

These Paintings are Curious about You

Aaron Bohrod surveys the spectacle of life through his magical realist paintings

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A name forgotten by time, Aaron Bohrod's memory is revered in Lincoln Glenn's exhibition, "A Cabinet of Curiosities." The gallery is nestled amongst dozens of others in lower Manhattan.

Walking down 24th street, it looks just the same as the others: huge panes of glass, steel hardware, and lots of empty space. I didn't feel the usual sense of cold disconnection when I entered this space, however. As I crossed the threshold, the warmth of the room was an invitation, pulling me inside.

The small one-room gallery glowed in a soft yellow light and the hardwood floors were worn; they reminded me of my kitchen at home. Having just walked by at least six contemporary art galleries on my way to Lincoln Glenn, it was refreshing to see real, grounded figures on a canvas.

Chelsea is teeming with artists trying to make a name for themselves, but Aaron Bohrod isn't one of them. Bohrod was an 84 year-old artist who started his painting practice at the Art Institute of Chicago before exhibiting all over the United States.

He studied at the Art Students League of New York until 1930, where he was influenced by John Sloan's realist city scenes. Bohrod was first known for his American cityscapes and social realist paintings of working class families. In the 1940's he documented the war for Life magazine, before becoming an artist in residence until his death in 1992.

He is most known for his realism and solid place as an influential Modern American artist. Finding his footing during an artistic period of rapid change and abstraction, Bohrod stayed true to his own style throughout his career, a feat for any artist.

His works can be identified by their hyperrealism, consistent use of vibrant color, and the effect of shininess that often overcoats entire pieces, which characterize the works in "A Cabinet of Curiosities."

In this exhibition, Bohrod's technical skill is on full display. In "Footnotes", a 20 x 16 inch oil and gesso painting, Bohrod has constructed an intricate still life consisting of feet, footwear, and shoe-related items.

The wooden paneling is expertly detailed, it's easy to forget everything sitting in front of it is in fact, flat. The fabric on the ballet shoe has a silky quality that contrasts with the dirtiness and

weight of the shoe; it is evident that it was worn and used, but still cared for. The doll shoes in the foreground remind of childhood, lost things, and pieces of memories.



Bohrod's entire collection in this exhibition is incredibly nostalgic to anyone that might stop by. Each work, though unique, have elements that may be familiar to some: a tiny gnome, a knight in shining armor, chewed gum on a piece of wood, a Leilani Hawaiian figurine, Old Macdonald Had a Farm. All of these items seem so random, but different associations and feelings are brought about for each individual viewer.

Many of Bohrod's compositions have childish iconography like dolls, ABC's, toys, and simple drawings, but that does not make them childish paintings. Instead, Bohrod is asking the viewer to contemplate their own childhood. What objects could represent aspects of your childhood? How do those items relate to who you are today?

My experience at this exhibition was one of comfort and calmness. His playfulness and familiar items made these paintings legible and easy to enjoy. I found myself searching Bohrod's painting like an I-Spy book, unearthing randomly specific memories from my childhood. Bohrod, a man who died a decade before I was born, was able to conjure up a timeless sense of nostalgia.