

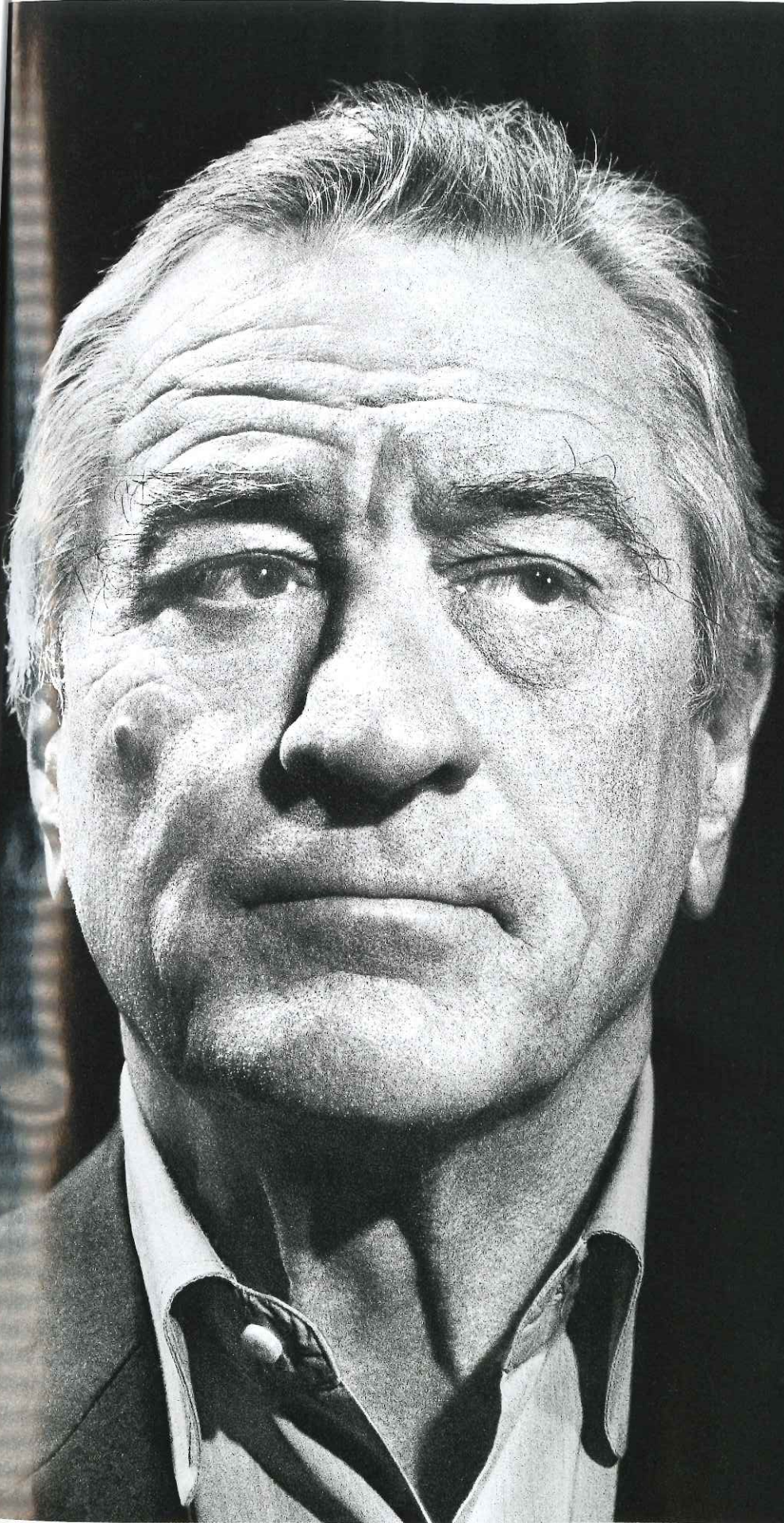
R H A P S O D Y

JUNE 2014

ROBERT
DE NIRO

UNITED 

A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER 



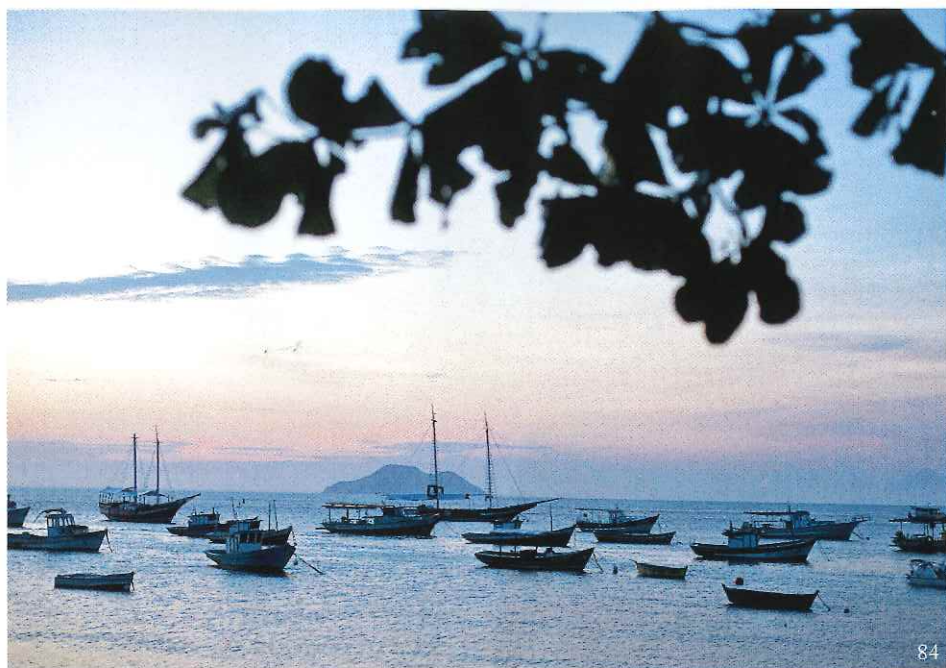
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—JUSTIN GOLDMAN

76 “Zaha Hadid is part of the world’s elite cabal of designers—sometimes dubbed ‘starchitects’—who are as famous as the buildings they create. Now these singular talents are increasingly turning their attention toward splashy residential developments.”
—MARK ELLWOOD

84 “Búzios’ beauty is best appreciated from the sea, where you can see villas tucked into green jungle yielding to one sun-toasted stretch of sand after another, each strewn with beautiful people, above which perch the fortunate few who call this place home.”
—KEVIN RAUB

