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ART REVIEW

From an Observer Who Misses Little, Lavish Details

By [BENJAMIN GENOCCHIO](#)

One of the things you immediately notice about Andrew Stevovich's paintings is the old-fashioned subject matter. The scenes of couples playing cards, dancing in formal dress at a ball, or smoking and drinking in a nightclub while watching a cabaret show suggest an artist whose world view is firmly rooted in the past.

Here and there in the more than 75 paintings and drawings assembled for his first museum retrospective at the [Hudson River Museum](#), Mr. Stevovich, who lives in Northborough, Mass., offers hints of the contemporary world around him. In one painting a cellphone rests on a table in a cafe next to an ashtray, while in another work, also a cafe scene, a woman works on a laptop computer. But over all these pictures ooze nostalgia.

The hair and clothing of the figures in his paintings recall the styles of the 1950s. Men are dressed in suits, often pinstriped and with short, narrow ties, while the women wear 1950s pencil or swing skirts, often accessorized with pearls, hats and high heels. Pastels predominate, in the color of the clothing and the décor of the interiors.

Writing in the catalog, Bartholomew F. Bland, the curator of the exhibition, outlines how the artist's background informs his work. Born in 1948 in Austria and raised in Washington, Mr. Stevovich grew up visiting the [National Gallery of Art](#), where, it helps to know, he developed very early an appreciation for the

works of Italian Renaissance painters, in particular their use of well-defined colors and full, stylized figures. His own figures are similarly colorful and stylized, so much so that individual faces and figures seem to repeat from one picture to the next.

Or maybe it is just that his faces have a very specific look. They have almond-shaped eyes, akin to the eyes on the faces of the figures in the paintings of [Pablo Picasso](#), another important and obvious influence on the artist. Then there are the sensuous lips, full and colored light red, along with a particular and unusual kind of nose that in profile resembles the shape of a ski jump. It is especially noticeable on the women.

Technically, Mr. Stevovich looks to the Renaissance artists, for their precise and delicate finishing. Each of his paintings is rendered with great care, the artist lavishing effort and concern on every line and detail, no matter how seemingly small and insignificant.

Take, for instance, “Twenty-One” (1984), an important early painting showing a group of men and women in formal attire seated and standing around a card table. Cards are laid out face up on the luminous red velvet table, along with piles of chips. But it is the seemingly casual glances of the figures that are the real subject of this work, with each person watching another without wanting to seem as if they are doing so.

Nearby is “Popcorn” (2008), a new major work on public view here for the first time. It shows a group of young people milling about a concession stand that is selling buckets of popcorn and soft drinks inside a movie theater, the back wall plastered with posters of gangsters and lovers.

As in many of Mr. Stevovich’s paintings, “Popcorn” includes a figure at one edge of the canvas who somehow appears to be aware of the viewer looking at him — he stares right at us. This adds an interesting, unexpected psychological dimension to the work, while at the same time returning to a certain history of illusion and fantasy in art, especially in Renaissance painting, where such visual trickery is quite common.

With people and objects seemingly frozen in time and space, Mr. Stevovich's paintings seem static. The figures don't look real, as if they are part of a past disassociated from the present; this makes any social criticism and commentary impossible. And yet the paintings delight through a modesty that is always fascinated with the way things look, down to their simplest details. Mr. Stevovich is a keen observer, even if it is of a world that we do not always recognize as our own.

“Andrew Stevovich: The Truth About Lola,” Hudson River Museum, 511 Warburton Avenue, Yonkers, through Jan. 11. Information: (914) 963-4550 or hrm.org.



FACES ATop, “Popcorn” (2008), and “Twenty-One” (1984), both oil on linen, by Andrew Stevovich.