

Giro bobs up with a new technic

An Interview by Ernest W. Watson

GUY ROWE (GIRO) is an artist who can't let well enough alone. He has an itchy imagination. He is forever searching for new methods of expression—and forever finding them. The new technic he has recently stumbled upon is full of exciting possibilities for the experimentally minded. This is the first time it has been made public.

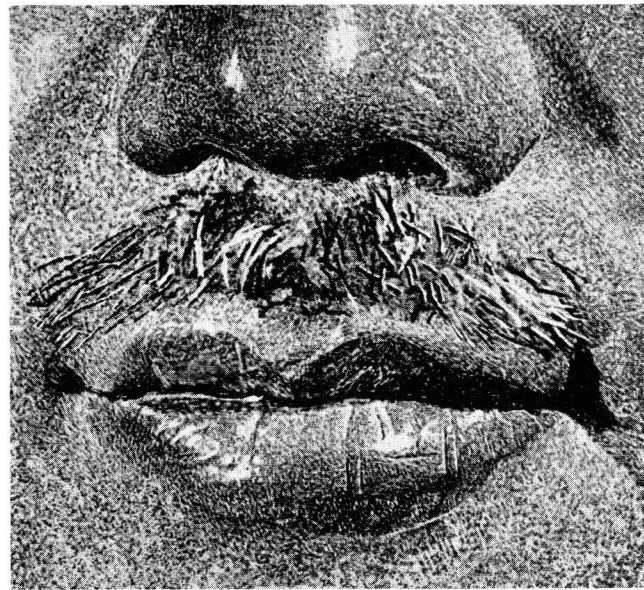
Several years ago Giro was well-known in the advertising art world. For fifteen years he painted those exquisite "Jello" still lifes which many will remember seeing in the mass magazines. In this kind of thing Giro had no peer and it took color photography to finally elbow him out.

He didn't mind a bit. He had made a pretty penny



on this Jello account—among others—and he was really glad to escape the tyranny of deadlines and have opportunity for experimentation and research. He had got interested in encaustic painting, the almost forgotten art of the ancients: the art of fixing colors permanently by means of wax and heat. It is the most enduring method of painting known to man, and examples in the museums, thousands of years old, look as fresh and full-colored as though just painted. Giro took a six-year vacation to delve into the technical problems of encaustic and he succeeded in producing some remarkably beautiful paintings in this medium. That, however, is not the subject of this article. Perhaps he will tell us about encaustic at another time, particularly about encaustic prints, something entirely new which he and Corinne Finsterwald (Mrs. Rowe) developed and have exhibited in several "two-man" shows.

It is the latest of his technical discoveries—grease drawing and painting on plastic—which he is demonstrating for us here. This new technic, like so many



This portrait of Chiang Kai-shek was drawn by Giro on a thin sheet of cellophane, with black and tan grease crayons. The detail, above, is reproduced exact size to show the remarkable technical treatment obtained by "engraving" on the grease crayon with a sharp point, much in the manner of scratchboard technic.

processes and practices in common use today, was stumbled upon by accident. We are reminded, for example, of the discovery of lithography—another grease medium. It was in 1796 that Alois Senefelder scribbled a laundry list on a slab of limestone with a greasy crayon, paper not being at hand, and this began a series of experiments that led to the making of prints from a plane surface.

The possibilities of grease on plastic occurred to Giro while he was trying to find a method of painting in watercolor on this transparent substance. Let him tell it in his own words.

"I had prepared a tacky ground (varnish) on a piece of protectoid and had dusted it with a light coating of dry, white pigment to render its surface receptive to watercolor. I picked up a piece of grease crayon in order to indicate, on the reverse side, outlines for a figure study on this protectoid. The beautiful quality of the gray lines and tones thus produced, with the grease crayon, so impressed me that I kept thinking about grease crayon technic even while I pursued my experiment with watercolor which, by the way, yielded good results.

"As soon as I could find time I began playing around with grease crayons on cellophane. I used crayons of my own manufacture, but china-marking crayons or lithograph crayons serve very well.

"When I turned my drawings face down on white paper their unique quality became apparent. I discovered that I could work into the crayon tones with the point of my penknife blade in the manner of scratchboard and, with the edge of the blade, large areas could readily be scraped away to make corrections. So long as the knife was used with a degree of gentleness it did not damage the cellophane surface.



I discovered also the infinite possibilities of textural effects through the simple expedient of slipping rough-textured surfaces, such as book linens and textured papers, under the cellophane while rendering areas needing such textures.

"One thing led to another until I arrived at the very practical device of coating the cellophane drawing with white enamel, brushing it on gently and evenly over the crayon drawing, and, after the enamel had dried to a tacky consistency, laying the cellophane—enamel side down—upon a piece of white cardboard. Thus the drawing became permanently protected both back and front. It presented a brilliant, sharp appearance and made excellent copy for reproduction processes. I was surprised to find that after allowing a considerable period for the enamel to dry thoroughly—this depends upon the kind of enamel used—the cellophane could be peeled from the face of the drawing, leaving it set permanently in the enamel with a clear, hard surface.

