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Robert Fishko, *Director*

GREGORY GILLESPIE

(1936-2000)

Roman Interior Kitchen (Still Life with Milk Carton)

1967-69

oil on panel

63 x 45 1/2 inches

signed and dated verso top right: "Gillespie 1967"

Provenance

The Artist, Rome

Forum Gallery, New York, NY

[acquired directly from the above, 1969]

George Gilbert Collection, New York, NY

[acquired directly from the above, early 1970s]

Estate of George Gilbert

Forum Gallery, New York, NY

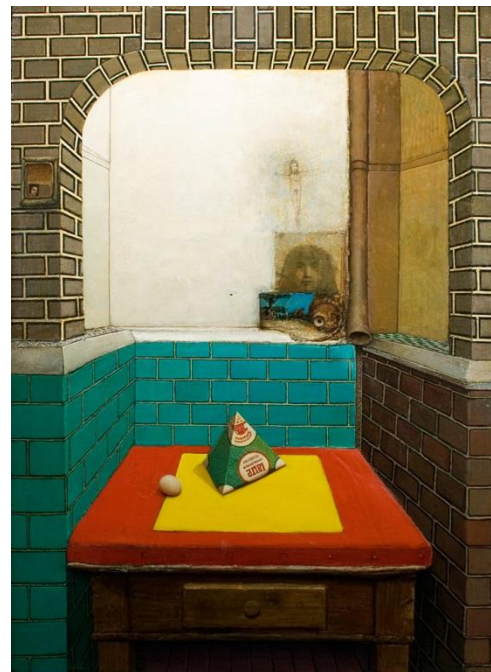
[acquired directly from the above, 1988]

Private Collection, Greenwich, CT

[acquired directly from the above 2000]

Forum Gallery, New York, NY

[acquired from the above, 2015]



Exhibited

A Unique American Vision: Paintings by Gregory Gillespie, curated by Donald D. Keyes,
Traveling exhibition:

Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia, Athens, GA

April 10 – May 30, 1999

Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, La Jolla, CA

June 12 – September 12, 1999

Massachusetts Institute of Technology, List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, MA

October 8 – December 19, 1999

Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, OH

January 9 – March 5, 2000

American Art Today: Images from Abroad, University Art Museum, Miami, FL,
February – March, 1996

Gregory Gillespie

Traveling exhibition:

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC

December 22, 1977- February 12, 1978

Georgia Museum of Art, The University of Georgia, Athens, GA,

April 23 - May 14, 1978

Gregory Gillespie: Recent Paintings, Forum Gallery, New York, NY,
November 13 – December 4, 1976

Frances Cohen Gillespie and Gregory Gillespie, University Gallery, University of
Massachusetts, Amherst, MA, September 18 – October 13, 1976

Gregory Gillespie, Paintings (Italy: 1962-1970), Forum Gallery, New York, NY
February 14 – March 10, 1970

Landmarks of 20th Century American Art, Forum Gallery, New York, NY
November 8, 2018 – January 5, 2019

Literature

A Unique American Vision: Paintings by Gregory Gillespie, Essays by Rani M. Carr,
Donald D. Keys and Carl Belz, 1999: Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia,
cat. no. 19, p.41, Illustrated.

Lerner, Abram. *Gregory Gillespie*, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden,
Smithsonian Institution: Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, DC, 1977,
cat no. 22, p.53, Illustrated.

Betz, Margaret. "New York Reviews, Gregory Gillespie," *Art News*, January 1977, p. 126

Brooker, Niccolo. *Landmarks of 20th Century American Art*, Forum Gallery, New York,
NY, 2018, pp. 34-37 and p. 35, Illustrated.

Essay

Gregory Gillespie was born in New Jersey, studied at New York's Cooper Union (1954-60), then at the San Francisco Art Institute (1960-62). It was soon apparent he would not follow in the footsteps of New York's Abstract Expressionists nor in those of the Bay Area Figurative painters, but that his art would always remain fully individualist, highly personal, and outside the parameters of the critical mainstream. Some saw his artistry as the contrivance of an art world contrarian; others recognized that Gregory was painstakingly progressing through his own personal demons and, in so doing, flabbergasting a limited audience with the painterly results.

Estrangement, entrapment, isolation, anxiety, repression, guilt, violence, and a heightened, even pornographic sexuality, consumed his Italian period work and divulged his psychic pain. Gillespie's focus on human genitalia as much betrayed his own-worded "horror of sex" as served to commit the intended sacrilege of savagely refuting the Catholic stricture with which he was raised.

Inspired by the beauty of historic paintings depicting scenes from a religion he had come to hate, Gregory's studio at the American Academy, less than a mile from the Vatican, became his personal artistic asylum.

