

“Nazarian - An Impressionist of the Soul” by Hugon Bukowski

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I chose this rather strange and oxymoronic title because this is how Nazarian describes his own work. In his studio in North Port, Florida among many art supplies and countless paintings hangs a large crucifix with a Christ, with Bible underneath and other Christian books on shelves and on his desk. A recent visitor to the studio, the art critic Cezary Stolarczyk, notes that many of Nazarian's paintings deal with religious themes and the ascetic face of Jesus Christ can be found in many of the artist's works. This theme constitutes a very rich and impressive body of work in Nazarian's oeuvre. This Armenian born, Warsaw educated artist explains his theme of artistic inspiration in the following words: “God is creation and creativity itself. God gives us, artists, a little ray of His own light. I am blessed, and I thank God for this gift.” In today's art world such a statement is very brave and rather unique.

And it is clear that Nazarian does not try to appease anyone. Instead he explores his interests and his visions of Biblical figures and historical figures that inspire him. Among his recent paintings we can see works like: “The Return of the Prodigal Son,” “Saint Francis” or “Tobias and The Angel.” Nazarian does not model his treatment of Tobias on any previous historical representation or interpretation. On his canvas we see Tobias as a tiny little man making his way through the expansive, yellow desert with a dead fish under his arm. Walking behind Tobias, slightly larger in size, we see an Angel with blue wings.

During the exhibition, while standing in front of Nazarian's paintings, I found references to the works of Picasso. But surprisingly there is little esteem for the Cubist maverick. Instead Nazarian treats Picasso's work with distance and irony. When I mention this to Nazarian during our momentary pause in front of one painting he agrees. That in fact is his intent. Van Gogh is also another subject of Nazarian's paintings but here the artist bows down to the master impressionist treating his portrait to a central place within a triptych of other great master painters, where Rembrandt is also given such an honor. These paintings act like visual thoughts about the past. They are Nazarian's personal interpretation of the history of painting.

During Nazarian's show I managed to briefly speak with a painting teacher at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. He was surprised to find out that all these paintings were painted in the year 2009 and that they looked like they were fresh and uninhibited like the work of Art Academy students. This seeming critique of Nazarian's painting was in fact a keen observation of his approach to painting which is not concerned with crossing the still uncrossed boundaries of painting. Many well known artists appeal to their public with shock value. Nazarian is not interested in this game. His paintings seem to be visual essays about various subjects that interest the artist. In this way Nazarian's work is timeless and his visions do not age as they are not restrained by a quest for fashion.

Nazarian has crossed many boundaries in his life - geographic boundaries. He was born in Iran to Armenian parents in 1946. A year later his family moved to Armenia. In Erevan he studied in a technical college, which he completed at the age of 22. Then he began his studies at the Institute of Theatre and the Arts in Erevan which he did not

complete because he fell in love with a Polish woman Elizabeth Rutkowska who soon became his wife. Soon after the marriage he moved to Warsaw, Poland where he continued his studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw completing his MFA in the early 1970's. After living in Poland for 12 years Nazarian with his family left in 1983 and journeyed across Europe while exhibiting his work in Germany, France and Italy. The shows culminated with an exhibition on a famed ocean liner "Stefan Batory." After driving thorough the east coast of Canada the Nazarians first settled in Chicago and finally ended up in North Port, Florida. He was not forgotten in Chicago however. He had a recent show at Lloyd Shin Fine Art Gallery in Northbrook, Illinois where his works were displayed among such greats like Jean Corot, Georges Rouault, Claude Monet, Henri Matisse, Paul Klee, Georges Braque, Francis Bacon, Jackson Pollock, Mark Tobey, Karel Appel, Max Weber, Tomislav Nikolic, Ju Sung Kim, Zao Wou Ki and others.

And now Nazarian is showing his works in Warsaw at the Gallery of Katarzyna Napiorkowska, who was his first promoter and representative in Poland. After his sojourns through the world in search for freedom Nazarian returns to Poland (his second homeland) and to his "old" gallery to show the newest works done especially for this show. Mrs. Napiorkowska owns a leading gallery in Poland and was one of the first independent gallery in owners after the fall of socialism in Poland. Her gallery was robbed and destroyed at the very beginning of its independence. So both Mrs. Napiorkowska and Mr. Nazarian know the bitter-sweet taste of success as they were forced to cross numerous obstacles on their road to personal freedom, which is a primary requirement of making true art - an art that will speak to many people.

Translated and edited by Ania Nazarian