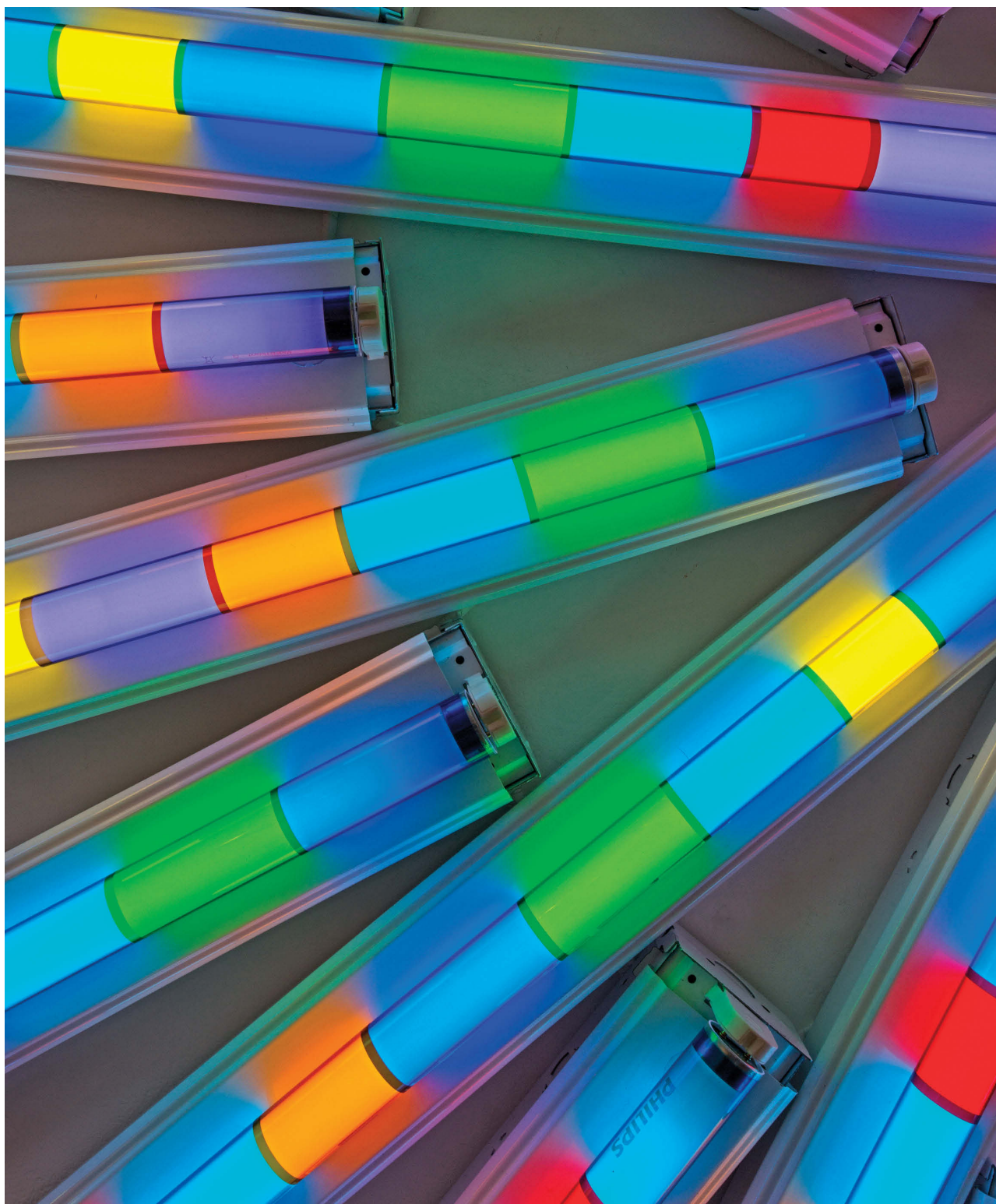


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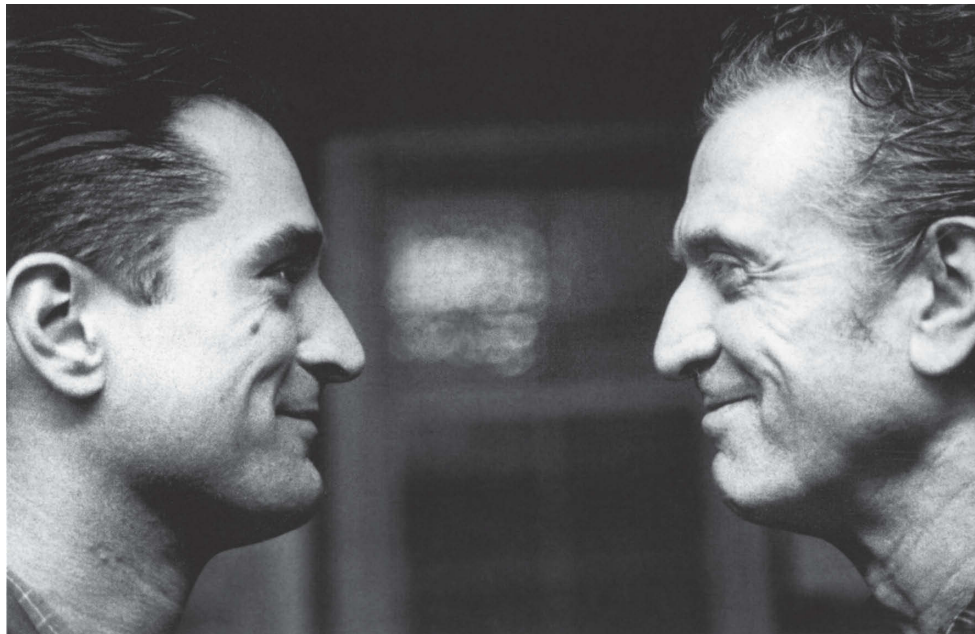
**Spencer Finch Follows the Light • Learning from Cézanne's Apples
Tips on Facing a Blank Canvas • The Paradox of Black Abstraction**

Now Starring: De Niro Sr.

Robert De Niro Jr. knows that his father was proud of his acting success, but there was also some resentment once **Robert De Niro Sr.**'s painting career was eclipsed by his son's fame.

"He was the real thing, my father," the actor says in *Remembering the Artist: Robert De Niro, Sr.*, a documentary that airs on HBO this month. "I see his work. I see how dedicated he was. He was to me a great artist. But you can never impose that on people." What you can do is enlighten them, a task Robert Jr. and codirectors **Perri Peltz** and **Geeta Gandbhir** aim to achieve in their film.

Born in Syracuse, New York, in 1922, De Niro Sr. studied under **Josef Albers** at Black Mountain College in North Carolina and at **Hans Hofmann's** 8th Street school in New York. While still in his 20s, De Niro Sr. found early success in the New York gallery scene. His 1945 solo show at **Peggy**



Actor Robert De Niro Jr. and his father, painter Robert De Niro Sr.

Guggenheim's Art of This Century gallery earned praise from critic **Clement Greenberg**, who wrote that the painter's "first show exhibits monumental effects rare in abstract art." A 1951 exhibition at Charles Egan Gallery prompted this magazine's editor at the time, **Thomas B. Hess**, to rank De Niro Sr.

"among the best of the younger artists to have emerged from anonymity."

