

## Mark Greenwold's 'Secret Storm'

By Robert Shuster Tuesday, Mar 30 2010



Courtesy DC Moore Gallery, NY

The Rembrandt of tan lines? Greenwold's *Seattle Apartment*, 1969

A novelist's relatively meager production—a single work every year, at best—would seem to have no equivalent in visual arts, where careers depend on a broad, brand-name presence. But for Mark Greenwold, a writer's painter if ever there was one, deliberation has become a trademark. Best known for rich tableaux of surreal, domestic tension (typically not much bigger than a sheet of paper), Greenwold assembles his scenes one tiny stroke of color at a time, peering through a jeweler's loupe and fussing over some sections for months.

Still, that's nothing compared to the four years Greenwold took to finish *Bright Promise*, the extraordinary centerpiece in an exhibit that surveys the painter's rarely seen efforts from the late 1960s and early '70s. In those days of swinger circles, the artist was filling his canvases, most quite large, with sex. Working in acrylic, Greenwold, a classicist at heart, created candy-colored interiors that play off old master studies in perspective, then added stylized figures who loll around, nude or provocatively posed, with Balthus-like disengagement. But when he turned to oil, first in the *Playboy*-like fantasy *Secret Storm*, flesh met flesh in eye-popping photorealism. You won't find a more stimulating work, sexual or visual, than *Bright Promise*: On the floor of a hallucinogenically colored bedroom, a young man mouths the breast of a naked redhead while a lithe, vampirish brunette undresses to join the fun. The details—wall shadows, tchochkes, tan lines—are astonishing (the chenille bedspread alone required a year), and the sense of imminent drama (present in all of the artist's work) is thrilling. Greenwold has fulfilled his own bright promise many times, even for a guy who's in no hurry.