

gregory gillespie



r o r s c h a c h i n g



FRONT COVER:

The Foot

n.d. oil on wood 54¼ x 36 inches

LEFT:

Meditating Double Woman

n.d. oil and mixed media on paper 17 x 14 inches

steven harvey fine art projects

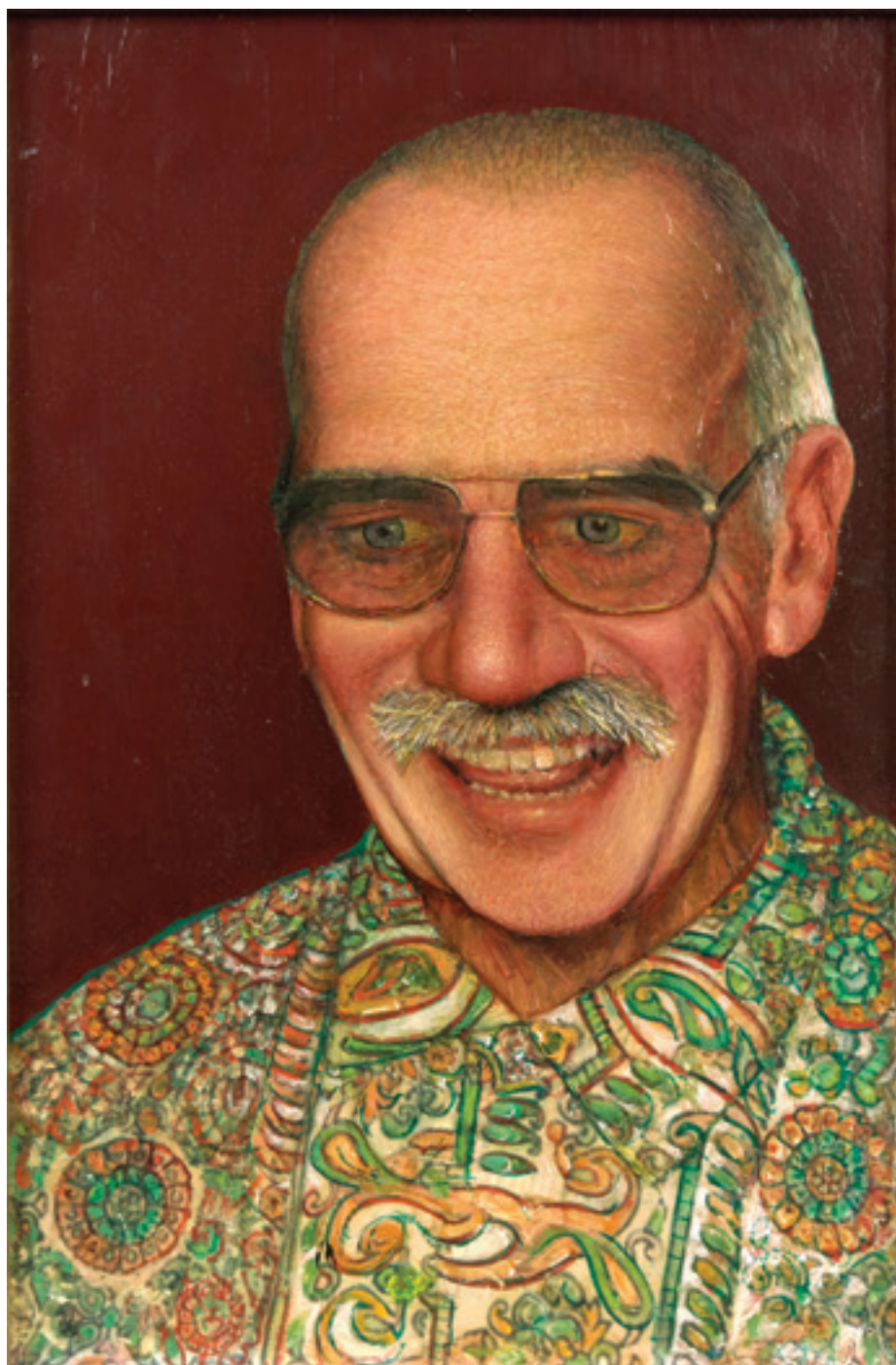
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OCTOBER 14 - NOVEMBER 15, 2015

