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Art in Review

By KEN JOHNSON

Robert De Niro Sr.: ‘Paintings and Drawings, 1948-1989’

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Thanks to the promotional efforts of his son, the actor Robert De Niro, the painter Robert De Niro Sr. (1922-93) is getting some well-deserved posthumous attention. A documentary in which the son talks movingly about his father was on HBO recently. This beautiful exhibition presents works from five decades.

Coming of age in the late 1940s, Mr. De Niro was committed to a kind of figurative painting indebted mainly to Matisse. He favored routine, School of Paris-type subject matter: generalized portraits, still lifes, the female nude and room interiors. But he painted with sensuous panache and an acute feel for color, using wide, generously loaded brushes. While the things he pictured were usually static, the way he rendered them — in a fluid choreography of painterly gestures and in hues ranging from muddy to incandescent — makes them seem voluptuously alive.



“Red House With Blue Door” (1970) by Robert De Niro Sr., one painting in an exhibition devoted to him at DC Moore. A recent documentary, featuring his son, focused on his career. 2104 Estate of Robert De Niro, Sr./Artist Rights Society, New York, DC Moore Gallery, New York

For a few years, he was a star of the New York art scene. Peggy Guggenheim gave him his first solo show in 1946, when he was just 24, and he garnered glowing reviews from Clement Greenberg and other critics. Then came Abstract Expressionism and, after that, Pop and Minimalism, and Mr. De Niro’s kind of painting fell precipitously out of fashion.

But he kept faith with his convictions, and with the passage of time, his pictures became brighter and more infectiously hedonistic. Some of the most compelling works here are from his later decades. Seemingly effortless paintings like the summery “Red House With Blue Door” (1970) and the velvety “Still Life With Vase of Flowers, Lemons, Chair and Guitar” (1989) register states of sensory grace

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