

cal, and even provocative. Some were reminiscent of Meret Oppenheim's Surrealist objects.

Gelabert focused mostly on trees, giving him the opportunity to create abstract and fantastical riffs on a theme. In *Portable Landscape* (2006), for example, one table is set atop another with what appears to be a slender wooden branch rising up through the middle of both. At the very top sits yet another, smaller table holding a wooden dish filled with artificial grass.

The grass could be viewed as either a peace offering or a display of the pathetic remnants of nature. Whatever the case, the contrast between the vivid green of the grass, meager and fake though it may be, and the pale wood of the tables inevitably conjured associations with life and death.

In *Shape of My Father* (2006), Gelabert was even more personal. A curved piece of wood, tapered at one end like a tail, is partially lined with tufts of artificial grass. With one graceful, almost calligraphic line, Gelabert has powerfully and poetically conveyed the idea of a strong person, bent by age but still fruitful and youthful inside.

—Valerie Gladstone

Robert Firestone

Walter Wickiser

Robert Firestone is a clinical psychologist and psychotherapist, and his works portray the human psyche. His paintings—colorful digital renderings of faces and figures—attempt to create a visual equivalent for the kind of emotional expression that is usually communicated verbally. He achieved that goal in some of the better paintings in this show by re-creating the effect of a vivid memory or dream that passes through the mind for no more than a split second.

Firestone begins by using a computer to layer scanned abstract shapes and figurative photographs, often repeating a motif. He then prints the images on canvas. His mark is not visible, and the digital process serves to distance the viewer from the artist. The resulting images don't seem to represent Firestone's own reflections, but rather archetypes that



Robert Firestone, *Death Scene 4*, 2006, digital painting, 40" x 25". Walter Wickiser.

could be lurking in anyone's unconscious. The faces and figures in these works were either hazy or completely blacked out, like silhouettes, and there were no clues or details to suggest narratives or situations. Only color, texture, and titles provided a context.

In *Death Scene 4* (2006), a group of silhouettes stand before a crackling neon background that is likely formed by the branches of a tree. The acid colors pulse with an unnatural energy, as though they might be about to engulf the dark forms. At times the digitized splatters of paint recall the electrified colors and patterns of a brain scan. The image could even be mistaken for a psychedelic album cover, but the title suggests that it's more of a graveside tableau. It is intense and visceral, like the traces of a memory that can be felt but no longer pictured.

—Meredith Mendelsohn

Tony Fitzpatrick

Pierogi

Tony Fitzpatrick combines a street aesthetic with a command of narrative worthy of a pulp-fiction cover artist. Most of the 23 works in this show, "The Life," came from the latest installment in his ongoing series "The Wonder: A Portrait

of Chicago." Engrossing and just a little dark, these tales focus on the habitués of that city's seedy underbelly.

Seamlessly mixing collage and drawing, the images are built around a large central figure and corners or borders filled in with matchbook covers and small advertisements. Small suited men, dancing girls, floating heads, dogs, and other figurative elements as well as intricate patterns of flowers, stars, and dotted lines fill in the white spaces and draw connections among the characters.

In describing a child murderer, *Candy Man* (2006) skillfully interweaves references to the Windy City: the setting of the slasher film of the same name, home of Wrigley's gum, as well as a historic meatpacking town. In *Icy Clue Girl* (2005), a column of poetry lays out the story ("Baby drowned trying to wash her own heart. Her own blue heart"), while viewers must fill in the gaps: the anchor stands for a sailor she loved; the bathing beauty recalls a happy outing at the shore. Other works, such as *Paloma* (2006), with its bird-headed central figure—a homage to Max Ernst's collages—leave



Tony Fitzpatrick, *Candy Man*, 2006, mixed media, 12 1/2" x 9 1/2". Pierogi.

more to the imagination and are the more engaging for it.

Fitzpatrick's predilection for collage pieces with a graphic style that harks back to the 1930s and '40s gives the works a nostalgic air. But his skillful manipulation of the compositions turns the stories into modern fables.

—Eric Bryant