Essay by Saul Ostrow



LEFT:

Self Portrait with Paisley Shirt
1999-2000 oil on panel 15 x 9¾ inches

Gregory Gillespie: A Descent Into Heaven

Gregory Gillespie (1936-2000) was a highly skilled technician, whose painting style varied: He made Dürer-esque self-portraits, haunting Ryder-esque expressionist landscapes, hyperrealist renderings of everyday events and monumental paintings of his studio, as well as symbolic geometric abstractions. Throughout his career he consistently returned to themes, for instance, the self-portrait. In these, he would delve deep into his own psyche, documenting his interactions, or alienation in the strange and overwhelming world that existed both inside and outside of him. In these works he would represent himself dolefully or comically as he does in “Self-Portrait Triumphant.”

I grew to know Gillespie and his work in the 1970s, when I was the art handler/ registrar at Forum Gallery on Madison Avenue. This gallery was committed to American figurative painters of the 1930-60s, and therefore was a truly an odd place to find Gillespie who was a young painter in his early 30s at the time. The earliest works I’m familiar with date from that period. These are often Italian landscape à la Giorgione, small in size and consisting of huge vistas punctuated by crumbling farmhouses and isolated tress. Other works from this time were paintings of interiors – whose walls are old, crumbling, and weathered – or of village inhabitants. Many of these works were made by painting over photographs cut from newspapers or magazines, and through the collaging of elements were transformed into familiar but uncanny scenes. Gillespie had struggled with these paintings, scraping and sanding them down, then painting them over and over again.





Even at the time he and I met, for some peculiar reason I have always associated Gillespie with William Gaddis' book *Recognitions*, the story of a Calvinist minister's son from rural New England who is inspired to become an artist by a reproduction of "The Seven Deadly Sins" by Bosch. He leaves his austere and puritanical home and travels to Europe to study painting. He arrives back in the States and goes to NY at the height of abstract expressionism's triumph – consequently there is no interest in his paintings. He then meets an unscrupulous art dealer who given his skills convinces him to be a forger of old master paintings – His forgeries are so good that they are in demand, yet he goes personally unrecognized. The book ends in a cataclysmic moment of death and destruction.

The reason for this association still alludes me even after this time. Perhaps it was because Gillespie could paint in the tradition of the Italian and Flemish masters, whom he much admired, yet he was no forger, nor did he go unrecognized – he had a retrospective at the Hirschhorn Museum at the age of 41. Nor did he live in NY, having chosen to remove himself from the art world by living instead in western Massachusetts where in later years he surrounded himself with local artists.

After I left the gallery in the early 80s, I was not in touch with Gillespie much. During this period, as can be seen from this exhibition of works from the last 10 years of his life, Gillespie continued to combine the fantastical and the mundane, while seemingly descending into a heaven that regardless of how strange it may appear, was as Talking Heads sang, "a place where nothing ever really happens."

Saul Ostrow

September 2015, NYC

White Lions

1997 oil on panel 22 x 27 inches





Landscape with Dancing Shiva
1983-1990 oil on panel 15 x 30½ inches



Two Figures Entwined
ca. 1999-2000 oil on wood with drawing features 8½ x 8½ inches

RIGHT:
Yin Yang
1995 oil on wood 34¾ x 31½ inches





Double-Sided Mandala
2000 oil on panel 28 x 26 inches

RIGHT:
Mandala with Shears
1996 oil on board 32¼ x 19⅞ inches





Harem
1994 oil on panel 25 1/8 x 15 inches



Bluefield
1996 oil and pencil 34¼ x 31⅞ inches

BACK COVER:
Self Portrait Triumphant, 2
2000 oil on panel 60½ x 42½ inches