92 “With Comporta Dunes, golf course designer David McLay Kidd is once again blowing things up—albeit in a more pleasant way. ‘I’m on a mission to make golf fun again,’ he says as we walk the first hole.”
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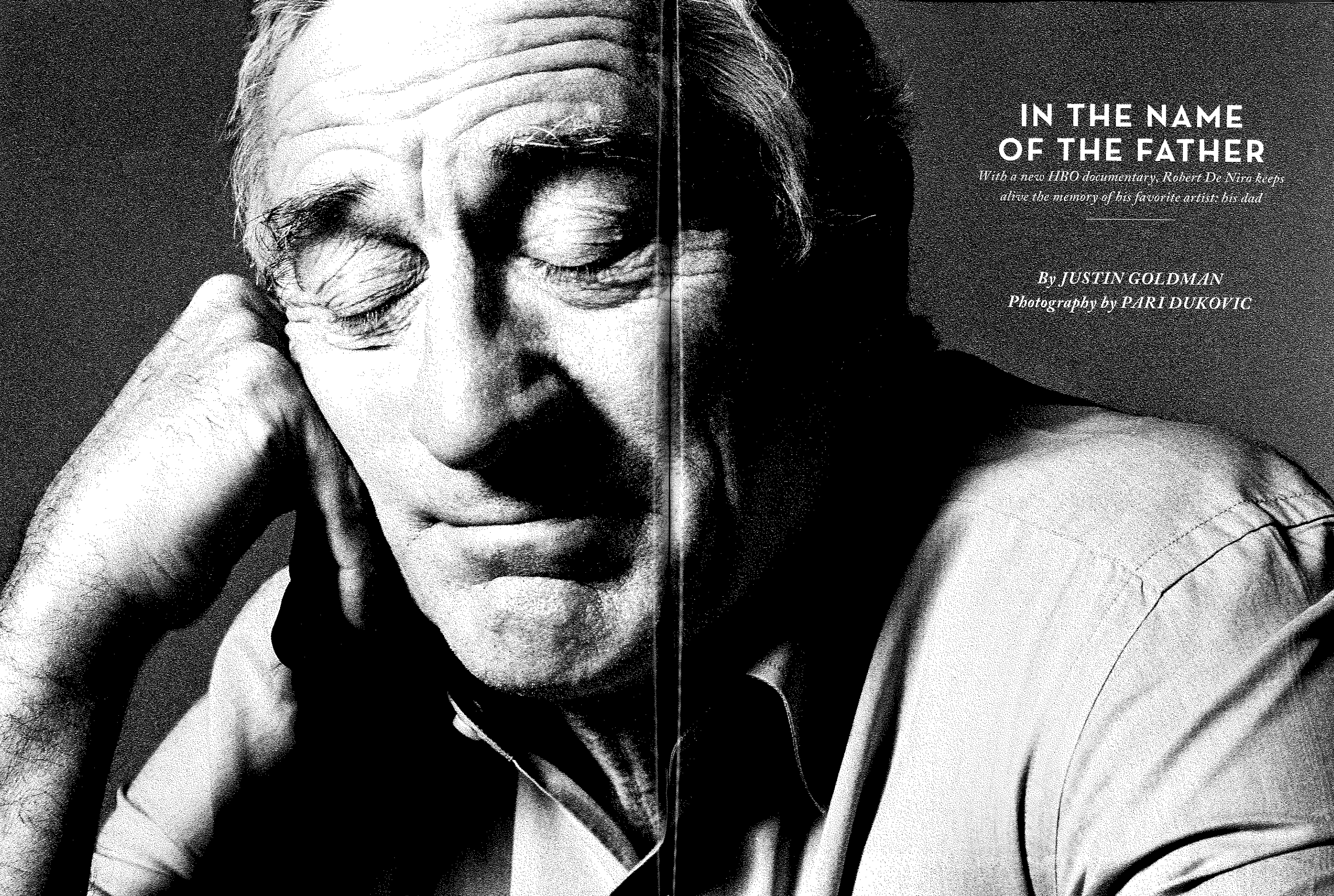
- 98 “I spent the plane ride reading and writing in journal. I liked flying and staring out the window at clouds and writing poetry about them. I’d always wanted my life to be more romantic than it actually was, and that flight was my first attempt to will those dreams into reality.”
—EMMA STRAUB



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ON THE COVER Exclusive photograph of Robert De Niro shot by Pari Dukovic at the Tribeca Grill in New York City



IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER

*With a new HBO documentary, Robert De Niro keeps
alive the memory of his favorite artist: his dad*

By **JUSTIN GOLDMAN**
Photography by **PARI DUKOVIC**



THE PAINTINGS on the walls at the Tribeca Grill, a restaurant Robert De Niro co-owns in lower Manhattan, are enormous, beautiful, greedy for the attention of the eye. The images are landscapes, still lifes, women seated in parlor rooms, conjured with bright dashes of paint reminiscent of Cézannes, Matisse. In front of one of these canvases, a depiction of a house next to a creek and a field, stands De Niro. His blue dress shirt, top button open,

harmonizes with the swaths of blue, yellow and green in the painting. Morning sun shines through a nearby window, and the 70-year-old actor stands, eyes closed, seeming almost perfectly at peace. A photographer is snapping pictures, and he will later remark with pleasure and some surprise at how accommodating De Niro is, how much time he gives to the photo shoot. It becomes less of a surprise that the actor, normally reticent with the press, seems so relaxed and generous during this harrying process when one realizes that he's doing this in the name of the man who painted those artworks on the wall: his father.

This month, HBO airs a documentary De Niro made about his father, *Remembering the Artist: Robert De Niro, Sr.* It's a touching piece of work, a 40-minute film that tells the story of an artist and man who had great talent but who perhaps found himself living in the wrong era, whose gifts were less appreciated than they should have been.

"My original intention with the documentary was just to do something for the family to have," De Niro says. "That was it. And then somebody asked me, Should we show it to HBO? And they were interested, so it just all progressed."

De Niro Sr. was a preternaturally gifted artist to whom success came quickly. At the age of 23, he placed paintings in the fall 1945 exhibition at Peggy Guggenheim's renowned Art of This Century gallery, alongside pieces by such luminaries as Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko. The following year, he had a solo show at Art of This Century. His work was well received by critics, who included him in the wave of New York-based Abstract Expressionists that was taking over the art world.

