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Robert Fishko, *Director*

**GREGORY GILLESPIE**

(1936 - 2000)

*Northampton Motor Vehicle Department,*

1971

oil and magna on wood

4 ½ x 6 ½ inches

**Provenance**

The Artist

Sydney and Frances Lewis, Richmond, VA

Private Collection, Australia



**Exhibited**

*Gregory Gillespie: Recent Paintings*, Smith College of Art, Smith College, Northampton, MA,  
November 18 - December 23, 1971

*1972 Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting*, Whitney Museum of American  
Art, New York, NY, January 25 - March 19, 1972

*Gregory Gillespie*, Forum Gallery, New York, April 15 - May 5, 1972

***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

**Literature**

Wolmer, Bruce. "Reviews and Previews: Gregory Gillespie," *Art News* 71, Summer  
1972, p. 19.

Lerner, Abram. *Gregory Gillespie*, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian  
Institution, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C., 1977, cat. no. 40, p. 71,  
illustrated.

## Note

Gregory Gillespie's visionary, insightful and psychologically loaded scene paintings, haunting fantasy landscapes, memorable self-portraits, symbolic abstractions and dimensional paintings defied categorization and brought Gillespie to the attention of discerning collectors and museums across the country. Throughout his career, Gillespie focused his unerring eye for detail and masterful technique on the forces that drive the human condition.

Born in New Jersey in 1936, Gregory Gillespie began his studies at The Cooper Union for Advancement of Science and Art in New York and completed his BFA and MFA degrees at the San Francisco Art Institute in 1963. Awarded a Fulbright-Hayes Grant and the Chester Dale Fellowship, Gillespie traveled to Italy, working at the American Academy in Rome until 1970.

In Italy, Gillespie created real and imaginary narratives of European life, often highly charged with sexuality and emotional power. Upon his return from Italy and settling in rural Massachusetts, where he spent the rest of his life, Gillespie turned his painter's attention to his own life and its immediate surroundings.

*Northampton Motor Vehicle Department* was created by Gregory Gillespie in 1971. Selected for inclusion in a remarkable retrospective exhibition organized by the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (Washington, DC) presented in 1977 when the Artist was just 40 years old, Gillespie told the story of the painting's inspiration for the accompanying catalogue:

*When I went to the Motor Vehicle Department to get my driver's license, they handed out these flyers with photographs of Governor Sargent sitting there. They had begun using color photographs on the driver's licenses, and the flyer explained the camera they were using, and so on. This whole scene was actually painted on the flyer they handed out.*<sup>i</sup>

Gillespie had been incorporating photographic elements and paper collage underneath his compositions for several years prior and it had become a valuable part of his creative process, as described by Abram Lerner, first Director of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden:

*Given his fascination with the more bizarre aspects of society, (Gillespie) discovered a source of endless material in the newspaper and magazine photographs which serve as our mirrors onto the world. Sorting and clipping those photographs which struck a response, he explored new relationships and affinities between them. Responding to their suggestive power, he reconciled images which had no common origin, arranging his collages into pictorial compositions from which various themes emerged. Having thus created the basic foundation of his composition, he painted over the entire surface, frequently disguising his source by transforming individual elements eliminating others or adding to the whole. In this fashion, beginning with disparate photo fragments, he was able to create a unified work which heightened those incongruous and psychological images which had originally sparked his interest.*<sup>ii</sup>

Forum Gallery represented Gregory Gillespie throughout his lifetime, presenting his first exhibition at the gallery in 1966 and then regularly until his death by suicide in 2000.

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<sup>i</sup> Lerner, Abram. *Gregory Gillespie*, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, by Smithsonian Institution Press, 1977, p. 71

<sup>ii</sup> Lerner, Abram. *Gregory Gillespie*, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, by Smithsonian Institution Press, 1977, p. 10