Roman Interior – Kitchen is a classic Gillespie composite of authenticity and fantasy. The verisimilitude of its components is eerily impeccable: the flawless but elementary brickwork, the ubiquitous Christ Crucified, the old-style Italian milk carton long-since superseded in form. However, the arrangement of the objects is somehow disconcerting, inexplicably unsettling, not wrong but not quite right. Sensing the artist's paranormal presence, the viewer cannot discern which spatial ingredients Gillespie included as realism instead of metaphor. Although Gillespie's Fulbright grant project was to study the work of the early Renaissance master Masaccio, it is fitting that he was most captivated by that of Carlo Crivelli. A mid-to-late 15th century painter with an intense, haunting neo-Gothic sensibility, Gillespie commented of Crivelli that he was one of the few artists skillful enough to seamlessly incorporate sculptural elements with those of painting, and to do so deftly enough to mask what one perceives as reality versus illusion. Such was the schizophrenic sphere of contradictions which Gregory Gillespie sought and succeeded in occupying.



Carlo Crivelli, Saint Peter of Verona
(Peter Martyr), circa 1475
(coll. National Gallery, London)

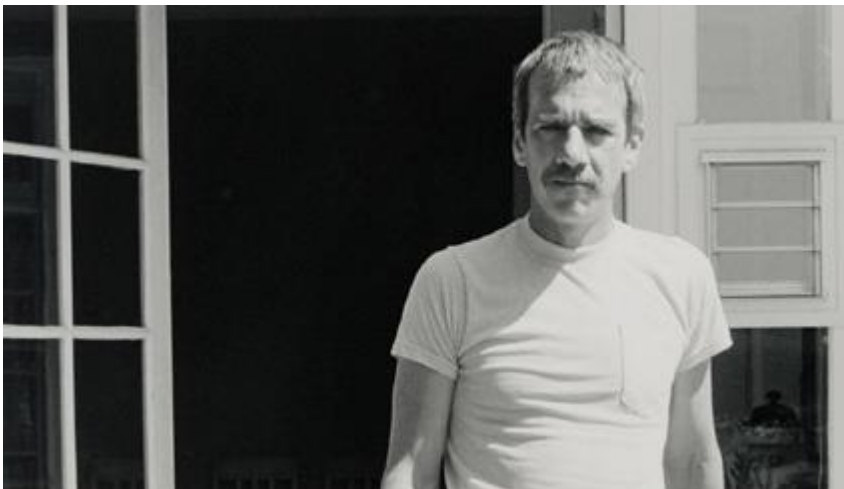
No painters of the decade came close to Gillespie's graphic nature and explicit scenes. A small coterie of 1960s Italian filmmakers, however, shared his capacity to transform the mundane into the hallucinatory. Like Gregory, these independent, outsider artists were interfacing with reality and sanity. Although it is doubtful that Gregory



Pier Paolo Pasolini, film-clip from his *Teorema* (*Theorem*), 1968

knew them personally, he may well have seen the controversial work they produced, precisely concurrent with his own: Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Theorem* (1968) in which an enigmatic male visitor has consensual sex with every member of a bourgeois Italian family before disappearing; Liliana Cavani's *Year of the Cannibals* (1969) where the streets of Milan are laden with the corpses of ill-defined state enemies while indifferent pedestrians walk past; and Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blowup* (1966), an existential mystery thriller whose bizarre, unrelated events terminate in a mimed tennis match with imaginary rackets and ball, the protagonist dematerializing just as the sound of the ball becomes audible. Although Gillespie did bring his phantasmagoric universe back with him to the United States (to rural Massachusetts) never was it so potent as in his Roman days of the mid to late 1960s. Unlike any artwork done previously or since, its rawness, its brilliance and perversion, remain a mystery to the mentally sound. Ultimately, Gregory was overpowered by his demons and took his own life on April 26, 2000.

“It’s almost like being in a dream. I’m sure a lot of people have experienced that—it’s not unique to me. But it’s often struck me that some of these paintings came out of experiences I had when I was young. My mother was mentally ill, she had been in asylums all during my childhood—ever since I was in second grade. We used to visit her every week and it was a world which made a great impression on me—people wandering about. The same feeling often recurs when I’m in public places or in social settings. It’s like a huge insane asylum where people have costumes on and they’re doing their routine and I’m doing mine. And I sometimes get this incredible feeling of insecurity. Often I like to get that feeling in the painting without making it too obvious.” (Gregory Gillespie in an interview with Howard Fox and Abram Lerner at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden; recorded in two sessions, March 24, 1977)



Gregory Gillespie