

North Port artist eschews marketing in pursuit of life

ART from 1B

sion of talent which sometimes dupes even sophisticated art critics," wrote Soviet-era critic Henryk Igitian of Nazarian's work. "But Iszchan has great talent and his name will soon be known to all."

That was in 1972, and Nazarian's name is not known to all, though his paintings are on exhibit at the Lloyd Shin Gallery in Illinois and he has a Web site, www.nazarianart.com.

The paintings, some almost mural-size, are conceptual and their symbolism, especially when it comes to the buying and selling of art, can be harsh. One features the art dealer as a donkey, another a portrait of Rembrandt looking down on art buyers depicted as cartoonish dolls. It is not likely to ingratiate him with buyers.

"Many people, they don't like truth," Iszchan said in his broken English. "They like a nice lie."

Honesty in art is paramount to Iszchan — more important than money, despite hundreds of thousands in mortgage debt, tenants who don't always pay and diminishing value of the real estate that is his

family's nest egg.

"I'm not a conformist," he said of his approach to art. "I do my job. I do what I like."

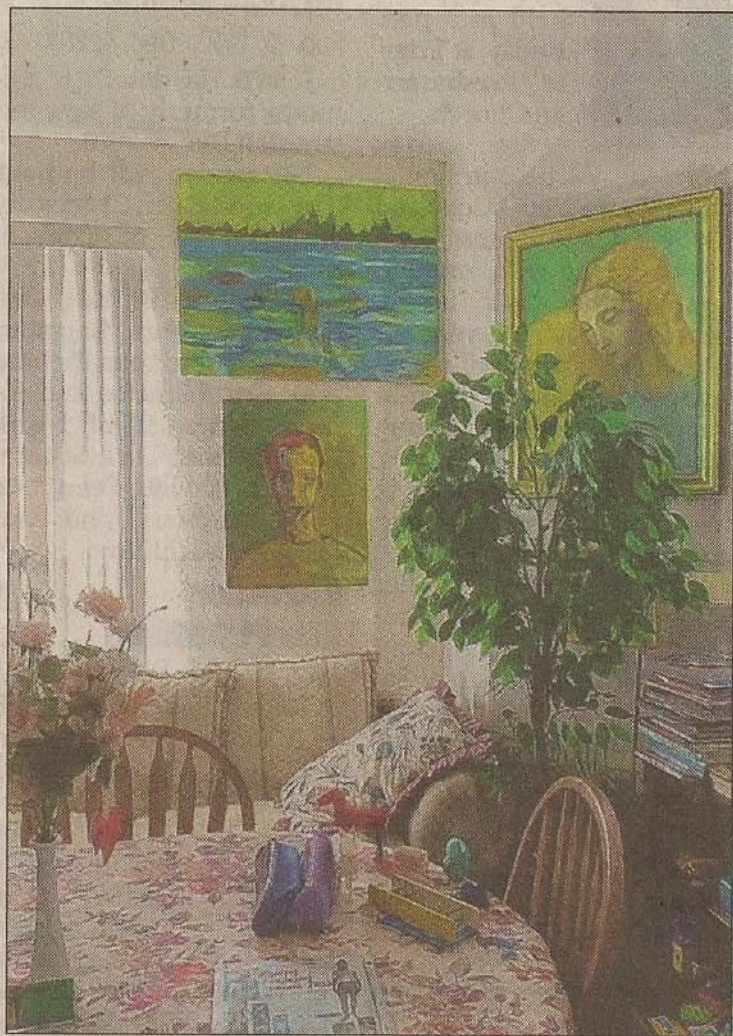
Yet he remains upbeat. His family eats a lot of fish that Iszchan catches at Venice's South Jetty. Last week it was bluefish Iszchan fried in batter and served with potatoes and cucumbers he pickles himself. He says almost any fish is good to eat, as long as it is fresh.

"It's a tough time for artists right now, very tough," he acknowledges.

But he purposely ignores the art marketplace. Prices for his work are as uncompromising as the artist. Created for their own sake with no regard for whether they will sell, the pieces are priced as high as \$15,000 to \$20,000. He has a large tapestry in the studio he says is worth \$100,000.

It took him three months to make and sits, buyerless, in the studio.

No matter. Iszchan and his family, all devout Catholics, have cultivated a lifestyle focused on non-monetary rewards, evidenced by both his growing art cache and Elizabeth's uncompensated hours raising money for the nonprofit she found-



Art covers nearly every wall in the home of Iszchan Nazarian, an Iranian-born Armenian immigrant who came to the United States from Poland in 1983. STAFF PHOTO / E. SKYLAR LITHELAND

ed in 1992, Direct Help to Eastern Europe. The organization collects a small amount from coin jars placed at businesses around North Port, supplemented by a few thousand dollars a year in donations each year from two or three sponsors.

The money goes directly to orphanages in Poland. Collections are off by about \$5,000 this year.

"Now people don't give as much because they just

don't have the money," said daughter Ania, a part-time teacher at Ringling College of Art and Design who volunteers as secretary.

The family's devotion to far-away orphans and art that doesn't sell is centered in a deep Christian conviction that informs both the painting and the charity work.

"You will take not money to heaven," said Elizabeth. "Only the help you give other people."