

Art in Review

- Self-portraits: The inside ... ■ ... and the outside
- A painting-sculpture interface ■ Rural South in photos and in miniatures ■ Pop icons of ambiguity.

Gregory Gillespie

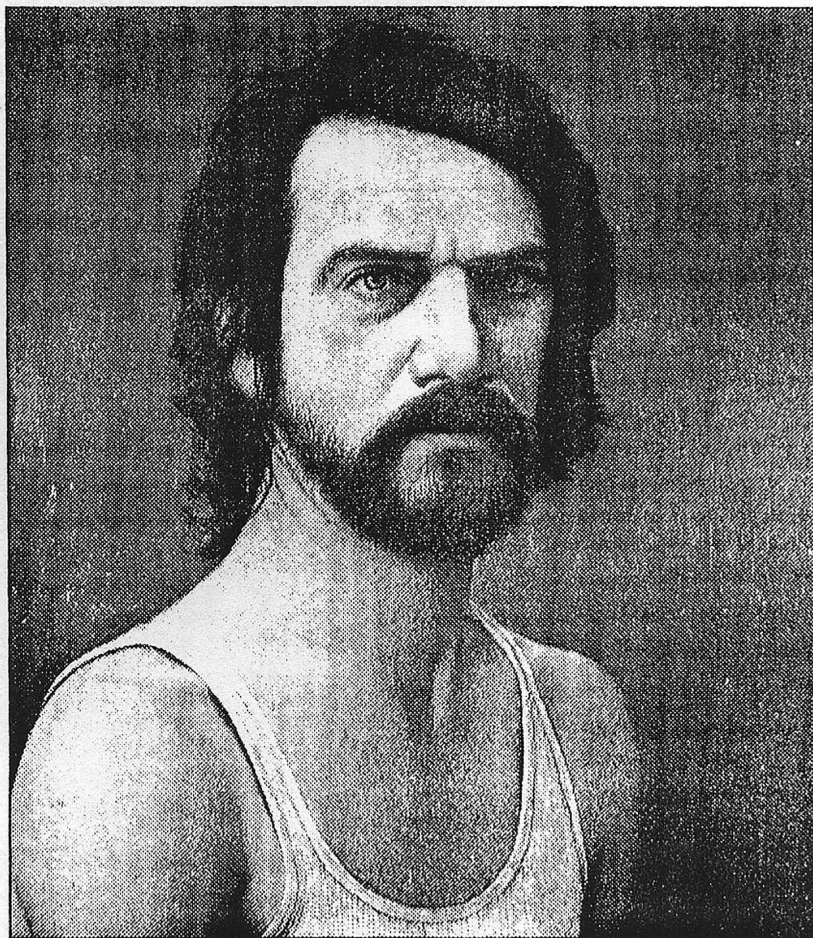
Forum Gallery
745 Fifth Avenue (at 58th Street)
Through March 21

Gregory Gillespie has been painting self-portraits for more than 20 years, and this mini-retrospective brings together more than a dozen examples. It is work of peculiar intensity. The artist often depicts himself bare-chested, and since he paints in a highly detailed, realistic style, every freckle, blemish and pore is minutely rendered, as if the painter could not get close enough — or bring the viewer close enough — to the physical reality of his subject.

Just as he unsparingly depicts the changes in his body over the years, so does he scrutinize his ego as his moods shift from anger to suspicion to hilarity to despair. Other aspects of his persona are implied by the carefully arranged still lifes that surround him. These include postcard reproductions of older art, images of Tantric deities, squeezed tubes of paint and pieces of sexually suggestive-looking fruit.

As a group, these self-portraits are remarkably engrossing. In part this is because of Mr. Gillespie's skill as a technician. But the real interest lies in the self he presents. Since the works construct a narrative on the progression from youth to middle age, one naturally tends to expect the latest paintings in the show to offer a psychic resolution. But "Self-Portrait (At Age 54)," done last year, doesn't provide one. The artist, looking uncharacteristically jolly, grins out at the viewer; but one also notes the presence of a very large sledgehammer conspicuously propped within arm's reach. It is the kind of edge this detail creates — a little dangerous, a little funny — that has kept Mr. Gillespie's work out of any mainstream so far, and that makes this show a memorable experience.

HOLLAND COTTER



"Self-Portrait" (1978) by Gregory Gillespie.

Courtesy Forum Gallery