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The Art of Iszchan Nazarian

Walking into Iszchan's studio is rather disorienting. His studio is filled with such a wide verity of color from the boldest yellows to the most subtle pastels. The canvases also seem to investigate a wide variety of themes from interesting juxtapositions of famous historical figures to images from Iszchan's childhood in Armenia. But despite varied subject matter all the canvases are expressive and painted with bold strokes, almost hurried strokes – as if to capture the image with its most immediate freshness as it develops in the mind.

Iszchan is a prolific artist and he works rapidly. He explains, "My ideas come quickly and over a period of days. I am not able to work in the studio for the sake of doing something. I work when inspiration overwhelms me." His sketchbooks are filled with ideas that prefigured the final paintings. These are quick sketches, sometimes with a little color added. His final paintings are not copies of sketches, however. In their final form the canvases take on a life of their own and the sketches are transformed, sometimes completely, during the process of painting.

Some of the canvases are more impressionistic yet still bold with luminous colors. There seem to be few if any still life studies or depictions of naturalistic imagery. Despite this Iszchan's work is grounded in reality of his past, in his ideas about creation both spatial and temporal and in his intense spirituality.



Many of his works are about his childhood, which he considers to be the most beautiful time of life. He tries to depict the vision of a world as seen through a child's eyes. Not surprisingly some of these canvases emanate a feeling of nostalgia and a longing for a return to the blissful state of innocence. These are often images of children swimming in a river. A small figure in an overwhelming landscape filled with bright colors. These appear like stills in a movie – they are moments brought back from the past.

Another extensive body of recent work explores the notion of creation and of creativity. On many canvases Iszchan juxtaposes famous artists or famous classical composers. He usually has them facing each other on a canvas. In this way he forces, for example, Van Gogh and Rembrandt to look at each other. The artists remain still and silent – they do not make any gesture towards each other. This lack of communication is telling. As artists they create alone and they are separated from each other by time- sometimes centuries. The story of art history brings them together, categorizes them and explains them. On his canvases Iszchan removes them from a chronological context of history and gives them a place of their own, just to be and possibly to converse, if they wish.

After contemplating this theme in Iszchan's oeuvre, there is another body of work that also demands attention in the studio. These are expressionistic figurative paintings of a person in nature. "It is St. Francis," Iszchan explains. He is depicted within bright landscapes and with animals accompanying him. Sometimes he appears transparent as if it was not the Saint being painted but an essence of him or a state of his being that remains mystical.



Iszchan's studio is filled with his works. Paintings are stacked in a few areas of the studio. Tapestries designed and woven by him, hang on some of the walls. Hand-made wooden sculptures of Jesus Christ and The Virgin Mary line one corner of the studio, creating an impromptu altar. Classical music is always playing when he is working; usually Beethoven, Bach or Mozart but sometimes vocal compositions of Palestrina or of Hildegard von Bingen.

The artist's studio leaves a lasting impression on a person who emerges from it as if from another world. One is left with a lightheaded feeling and colors still marked on the retina of the eyes. His paintings, sculptures and tapestries are vivid and unforgettable.

Personal History

Not long after Iszchan was born in Sultanabad, Iran his Armenian parents decided to move to Erevan, Armenia. Iszchan's father, a chemical engineer, was offered a job at a paint factory in Erevan. The family soon grew to include 9 children and life became more challenging in Soviet occupied Armenia.

Iszchan speaks of his childhood as a time of poverty and hunger but also as a time of innocence, beauty and friendship. In grade school he was not favored as a pupil since he did not devote much time to study. In fact his notebooks were filled with drawings and scribbles rather than homework assignments. Art was consistently the only class that he excelled in. Despite Iszchan's artistic inclinations he completed the Technical Institute of Electronic Machines in Erevan. He did not continue on this path, however, and after trying his hand in a broad range of jobs including barber and bricklayer in 1968 he enrolled at the Academy of Fine and Theatrical Arts in Erevan.

While still an art student, Iszchan met his future wife through a mutual friend. Elizabeth is Polish and upon their marriage the couple settled near Warsaw in Poland. Iszchan continued his studies at the Warsaw Academy of Art, which he completed with a Masters degree in the faculty of painting and tapestry making in the year 1974. He began to exhibit his works in Poland and in other European countries. Quickly his talent was recognized and reviews of his works were favorable, even enthusiastic.

In 1983 the Nazarian family (including wife Elizabeth and two daughters) emigrated to the USA. They first settled and lived in Chicago, Illinois. Within two months of arrival, the family received permanent resident status in the USA due to Iszchan's impressive artistic resume and portfolio. In the year 2000 the Nazarian's moved to North Port, Florida. It is in the provincial sun drenched Florida that Iszchan admits he feels like a child again. The beauty of nature and the warmth of the sun give him energy and joy. But nature is not the ultimate force that inspires him. Iszchan credits God with all his artistic and personal accomplishments. With a subtle smile and assuredness of voice he explains, "God is creation and creativity itself. God gives us artists a little ray of his own light. I am lucky and I thank God for this gift."

Iszchan's work can be seen in his studio in Warm Mineral Springs: 207 Ortiz Blvd. – Please call to make an appointment. Telephone (941) 426-7559 Website: www.nazarianart.com

by Ania Nazarian.