Though he exhibited alongside the Abstract Expressionists, De Niro Sr. was a figurative painter, sticking to traditional themes like female nudes, still lifes of fruit and flowers, and portraits of family members and his pet parrot. **Pierre Bonnard** and **Henri Matisse** were obvious influences, although De Niro Sr.'s hand was looser, his figures less defined. This left him on the margins of art history, especially once **Andy Warhol**, **Roy Lichtenstein**, and **Ellsworth Kelly** ushered in the '60s and pushed aside expressive gestures. Where De Niro Sr. once was too French, now he was too painterly.

Remembering the Artist also explores the painter's complicated personal life. De Niro Sr. was married to artist **Virginia Admiral**, whom he'd met at Hofmann's school. The couple lived a bohemian downtown lifestyle even after the birth

of Robert Jr. in 1943, and they counted **Anaïs Nin** and **Tennessee Williams** among their close friends. But De Niro Sr. moved out of the house while his son was still a toddler, and the artist struggled to come to terms with his sexuality.

His journal entries, read by Robert Jr. in the documentary, reveal a conflicted man: "Being a painter is an affection, like being a homosexual. One had to have the strength to continue working without the thought of recognition either before or after death, just as one had to have the strength to accept life alone without the thought of a romantic attachment."

De Niro Sr. died of cancer in 1993, but the filmmakers hope he will be remembered alongside **Jackson Pollock**, **Willem de Kooning**, **Franz Kline**, and **Mark Rothko**. "I feel it's my obligation to kind of document what he did, to keep it going," says the son. "The whole reason to do it is for my father."

—**Keith Plocek**



De Niro Sr.'s *Three Women*, 1968, oil on canvas.

TOP: ANGELO INOVI; BOTTOM: COURTESY THE ESTATE OF ROBERT DE NIRO, SR. AND DC MOORE GALLERY, NEW YORK