Unfortunately, the good times ended nearly as suddenly as they began. By the time of that solo show, De Niro Sr. had already left his wife and three-year-old son, in part because he was gay. He wrote in his journal at the time, "If God doesn't want me to be a homosexual, about which I have so much guilt, he will find a woman who I will love and who will love me, or at least create an interest in me in women as sexual partners." While De Niro Sr.'s wife knew about his struggle with his sexuality, his son didn't become aware of it until much later.

"My mother mentioned it one day before she passed away," says De Niro, who maintained a strong bond with his father and saw him frequently—often for trips to the movies—despite his parents' separation. People had refrained from telling him about his father's homosexuality when he was younger, he says, because "they didn't want to say anything, because they didn't know what I knew."

Perhaps worse for De Niro Sr. than the personal turmoil were the problems he faced with his work. In the late '40s and early '50s, art world tastes moved more and more toward the abstract—Pollock's drip paintings, Rothko's rectangles—while he produced paintings that were more figurative, influenced by earlier French masters like Matisse and Pierre Bonnard.

"You've got an artist who was obviously extremely promising right out of the starting gate, and people loved his work and people continued to love his work," says Megan Fox Kelly, the art advisor to De Niro Sr.'s estate. "But there was a shift in the art world, where everybody was very focused on a certain type of painting, and anything that wasn't about that really was on the margins."

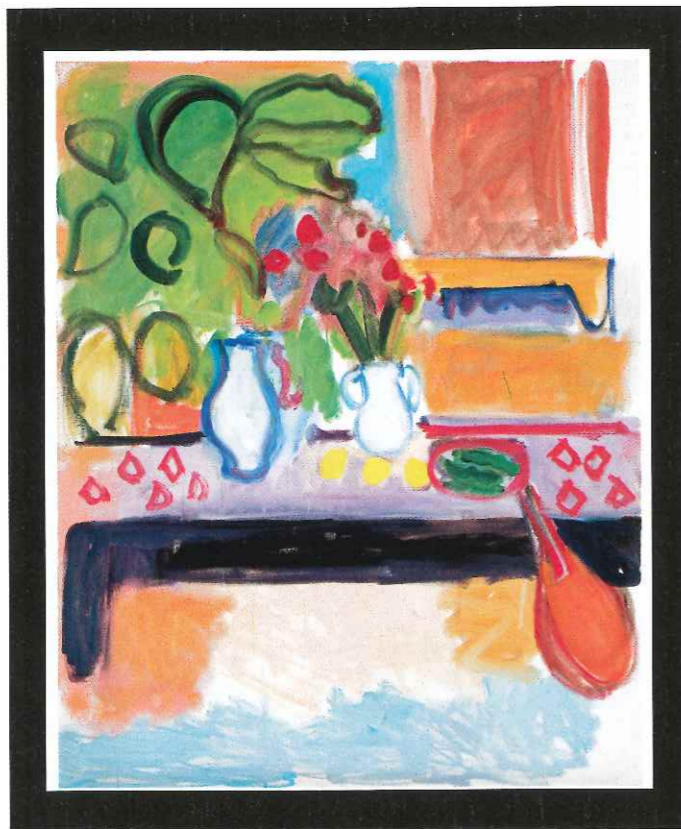
De Niro Sr. continued to get shows at various galleries, though not as frequently or profitably as some of his contemporaries, and he often battled with gallery owners. His son witnessed these struggles up close.

"I remember when I was younger, I would go with him to an art gallery—we'd have to collect money for one of his works," De Niro says. "These people, somewhere uptown, the husband had owned a soup company, so they had stacks of dried soup, and they handed that to him, as like a Christmas present. They could have wrapped it at least."

In the early '60s, when Pop Art became in vogue, De Niro Sr. decided to move to France in the hope that he would flourish in the place where so

many artists he admired had lived and worked. But he didn't find success there, either, and fell into a deep depression.

