of delicate, and revealing, details: wrinkles and tension in the fabric, worn lace, a wayward strap. It's hard to believe there's not a body holding it up. She gives this worn bra a regal presence.

"The brassiere is a rite of passage. It can be seductive, constructive, protective or obstructive," Byrnes says. "A woman rarely leaves home without it; for many, it is an essential layer of skin."

Claire Watkins of New York dazzles with her "Portrait of My Brain," a motorized installation. In it, 1,192 LED lights spill in beautiful patterns from a row of brain-like circuit boards. Each light represents a person Watkins can remember from her life. Electricity travels through the boards, making the lights flicker.

Other must-sees are rich prints by Essaydi, a native of Morocco, that envelop women in fabric, henna and Islamic script; a quirky series of photographs of and by Holly Lynton of Weehawken, N.J., who looks like a child but is very much a woman, peering at the world through nature; mind-bogglingly detailed and fun scrapbooks by Juliana Coles of Albuquerque.

And don't miss the "Self-Help" series by Albuquerque's Adrienne Salinger. She photographs stacks of self-help books, each one a reflection of what makes up a particular person. They're amusing, but make you ponder whether we are what we read.

"Eye to I" is presented in conjunction with the "Women in Creativity" series organized by Albuquerque's National Hispanic Cultural Center as part of National Women's History month in March.

It's on the top floor of 516 Arts, Downtown's new museum-style gallery; the downstairs is host to "Mapping Bodies: The Art & Artifice of Science," a satellite exhibition presented by the Museum of Fine Arts in Santa Fe. It, too, is top-notch, exploring the intersection of art and science.

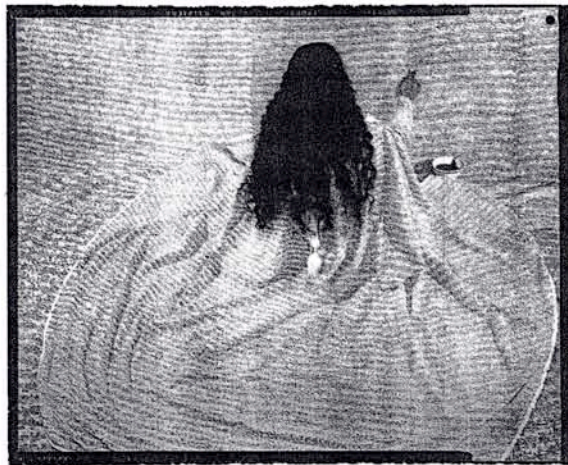
Look for incredible digital images by Alison Carey in which she builds then photographs alien worlds; and light-box installations by Clayton Porter, who assembles recycled X-rays to address themes of medicine and religion, work inspired by the death of his mother from cancer.

516 Arts hit one out of the park with its exceptional inaugural show "Green." The question of whether Sbarge and program director Andrew John Cecil could maintain the high quality of art—work that is both beautiful and profound—has been answered with "Eye to I."

The answer is yes.



"Postulating Jane," an oil painting by Jennifer Nehrbass, flawlessly blends the real and surreal, with a dash of impressionism.



"Converging Territories #10," a C-print mounted on aluminum by Lalla Essaydi, is awash in Islamic text that is partly autobiographical, expressing her thoughts and experiences as a woman caught between past and present, East and West.



"Trinity" is a light-box installation by Clayton Porter built of recycled X-rays and fishing line.