

Framingham artist mounts 'Places and Faces' show at the Whistler

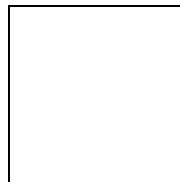
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Framingham artist David Wells Roth's oil on canvas "Sheridan Square" (1981) at his exhibit at the Whistler House Museum of Art. (May 18, 2010)

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By Kristine Lundblad/GATEHOUSE NEWS SERVICE

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LOWELL —

In a large and beautifully lit gallery at the Whistler House Museum of Art, David Wells Roth's main inspirations -- light and form -- are on center stage in an exhibit called "Places and Faces."

The exhibit includes luminous cityscapes of snow-covered buildings, a corner store and a downtown neighborhood caught in early morning light. There are bridges and industrial buildings, a harbor and a woman waiting for a cab on a New York street.

Painting both outdoors and with inspiration from photographs, Roth, a Framingham resident, is revisiting cityscapes after completing a three-year project painting 31 federal judicial portraits for the U.S. Federal Court in Puerto Rico. In fact, on one wall of the Parker Gallery at the Whistler hang the final five portraits which will be sent to their permanent home in San Juan when the show closes.

"The one thing that started me on the cityscapes was that," he said, pointing at "Sheridan Square," a painting in the exhibit. The painting holds nostalgia for Roth -- he was familiar with the area he painted and, in fact, lived for a time in the car that is parked in the center of the canvas.

Although the paintings in the exhibit span much of his career, with some early works from the 1980s, Roth is reinvigorated to paint places and people again after completing the portrait project.

"This is what I'm doing now," said Roth. "I'm moving into that and figures, as well. I spent three years on the judges. Now that they're done, I'm really trying to feel out that direction."

Jim Dymont, exhibits and gallery manager at the Whistler House Museum, said he wanted to show Roth's work after hearing about him from several sources.

"I think we found out (about David) through our resident artist, Meredith Fife Day," said Dymont. Sculptor Mico Kaufman -- whose sculpture of James McNeill Whistler graces the Victorian park on the grounds of the museum -- also spoke highly of Roth's work.

Dymont said the exhibit has been well received by visitors.

"People love the squares," he said of Roth's cityscape paintings. "Everyone loves his work. They love the lighting, he's really good with contrast and light."

The exhibit also includes early work such as a portrait of his father done by a 15-year-old Roth, self portraits and still lifes.

"In 2004, I started doing still lifes," said Roth. "The style is different. Then I got back into (cityscapes)." The city scenes are primarily of Boston and New York.

The main building of the Whistler House Museum of Art is the historic home and birthplace of James McNeill Whistler. He is best known for the iconic "Whistler's Mother," although that painting, formally titled "Arrangement in Grey and Black: Portrait of the Artist's Mother," is not housed at the Whistler but in a museum in France.

The museum's collection is primarily 19th and early 20th century art, said Dymont. Items from the permanent collection, including prints by Whistler, are displayed in the house while the Parker Gallery holds visiting exhibits, changing every seven to eight weeks. The grounds also comprise a courtyard and the Victorian park.

"David Wells Roth: Places and Faces" is on exhibit through June 12.

The Whistler House Museum of Art is at 243 Worthen St., Lowell. Hours are 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday and by appointment. Admission is \$5 for adults and \$4 for seniors, students and children. For information, call 978-452-7641 or visit www.whistlerhouse.org.

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