

January 24, 2009

The spontaneity of Vera Arutyunyan

A late-blooming painter makes her mark on the art world

by Shahane Martirosyan

LOS ANGELES – Vincent Van Gogh was raised as a priest's son whose lackluster work habits didn't promise a great professional career. Yet, deep within, he must've known that he had to give us the *Starry Night*. Van Gogh absolutely, positively, wholeheartedly had to devote his whole life to painting in order to explain himself and the nature around him that had made him the madman that he was. He made magic with every brush stroke, forever changing Impressionism.

During a recent visit to Paris, I found myself staring at *Starry Night* at the d'Orsay for nearly an hour, wondering why I couldn't look away. There was something exuberant about the stars and their movement. I felt emotionally connected to the painting and to myself while being very aware of my surroundings. It's hard to believe the effect that paint on canvas can have on a person. But emotion and energy are exactly what artists bring out in their works.

Late last year, I was assigned to review the Art Knows No Borders exhibition in downtown Los Angeles – a public art, literary, music, and relief event spearheaded by **Crystal Allene Cook**. Art Knows No Borders raises awareness of the effects of war, ethnic conflicts, and genocide. Of the countless paintings donated to the exhibition by over 100 artists, two small pieces caught my eye right away. The name under the paintings read **Vera Arutyunyan**.

Inner freedom

Arutyunyan walked with me to show the paintings she had donated to the exhibition. I looked at this most endearing woman and I looked at her paintings. I did not see how she was connected to the Abstract Expressionism that was in front of my eyes, especially when she told me she worked as an engineer for Los Angeles County. Yet I saw in her paintings the very same emotions that were roused in me when I was staring at Van Gogh's canvases.

At her next exhibit, titled "Immortality," which ran for two weeks in December at the Infusion Gallery in downtown Los Angeles, there was love in the air – my love of her paintings, that is. Standing in front of *Experiencing Inner Freedom*, a large oil-and-acrylic canvas, I was once again dumbfounded by the abundance of primary colors that were making me look within myself. The energy of her painting was glaring back at me, the red and the yellow stroking me harder and harder the longer I stared.

Arutyunyan reinvents Abstract Expressionism with each brushstroke, even though her work is marked by spontaneity. Pollack once said, "When I am in my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing." As I spoke with Arutyunyan during the exhibition in December, her words seemed to echo Pollack's. "I never plan what I'm going to do," she said. "I do everything subconsciously."



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Vera Arutyunyan.

