

Philip Pearlstein: Famous American Painter Exhibit at Stony Brook

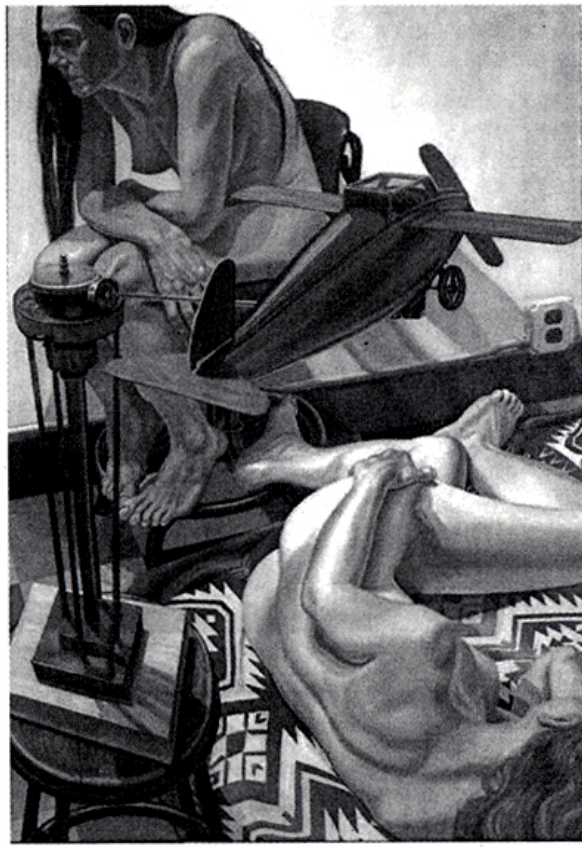


that consists of both watercolor paintings and oil-based paint works dating from 1990-2007.

Immediately one notices the size of the selected paintings because some are larger than life-sized. All of the works on display feature naked models along with a menagerie of Americana objects. This style of using both inanimate objects and people in the design is well-known as Pearlstein's. What is featured in the works, the artist calls it an "itinerary of things" as the models are also

civilization and a collection of American junk." By featuring American artifacts in his art, Pearlstein is documenting our culture.

Pearlstein claims that he has taken cue from other New York abstract expressionists and his style reflects this. However, Pearlstein's diverse personal history has much to do with his style as anything else. He attended a high school in Pittsburgh where "the art teacher didn't teach anything, but a number of the students had careers in art,"



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On Wed. October 24, a contemporary artist who is documented in many art history books spoke at the Staller Center for the Arts at Stony Brook University. Philip Pearlstein lectured to a large and enthusiastic audience about his journey from being an award-winning high school art student to an artist whose work is part of the collection of every major museum.

A good part of Pearlstein's career as an artist began as an art professor at Brooklyn College, where he lectured alongside legendary artists. He said that Brooklyn College had one of the strongest art faculties in the country.

Pearlstein said that he did not get going as an artist until he was forty and earned tenure at the college.

Pearlstein spoke of the college community as the incubator that nurtured his creativity as he taught students and thus related to the community at SBU.

His career manifested out of the ideas that he had to prepare for class to interest his students. He insisted that he learned much from his students during his teaching career and has thanked many of them, while a good majority of them still remain nameless.

On display in the Staller Center Gallery is a selection of Pearlstein's work from the Betty Cuninghams Gallery in NYC

objects.

What is very interesting about the exhibit is that some pieces from Pearlstein's collection of random objects featured in his paintings are on display along side his art. This leads to a great opportunity to observe from one's view the beauty of the real object and to appreciate how Pearlstein painted from real life.

One of the pieces Pearlstein discussed at the lecture was a recent painting that featured a neon-light Mickey Mouse figure, which was one of the objects included. After being in the hospital from an illness, Pearlstein comically related to the audience that he could not believe that his last work was one that featured Mickey Mouse.

Pearlstein regained his health and has completed other pieces since, however, it appears he does have a certain interest in the image of that classic Disney character. In the Staller Gallery, there is a Mickey Mouse puppet on display that is featured in another painting.

His collection of props, famously featured in his works, is mostly collected from antique fairs and shops. Once Pearlstein discovers some objects, he is inspired to create a composition including the pieces.

Sometimes, however, he is merely interested in the object and it may appear in another work. Pearlstein affectionately called antique stores an "arsenal of our

including Andy Warhol, he said. In high school, Pearlstein won an art competition and two of his paintings were reprinted in Life Magazine.

In 1943, during his freshman year in college, Pearlstein was drafted into the army. The army used Pearlstein's artistic abilities when he was assigned to draw charts to educate the soldiers about the assembly of the weapons.

Eventually, he was sent to Italy in the infantry where he made private drawings of American soldiers and Italian civilians. He was later pulled from the infantry and worked in a sign shop along with German artists.

After the war, he moved back to the states and worked with graphic designers. He attempted to better himself by applying to famous magazines, such as Vogue, but his work was never well received. Pearlstein moved to NYC and worked with a graphic designer, while earning a master's degree in Art History from New York University.

A boost to his career happened when one of his pieces was featured in a popular art magazine. Later, Pearlstein would learn that the art director who featured his work thought it was the "ugliest" work he had ever seen, but had a personal vendetta against the magazine.

Pearlstein won a Fulbright Grant and returned to Italy many years after the war ended. Here, Pearlstein began to develop

his naturalist style of painting and was inspired by the stage sets for the classic movie "La Dolce Vita" which was filmed in Italy.

When he returned to the U.S., Pearlstein was a critique at MOMA and a writer for Art News Magazine. In the 1960's and 70's, Pearlstein included other elements in his paintings of people hoping to make the composition more interesting. This famous style was in its infancy some forty years ago.

The exhibit is open until Dec. 8, and is easy to enjoy by examining the details that are included in the paintings and those that are on display around the gallery. Pearlstein paints from his own perspective and tries to remain true to what he sees.

The varied elements of his compositions and his colorful past explain Pearlstein's belief that "artists that devote themselves to art forever usually don't have a great background."

From left to right:

Philip Pearlstein, "Model with Superman, Nefertiti, and Gargoyle," 1999, oil on canvas, 72 x 48"

Philip Pearlstein, "Models with a Wooden Airplane," 2005, oil on canvas, 72 x 48"

Courtesy of Betty Cuninghams Gallery, NYC