

**S**hirley Gorelick opens the door and we enter. The weight of the sight of the smoking man tips the room toward his far corner. He is casually sitting there, open, familiar, staring at me. He is smoking and looking and smoking. She shuts the door behind us, turns on more light, slips a larger portrait over the one of the smoking man, and we talk.

Not all the portraits have such presence. The five larger-than-life portraits in this show are views of and into two of Gorelick's friends: husband and wife. She has known them for a good part of her life. They are part of her life and she wants to get to them and get into them. They are both psychiatrists; they look related. As in her past portraits, Gorelick chooses different views of the same person and makes a group of one person, or she makes one person from a group. Either way it is different views of one.

In *Boris and Libby*, a 1973 portrait of Boris covered with mustache and beard and white shirt, beside Libby his nude wife, their features almost match. Their expressions are as intense as their focus. Boris and Libby in *Family I*, seated above seated daughter and son, make a pattern relat-

ed to squares on the floor. Here are four corners of the same character: different age, sex, face of the same essence from different climates of moods—different stages of anger and humor, from adolescent discontent to distanced adult glint.

The 1976 sisters are different. Three adolescent sisters on their back lawn are three pairs of selves, each robed and unrobed, in a related but unrelating group of six. In each posed but unpoised pair, we see youth but not innocence. Stomachs and breasts sag with no pretense at cosmetic stance. Each self standing beside a self is a parallel play of I's unattending each other's existence: one-dimensional identity whose lack of self-consciousness seems to stem from lack of consciousness of self. They exist as subjects with no sense of being objects. The tight-knit plants against and in which they stand metaphorically close down any dimension between background and floor. There is no space, separation, or distance between what they stand on and what they stand before.

The present series, five portraits of Dr. Tess Forrest and Dr. Joseph Barnett, was begun

in 1980. Now the subjects are dressed and seated up close. No matter where you stand, their eyes bore into you. Middle-aged, middle class, seated in attitudes that have as much to do with their profession as with their character, nothing quirky hooks your interest. And that is what *is* of interest. We are in their inner rooms. Surrounded by their books and objects, they are seated together or alone as if we have come to them; the open position of their arms, the crossed legs, the innuendos in facial expression, the nuances in their direct stares seem to receive and give, to conceal and reveal. Convention is bodied with substance.

"To get it right," "specific," to get the "turn" of the face, to "fill the room with light in order not to let light flatten space," "to get all the dimension," "to get it exactly the way it is" in order "not to lose the person," as if there is an "isness." All this entails the subjects' sitting for sculptures, silverpoints (which are included in the show), drawings, and photographs (which are to be least trusted). "I'll do anything, use everything I can get."

The important thing is to expand the technical to encom-

pass what she knows. Technical knowledge and experience, art history and theory, are what she has been teaching for 25 years. The same intuition about people that feeds her portraits feeds her teaching. She has helped others pick up beginning threads of their style and founded one of the first women's cooperative galleries.

She feels she is always beginning. In an effort to get at it, she is moving in. The Forrest-Barnetts are the closest close-ups she has attempted, the deepest she has entered into an inner room. Using all she can glean from the Old Masters, experimenting all the way, fusing old techniques with new, she is always discovering. Color, like the characters, is ostensibly clear and true to flesh, dress, and objects. Yet color, like people, is complex. Each canvas is first painted with a base blue or pink against which color strokes combat in order to self-define. Within each molecule of flesh is a sea of strokes that create motion within shape. Every gesture of a feature most true to the subject involves a complex of large and small gestural imprints by the artist. The space is composed of carefully arranged planes that recede with texture or scumbling to create a sense of three-dimensionality.

In skin there are turns of the flesh, crevices that have to do with facial gesture and age: gestures within features, contours within planes. To make them real, "to paint people the way they really are," each subject is self-contained. Visually they hold up as identities among the book- and object-filled shelves and within the space of the chair and room. Together, as a couple on a couch, the patterns of their elbows and knees simulate organically the herringbone tweed they are seated on. But unlike the tweed, they remain separate as they touch: subjective objects, objective subjects.

Gorelick walks up to the 9-foot monochromatic triptych of Tess, the most experimental, least successful, but as yet unfinished work. She turns toward me, her face beside the three. "See, she is larger than life." The triptych becomes a polyptych. (SoHo 20, April 3-28)

**Barbara Flug Colin**

## SHIRLEY GORELICK

Shirley Gorelick, Dr. Joseph Barnett, 1980. Oil on canvas, 8 x 40". Courtesy SoHo 20 Gallery.