Satellite Broadcast Program Grid

26 January - 1 February



26 January		27 January		28 January		29 January		30 January		31 January		1 February	
EST	PST	EST	PST	EST	PST	EST	PST	EST	PST	EST	PST	EST	PST
4:30	7:30	4:30	7:30	4:30	7:30	4:30	7:30	4:30	7:30	4:30	7:30	4:30	7:30
5:00	8:00	5:00	8:00	5:00	8:00	5:00	8:00	5:00	8:00	5:00	8:00	5:55	8:55
6:00	9:00	5:55	8:55	6:00	9:00	5:55	8:55	6:00	9:00	5:25	8:25	6:00	9:00
7:30	10:30	7:25	10:25	7:00	10:00	7:00	10:00	7:00	10:00	7:50	10:50	7:50	10:50
8:30	11:30	7:50	10:50	7:25	10:25	7:25	10:25	7:25	10:25	8:15	11:15	8:15	11:15
9:00	12:00	8:05	11:05	7:50	10:50	7:50	10:50	7:50	10:50	9:00	12:00	8:15	11:15
9:25	12:25	8:30	11:30	8:15	11:15	8:15	11:15	8:15	11:15	9:20	12:20	9:20	12:20
10:00	13:00	9:00	12:00	9:00	12:00	9:00	12:00	9:00	12:00	9:20	12:20	9:20	12:20
10:25	13:25	9:20	12:20	9:20	12:20	9:20	12:20	9:20	12:20	10:00	13:00	10:00	13:00
10:50	13:50	10:00	13:00	10:00	13:00	10:00	13:00	10:00	13:00	10:25	13:25	10:25	13:25
11:15	14:15	10:25	13:25	10:25	13:25	10:25	13:25	10:25	13:25	11:00	14:00	11:00	14:00
11:40	14:40	10:50	13:50	11:00	14:00	11:00	14:00	11:00	14:00	11:25	14:25	11:25	14:25
12:00	15:00	11:00	14:00	11:25	14:25	11:25	14:25	11:25	14:25	12:00	15:00	12:00	15:00
12:30	15:30	11:25	14:25	12:00	15:00	12:00	15:00	12:00	15:00	12:30	15:30	12:30	15:30
13:30	16:30	12:00	15:00	12:30	15:30	12:30	15:30	12:30	15:30	13:00	16:00	13:00	16:00
13:50	16:50	12:30	15:30	13:00	16:00	13:00	16:00	13:00	16:00	13:30	16:30	13:30	16:30
14:15	17:15	13:30	16:30	13:05	16:05	13:05	16:05	13:05	16:05	13:50	16:50	13:50	16:50
15:00	18:00	14:15	17:15	13:30	16:30	13:30	16:30	13:30	16:30	14:15	17:15	14:15	17:15
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16:05	19:05	15:30	18:30	15:00	18:00	15:00	18:00	15:00	18:00	16:05	19:05	16:05	19:05
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19:05	22:05	18:30	21:30	18:30	21:30	18:30	21:30	18:30	21:30	19:05	22:05	19:05	22:05
19:35	22:35	19:05	22:05	19:05	22:05	19:05	22:05	19:05	22:05	19:35	22:35	19:35	22:35
20:00	23:00	19:35	22:35	19:35	22:35	19:35	22:35	19:35	22:35	20:00	23:00	20:00	23:00
20:35	23:35	20:00	23:00	20:00	23:00	20:00	23:00	20:00	23:00	20:35	23:35	20:35	23:35
21:00	0:00	20:35	23:35	20:35	23:35	20:35	23:35	20:35	23:35	21:00	0:00	21:00	0:00
21:20	0:20	21:00	0:00	21:00	0:00	21:00	0:00	21:00	0:00	21:20	0:20	21:20	0:20
22:30	1:30	21:20	0:20	21:25	0:25	21:25	0:25	21:25	0:25	22:30	1:30	22:30	1:30
23:00	2:00	22:30	1:30	23:00	2:00	23:00	2:00	23:00	2:00	23:00	2:00	23:00	2:00
23:30	2:30	23:30	2:30	0:00	3:00	0:00	3:00	0:00	3:00	23:30	2:30	23:30	2:30
0:00	3:00	0:00	3:00	0:00	3:00	0:00	3:00	0:00	3:00	0:00	3:00	0:00	3:00
0:50	3:50	0:50	3:50	1:05	4:05	1:05	4:05	1:05	4:05	0:50	3:50	0:50	3:50
1:10	4:10	1:25	4:25	1:25	4:25	1:25	4:25	1:25	4:25	1:10	4:10	1:10	4:10
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3:35	6:35	3:35	6:35	3:35	6:35	3:35	6:35	3:35	6:35	3:35	6:35	3:35	6:35
4:00	7:00	4:00	7:00	4:00	7:00	4:00	7:00	4:00	7:00	4:00	7:00	4:00	7:00

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It's like I'm in an energy lock. I put on Beethoven, I cross myself, and I begin painting." Arutyunyan also noted that when she creates a new canvas, she has to finish it the same day, as each painting is the result of the particular energy burst of a given day.

Arutyunyan, who has earned international acclaim and exhibited throughout Europe, Asia, the United States, and elsewhere, pointed at one of the paintings on the wall and said her inspiration for the piece came from Van Gogh's *Starry Night*.

An artist's journey

Arutyunyan was born in Yerevan in 1958. "I always painted, I always loved it, but my parents always expected me to have a 'real' profession," she recalled. "So I became an engineer."

"I came to the United State all by myself, with only 27 bucks in my pocket," she remembered.

She concentrated on her profession. Soon her determination landed her a coveted job at the Amgen company, and



Platonic Idea 36x48 Oil on Canvas 2007.

subsequently she was hired by Los Angeles County. She was doing what she was meant to do, what her parents had raised her to do.

However, there was something always haunting her in her dreams. "I always dreamt of painting," Arutyunyan said. "I even dreamt of pressing the paint out of the tube and eating it." Then a tragic event changed everything. "When my dad passed away [in Armenia], I took out a photograph of him from my wallet and drew his portrait on paper," she said.

tion and outlook alike. "She changed my life completely," Arutyunyan said. "After the first class in her course, she told me that I was too advanced to be in that particular classroom. She asked me to take her private courses."

Amitai became a mentor. "She made me believe in myself, she gave me strength to believe, she told me that I had something to tell the world."

Following Amitai's advice, Arutyunyan painted more and more each day. Her hard work paid off when Orlando Gallery, one of Los Angeles' oldest and most prestigious art spaces, hosted her first solo exhibition, in 2006. Since then the gallery has continued to display Arutyunyan's paintings.

Arutyunyan has received an award from Los Angeles mayor **Antonio Villaraigosa**, and her work was selected to be displayed at the Los Angeles International Airport (Terminal 1).

Meanwhile, Arutyunyan continues to work as an engineer for the county. In fact, she giggles every time she calls herself a professional artist, even if she continues to receive invitations from galleries around the world.