

Wallace's images the art of real life

It's liberating to paint people you don't know

Gilbert Bouclair



As an experiment, Wallace decided to deliberately eschew taking his own reference photographs, striving to keep as much distance between himself and his portraits as possible.

An exhibit of nine of these unusual portraits is on display in the ProjEX Room at Latitude 53 Gallery.

For subject matter in this unique approach to figure work — given that he's decided not to work with models or images he had directly taken — he's dipping into the large collection of photographs he's been hoarding for years, as well as photos and rolls of film given to him by his artist friends, and even images he finds at yard sales or lying in the street.

One of the first paintings he produced in the series is an image of a child sitting on a dentist's chair that Wallace's studiomate found in a dumpster.

"I can't tell you how exciting it is for me to walk down the street and see a photograph lying face down in front of me. There's a real excitement as I turn it over to see if it's an image I can use," he says, adding that he's always loved painting figures and portraits and has done so since he first started drawing at the ten-

der age of five.

"In a way it's almost as if I'm archiving these discarded photo images, saving them for the future," Wallace says, noting that he picks his final images out of hundreds of potential photos in his ever-expanding collection.

Now several years into his experiment, Wallace has discovered that "separating the image from its immediate context" and the emotional connections associated with painting subjects he knows, allows him great freedom to concentrate on what makes the best picture and not what would make the person in the image feel comfortable.

Many of the images Wallace focuses on are subjects who in some way radiate a sense of isolation, loneliness or unease, traits the painter can happily push to their logical extremes.

One of the most powerful images in the show — "Do Not Discard," a poignant picture of a young woman lying peacefully on a hospital bed — was a real compositional challenge for Wallace. The portrait artist was able to happily fuss with angles, perspective and abstract issues — for example, whether or not he



Campbell Wallace is displaying 'photo surrealism' paintings at Latitude 53.

should paint the picture's blurred subject in focus or leave her as she was in the original photo — as opposed to being caught up in the usual muddle of emotions you face when someone you know is in the hospital.

"I'm also free to play with the weird symbolic elements that come out when I paint an image, or I can do things like play with the negative space and push people to the periphery of the painting."

PREVIEW

Campbell Wallace's "Distant"

Showing at: Latitude 53 Gallery ProjEX Room, second floor, 10248 106th St.
 Until: May 7. Meet the artist at the opening reception, today at 8 p.m.