"The more I worked with grease on plastic the more enthusiastic I became. It proved to be very useful in working out drawings and composition problems. I made a sketchbook of protectoid sheets for outdoor sketching. Back in the studio I developed these plastic sketches and found that I could work over them as much as I desired, carrying the studies on to completion, thus saving the

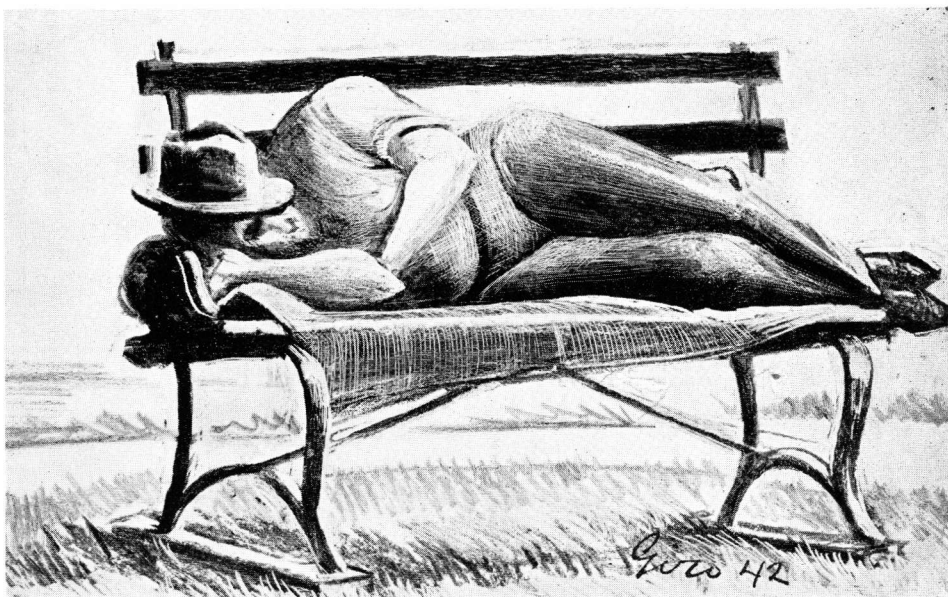
Reproduced from a color drawing in grease crayons on cellophane. One of a series of "dim-out" sketches made on Broadway by Giro.

time otherwise devoted to re-drawing on another paper from an ordinary sketchbook.

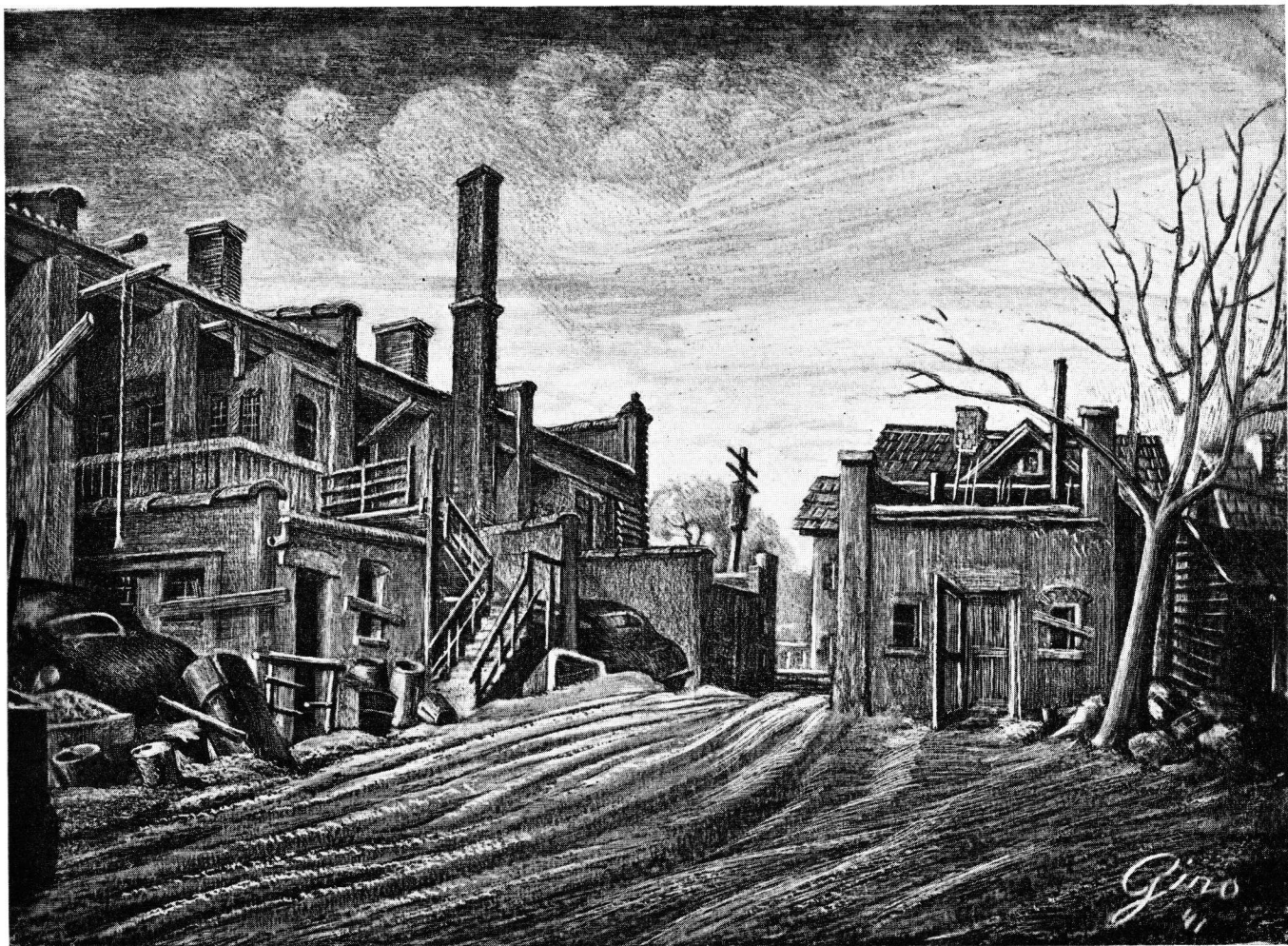
"Of course I soon began to experiment with color, using crayons of my own manufacture. Again I refer the reader to china-marking crayons which come in a sufficient variety of colors, at least for one's first experiments. One has to get used to working "backwards" in this color technic because the last colors applied will be on the back of the color film instead of its face as in the usual method of working on an opaque surface. This sounds more troublesome than it is as the color need not be thickly applied anyhow."

