

Robert Fishko, *Director*

www.artnewsonline.com JANUARY 2001

ARTnews

Gregory Gillespie

FORUM

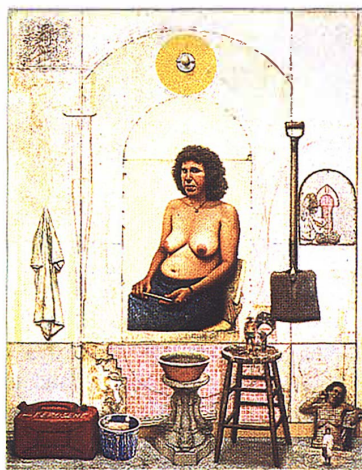
To honor Gregory Gillespie, who died last April, Forum assembled 34 paintings and mixed-media works representing his entire career. The show included self-portraits, portraits, still lifes, Boschlike organic fantasies, mandalas, a landscape, and even a sculpture—*Greg's Tomb II*—whose title assumed a mordant irony.

The quickly organized exhibition had a makeshift look but nevertheless served as a reminder of Gillespie's tremendous ambition and idiosyncratic development. He began as a realist, and it could be argued that his search for the real intensified over the years and motivated his later embrace of symbolism and surrealism.

Although he was raised a Catholic and spent most of the 1960s in Italy, Gillespie's realism has more in common formally with the meticulously rendered surfaces of the Northern Renaissance than with the idealized forms of southern Europe. *Self-Portrait (Bald)* (1971–72), for instance, with its crisp delineation, subtle modeling, diffuse light, and flattened space, recalls the German artist Hans Holbein's portraits. In fact, almost all Gillespie's works exhibit a distinctly northern sensibility in their reverence for descriptive detail and insistence on a shallow, claustrophobic space.

Gillespie's grand project—mythologizing his life—was most evident in the portraits of his wife. In *Fertility* (1991), he casts her as a Venus/Madonna, portraying her face and body with a brutally unflattering realism and surrounding her with still-life objects that serve as attributes. Here, a shovel, a basin of water, and a container of kerosene refer not only to the natural elements but also to passion, sex, and birth. Gillespie crowns his goddess with a naked lightbulb set in a nimbus of yellow paint—a halo that celebrates and mocks his own ambition.

—Nancy Grimes



Gregory Gillespie,
Fertility, 1991, mixed
media, 110" x 84".
Forum.