

More on Ariel Agemian

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What is the transformative gift of this Armenian artist who converts the poles of seeming opposition in life into the light of mystical wholeness on canvas?

Ariel Agemian's life of compelling artistic expression was sourced in a spirituality as authentic as his talent, therefore choosing to attend divinity school at Moorat College in Venice rather than the monk's choice for him for a medical degree from the University of Rome. He continued his studies at the University of Padua, and received a Doctorate of Philosophy degree at the age of 21. In 1931, he visited Torino, Italy while he was still in Italy and studied the public exhibition of the Shroud of Turin.

The vortex of his colorful life seemed always to be in high energy centers- Rome- Paris- N.Y. City, encompassing many "greats" in high places.

In Paris he set up studio, taught at the College Moorat, at the University of Paris and also committed much time to painting murals and ceiling panels for the Church in Arnoueville. His recollections of the massacre were painted with oils on canvas and it is titled, The Turkish Massacre. This painting was requested to be in the Louvre after his death. It is now in the home of one of his nephews living in La Ciotat, France. In 1935, he painted the Face of Christ, from the Shroud of Turin, which has become the most widely accepted work representing the Shroud.

In 1937 his maternal uncle, a priest, died of an epileptic seizure. This devastated him. He decided to take his favorite works to America for a showing arranged by the Armenians in New York City and also to study the American people for a series of tableaux on democracy. Unfortunately, he left a major part of the works, which were done from the late 20's to the early 30's in his studio in Paris. His intended three month stay extended to the last twenty-five years of his life. During the first few months, he set up studio in N.Y.C., met many celebrities in the musical world thru his teaching, and taught his soon to be wife, Maria Roxas, an artist in her own right. Maria's father was the coach for the

Metropolitan Opera Singers and her mother sang with the Neopolitan Opera Company. Soon portraits of opera stars hung in his studio. Maria and Ariel were married in 1939. In 1941, their first and only son, Stefan was born. The joys of life were now multiplied with the bearing of a son, who would carry on the Agemian name and talent. At this time he decided to not delay any longer his priestly vocation and he would continue to love God thru his art and paint mostly religious works. What concurred was that he also changed the medium for his work from oils to pastels and to light from dark, pen and ink, chalk on black construction paper. Sadness came to both Ariel and Maria when they learned in 1942 that Stefan was born with a severe handicap of Cerebral Palsy. His high hopes and dreams were dashed and Maria never forgave herself for not "birthing right." Before he pursued his new vocation to dedicate his work to God, he thought he would return to Europe and retrieve his paintings. The boat, SS Normandie, on which he booked passage burned in the New York harbor. This decided his fate. He never attempted to return as he saw that event was an omen and in 1943 their only daughter, annig, was born. From 1945 to his death in 1963, Ariel painted nightly producing over a 1000 pen and ink sketches for the Confraternity of the Precious Blood over a twenty-five year period. He never sold any of his works including those portraits of famous musicians. He painted on commission and donated his time and what money he received to the Armenian Catholic Church. Tuition for his daughter was the only major expense and one of his illustrations would pay part of the monthly tuition. It was apparent that he internally suffered from the sorrow of seeing his son so helpless and incapacitated. What would be the band-aid for healing were the annual pilgrimages that the family made to Quebec, Canada to visit the St. Anne de Beaupre Shrine and that their prayers would be answered in the form of a miracle. Stefan would be cured. Dark to light in life manifested with his dark to light in his painting. From his experiences of sadness, witnessing an horrific event, being torn between his art and love for God and his frustrations in having a handicap son , all this proved to deepen the findings of the darkness in his soul only to rise up and heighten his love and adoration for God and the Blessed Mother thru his art and his writings.

annig agemian raley