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A Master of Technique

And other shows worth seeing in New York

By WILLIAM MEYERS

Artists See Artists II

Deborah Bell Photographs _511 W. 25th St., Room 703 _Through March 27

There are two possible reasons that photographers' portraits of artists, many also photographers, might be more interesting than portraits of less talented people: The subject artists could be physically more compelling than ordinary folk, or there might exist a special affinity between two people caught up in similar pursuits. Deborah Bell is exhibiting works by 30 photographers, both well-known and less well-known, of artists similarly spread across the spectrum of renown, allowing us to consider the two possibilities.

Walker Evans's "Portrait of Berenice Abbott, 1930" substantiates the second possibility. Taken the year after Abbott returned from Europe, the picture concentrates on her large, wide-open eyes; she looks vulnerable and clutches at her collar as if for protection, but against what? Maybe the struggle to establish herself professionally in a New York stricken by the Depression. It seems a particularly intimate and revealing picture. John Coplans's "Self-portrait (hands spread on knees), 1985" tests the first possibility: Coplans's knees, the backs of his hands, even the backs of his fingers, are covered with fine, black hair. This is compelling, but probably not in a way unique to artists. Also up are David Armstrong's "Nan in Stuyvesant Park, 1991" and Nan Goldin's "Ethyl Eichelberger at Area, New York City, 1984," László Moholy-Nagy's "Lucia Moholy, ca. 1920" and Lucia Moholy's "Florence Henri, 1927." The artists take turns seeing and being seen.