The accompanying illustrations give little more than a hint of effects which Giro has obtained with this new technic. Its possibilities will become apparent only as one makes his own experiments. The head of Chiang Kai-shek is rendered in two colors. The basic color is a low-toned, grayish yellow. Except for the eyes, eyebrows, mustache and occasional dark accents in black, this tan crayon—textured by engraving with a knife blade as described—rendered the entire head. The exact-size detail on page 10 demonstrates, even without color, some of the remarkable effects that are possible in this engraving-on-crayon-on-cellophane manner.

While it is not necessary to back-up all plastic drawings with white enamel, it is advisable to do so when the work is intended for reproduction; otherwise the cellophane is likely to warp and wrinkle and refuse to lie flat against a cardboard background. Unless the cellophane is in perfect contact with its background, or is painted with enamel, the engraver may have difficulty with it. Color reproduction from paintings in this technic have already been successfully made. Ernest Hamlin Baker, of whom Guy Rowe wrote in the February number, has begun to employ this technic and is enthusiastic about it. His first reproduced work in this method was a cover for the December 12th *Liberty*. Another was an illustration (a U. S. Steel Co. advertisement) depicting an American marine in Guadalcanal. This has just appeared in the February 16th issue of *Time* and in current issues of other magazines. The agency, B.B.D.&O., has reported that it is one of the few jobs that everyone in the place



This halftone reproduces at exact size a black, grease crayon drawing on charcoal.



Reproduced from a black, grease crayon drawing on cellophane, this composition by Giro exhibits a wide range of technical treatment. Some areas show scratchboard effects while others have textures secured by slipping rough textured surfaces under the drawing. The light clouds were done by scraping the crayon with the edge of a knife blade while the drawing was superimposed on a mottled book linen. Rough watercolor paper under the foreground produced a different result.

liked. Other work upon which Baker is now engaged will appear soon.

The employment of grease crayon on cellophane is but one of several technical experiments Giro has been making with plastic as a painting ground during the past few years. He paints on protectoid with ordinary artists oil colors. It is like painting on glass but with this difference, the thin plastic will not break and it can be pulled off when the painting has dried. Also some different fundamental change must take place. Oil dries first on the surface of a paint film; so in this method what will be the *back* of the film dries first instead of last as in a painting on canvas. This means, of course, that the face of the paint film (the actual surface of the painting) is protected all the time it is drying—from the time the first brush stroke is applied to the plastic. Giro does not pretend to explain the chemical or physical action involved in this reverse drying process; his experiments have been wholly concerned with visual results. He likes the method of working backwards and likes, too, the hard, clear surface of the result.

Giro is back in New York now after the years spent

in experiments on his Hampton, Connecticut, farm and in Detroit. Naturally he is applying the fruits of his experiments to commercial projects in which he is now engaged.



Portrait of Ed. Flynn, reproduced at exact size. An actual piece of cloth, laid under the cellophane, is responsible for the texture of the coat. Note the "engraved" effect of the white line technic.