The younger De Niro had never been drawn to painting—"I think he tried to get me to pose for him at times, and I really just was not patient enough to sit," he says—but he was devoted to his father, and determined to help him out. At one point, he went so far as to travel to Paris and carry an armload of paintings from gallery to gallery along the Left Bank in an attempt to solicit interest—unheard of in the art world. Sadly, even this gambit failed, and eventually De Niro talked his father into returning to New York. >



FINAL MARKS Robert De Niro Sr., "Last Painting," 1985–1993, oil on canvas



FAMILY TIES From top: Father and son circa 1983; De Niro Sr. in his studio circa 1980

COURTESY DC MOORE GALLERY. COPYRIGHT ESTATE OF ROBERT DE NIRO SR./ARSNY (PAINTING)

As De Niro the painter struggled for recognition, De Niro the actor began his meteoric ascent, scoring the roles—*Mean Streets*, *The Godfather: Part II*, *Taxi Driver*—that made him a star. One might think that coming from an artistic family predisposed De Niro toward this path, but the actor doesn't see it that way. "Kids from all backgrounds, whose parents are from all walks, want to be an actor, a writer, a painter," he says. "They could come from the most unartistic background and wind up becoming an artist or creating something, but that's probably the reason they wanted to—because they wanted to get away from whatever that was. My parents maybe were more of that, especially my father."

Of course, De Niro couldn't help but absorb certain aspects of his father's character, even if it was unintentional. The artist painted and painted—he wrote in his journal that he "had to have the strength to continue working without the thought of recognition, either before or after death"—and was extremely intense in his process, losing himself in the canvas. Surely we see echoes of this intensity in the son's frighteningly charged method portrayals of Travis Bickle, Jake LaMotta and Al Capone.

"It wasn't like I said, 'My father's an intense artist, so I'm gonna be an intense actor,'" De Niro says. "I saw just by how much work he had done that he was committed to it,

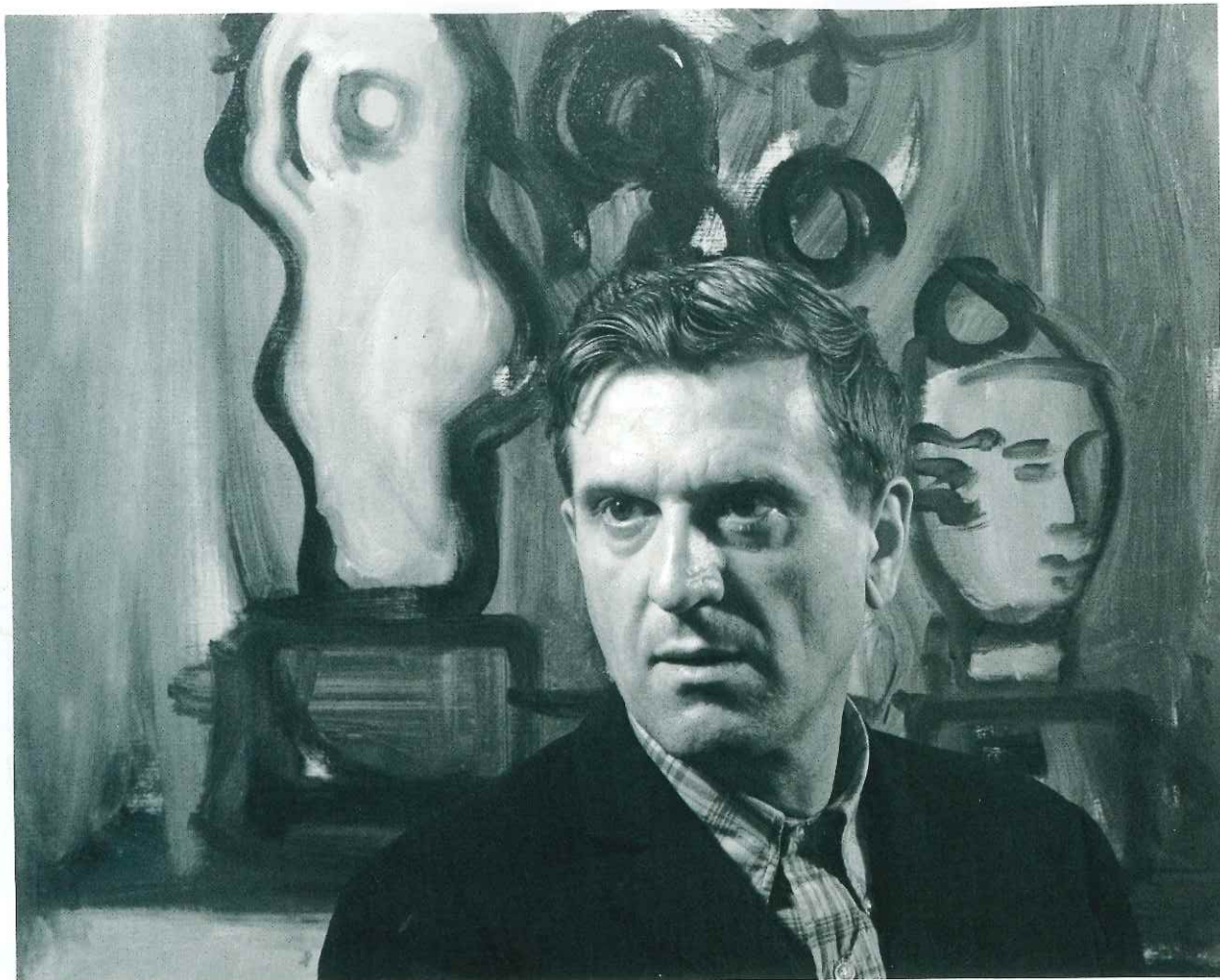
and he worked hard. That's what I saw, his focus on the canvas. I've seen some footage where he's very intense painting or drawing, and that I was impressed with."

