

Robert Deniro Sr, Remembering An Artist



Photo by DUFFY 2014

By Tammy Duffy

The prevailing notion in many parts of the art world is that art prices do go up when an artist dies, as if death trips some kind of mystical instant inflation switch. Most artists age gracefully over time and gradually taper off in terms of production as they get older. Some artists actually knowing their death is imminent, will madly dash to the studio to produce as much art as they can before they reach the big easel in the sky.

HBO and the DC Moore Gallery (535 West 22nd St, NYC) have done a luminescent job representing the work and life of artist Robert DeNiro Sr. The current exhibition of DeNiro Sr.'s work at DC Moore ends on July 31, 2014. The HBO documentary entitled, Remembering the Artist: Robert DeNiro Sr. is available to watch on HBO at this present time.

The actor and son of DeNiro, Robert DeNiro has put together the ultimate tribute to his Father with this exhibition and the HBO documentary. A true homage of his love for his Father. The movie is so heartfelt, the paintings in the exhibition so exquisite. Both the film and exhibition are filled with love, life and a layering of stories told by DeNiro.

De Niro recalls memories of his father's despair over his own sexuality and his overlooked body of work. DeNiro's father was gay. His father wrote in a journal, "If God does not want me to be a homosexual than he will find me a woman I will love and who will love me for me." (as stated in the HBO film, Remembering the Artist)

In the 1940's, NYC was emerging as the place for the rise of contemporary art. A small group of artists achieved fame during this time and became known as the NY School of Art. Artists in this group included the likes of Jackson Pollock, Grace Hartigan, William de Kooning, Franz Kline, Mark Rothko, Roy Lichtenstein, and Robert DeNiro Sr.

The entire time Robert DeNiro's Hollywood career was skyrocketing, his father was living his final days as a starving artist in Paris. DeNiro brought his father back from Paris to live his final days in the USA.

Though DeNiro did not spend a lot of time with his dad, who was divorced from his mother, poet and painter Virginia Holton Admiral, the actor still felt close to him.

"We were not the type of father and son who played baseball together, as you can surmise, but we had a connection." My father wasn't a bad father, or absent. He was very loving. He adored me... as I do my kids." DeNiro said in the movie. DeNiro Sr. was conflicted about being gay, being from that generation, especially from a small town upstate. He was from Syracuse, NY.

His father was the real thing. He was a dedicated great artist. The exhibition at DC Moore Gallery is an ocular wonder. Layer upon layer of pentimenti displayed in the paintings demonstrate multiple stories that are clearly seen and hidden amongst the canvases. You are left to freely associate with each painting and formulate your own stories, your own vibrant experience.

His use of color, gesture, and movement, created works that resemble techniques seen in European French modernism, with Abstract Expressionism. You feel that Delacroix and Matisse have entered the paintings to add their own "tag" to each painting. . DeNiro's extensive knowledge of art history, allowed him to maintain the tradition of representational painting that was under attack by the tide of abstraction championed by many artist and critics in the 1950s. Greta Garbo also found her way into many of DeNiro's works.

He had studied with Hans Hofmann in New York and Provincetown, and Josef Albers at Black Mountain College, North Carolina, in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and then worked for five years at Hilla Rebay's legendary Museum of Non-Objective Art. In 1945, he was included in a group show at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century in New York, which was a leading gallery for the art of both established European modernists. He had his first solo exhibition there in April and May of the following year. In 1958-1962, DeNiro radically changed his painting style. There was a new profound energy

evident that was absent before.

Today, when the art world has opened to a larger range of artistic perspectives, De Niro's many accomplishments and unwavering dedication to his personal artistic vision can be more readily appreciated as a singular achievement in postwar American art. Robert De Niro, Sr. has work in many museum collections, including those of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Corcoran Gallery of Art, and Whitney Museum of American Art. In 2009, a retrospective of his work was presented at the Musée Matisse in Nice, France.

The documentary is De Niro's a great lesson to all of us to preserve what is most precious. The love we have for a parent and the legacy they gave to the world. He accomplished this with the documentary and exhibition. It is the ultimate love letter to his father.

DeNiro has done a beautiful job preserving his father's legacy. The HBO film is one of the most beautiful, heartwarming art documentaries I have ever watched, and I have watched quite a few in my years on this earth. The heartfelt emotion and love DeNiro, the actor, has for his father is so evident. The preservation of his father's art studio is a memorial to him. Most memorials are placed in public spaces with the intention of maintaining an aspect of history. The art studio memorial, the exhibition and the documentary are a striking, loving reminder of who Robert DeNiro Sr. was and where he came from and love a son has for him.