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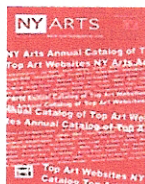


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Robert W. Firestone: Feelings – D. Dominick Lombardi



Robert W. Firestone, Community, Digital Painting, 40 X 70".



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January is figure month at the Walter Wickiser Gallery. In one group show, Milton Avery's daughter, March Avery, and grandson, Sean Cavanaugh, grace the walls with curious appropriations and realistic apparitions. In another nearby room hang the story tale narratives of Korean artist Deulhai Kim, which show a great mastery of aquatint etching.

In the main gallery, psychotherapist and author of *Fear of Intimacy*, Robert W. Firestone, shows us a stirring visual approach of expressing his thoughts and observations on the human condition. In these potent digital paintings, we see a significant nod to the psychedelic 60s—in particular, acid trip imagery on film and music video. This can be interpreted as a nod to the early years of scientific experimentation with hallucinogenic drugs, but it is not clear, it could simply be a way of setting a scene, or of building a field in which his subjects can dwell. This suggestion of psychedelia is nowhere more apparent than in the two works *Shadow* and *Death Scene 4*, where crowds of simplified figures are enhanced and intensified by long, bubbling colors and textured transitions. The effect is curious, and much more fresh looking than one would at first imagine.

One young woman's face repeats in a number of the works here. The largest of these, *Veiled Beauty*, is a

prismatic portrait—an image that vacillates between solid forms and fuzzy bursts of color—constructed somewhat like a mildly cubistic collage, but with a greater sense of singularity. In this work, we see the artist's dedication to his means of expression—the computer—in revealing both the deep emotional context and the chromatic tones, which express those emotions. In *Reflection*, the lone figure repeats in an alternating pattern, colored in black and orange hues, which more precisely reflect the good doctor's interest in the difference between how we see ourselves and how others see us. Or, more specifically, it looks to be about how quickly perception converts to reality—in the blink of an eye.

Most of the works have a somewhat serious tone, save for *Sisters*. Here, two smiling siblings echo each other's features and gaze, as they emerge through veils of crisp colors and flashy accents. There is gentleness here too, which indicates to this reviewer that there is a personal connection to the subjects of *Sisters*—a connection that leads to suggest of these two, a greater and more developed personality or individuality. Something, I suspect, the artist is striving for here.

Firestone is at his best when he pushes his abstractions to a simpler, more primal place. For instance, in his most recent offering, *Community*, the artist creates a rhythmic feel that yields fiery colors and haunting black forms. The result is a hypnotic, even dramatic, composition that blends jazzy organics with bold passages.

I suspect the artist will continue in this direction, as he furthers his search, parlaying the intricacies and intimacies of the human emotions he knows so well.

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