**"IT WASN'T
LIKE I SAID,
'MY FATHER'S
AN INTENSE
ARTIST, SO
I'M GONNA BE
AN INTENSE
ACTOR.'"**

There are other, more explicit indications of the father's effect on the son's work. The actor's directorial debut, *A Bronx Tale*, came out in 1993, less than six months after his father's death from cancer at the age of

71. The film, which is dedicated to De Niro Sr., tells the story of Calogero, an adolescent who comes of age in the turbulent Bronx of the 1960s with two paternal figures: one his actual dad, a bus driver (played by De Niro) committed to the straight-and-narrow path, the other a neighborhood gangster, Sonny (Chazz Palminteri), who serves as a charming but hard-edged mentor. The film closes with a voiceover in which Calogero tells what the two men taught him: "I learned to give love and get love unconditionally. ... And I learned the greatest gift of all: The saddest thing in life is wasted talent, and the choices that you make will shape your life forever." >





A SERIOUS MAN De Niro Sr. standing in front of one of his paintings in 1966

It's easy to see in De Niro's efforts to preserve his father's work and legacy the unconditional love spoken of in *A Bronx Tale*, and how that love manifests itself in part as a desire to avoid the stigma of "wasted talent." De Niro's father produced hundreds of paintings in his life, and the actor continues to work diligently to track down as many of them as he can.

"As busy as he is, he always wants to know what's going on," Kelly says. "He wants to be a part of every decision. He's completely passionate about his father's work. He is completely committed to promoting the legacy of this artist."

I AM not an art critic. I can look at the work of Robert De Niro Sr., those huge, bright paintings that adorn the walls of the Tribeca Grill, the free-flowing charcoal line drawings hanging in Locanda Verde next door, and tell you that I think they're beautiful. But I can't tell you why they're not in the galleries at MoMA or the Whitney.

"Things are what they are," De Niro says. "They're not always fair, and I'm not saying it like they weren't fair to my father. It's just, that's what life is."

De Niro admits that he's not an art critic, either. Nor does he claim that looking at his father's paintings helps him understand the man better. "I'd like to say I do, but I

can't," he says. "All I know is that my father was a real artist, a great artist, and the only one—I'm partial of course—that I really care about. Of course, I respect all the other great works of art, but I always knew my father's work was special."

As Calogero says in *A Bronx Tale*, the choices we make shape us forever—beyond our passing, even. De Niro Sr. may not have received his due during his lifetime, but he chose to continue painting, nearly up until the day he died, producing a body of work that lives on. What's more, while it surely would have been easy for an artist who saw the canon slip away from him to feel resentment of his son for being lionized, he chose instead to always be supportive.

"He was proud of me," says De Niro, who returned the feeling: "I'd always go to his shows. I supported him, I'd bring my grandmother, and other family members would come. It was this thing for years."

That devotion to family remains in place today, and is the reason why De Niro chose to keep one of his father's old studios in Soho. "I wanted [my children] to see what their grandfather did, get a real sense of what it was," he says.

That's why De Niro made the documentary, why he did this interview and photo shoot and why he still owns that studio. He's keeping his father alive. ☺