

March 2011, Bellport, New York: When Professor William Innes Homer, dean of American art historians, was asked to examine the life's work of an unknown artist in 2007, he was stunned by what he found: a large body of extraordinary abstract landscape and figurative paintings by a highly gifted artist who was completely unknown in his lifetime. Soon a team of art historians was conducting research into the life and art of Arthur Pinajian [1914-1999]. The result is a book and traveling exhibition entitled, *Pinajian: Master of Abstraction Discovered*.

In July of 2010, Pinajian's work was introduced to the world at the Woodstock Artist's Association and Museum in Woodstock, New York. In November the exhibition traveled to the Armenian Library and Museum of America in Watertown, Massachusetts. In May of 2011, the exhibition will journey to the west coast for an opening at the Zorayan Museum in Los Angeles, California. A collection of mostly small works including illustrations from the 1930s has been recently assembled and will be exhibited at the Bellport Arts Framing Studio located at 147 South Country Road, Bellport, New York. This rare opportunity to acquire a Pinajian will run from March 18 through April 24, 2011 with an opening reception on Saturday March 19, 2010 from 4 to 6pm.

The fascinating story surrounding the discovery first broke in the *New York Times* in March 2007, in a feature article titled, "Closing on a House, and a Life's Story, Told in Art." After Pinajian's death in 1999, five decades of accumulated artwork was found stacked up in the run down garage and attic of the Bellport Village cottage he shared with his sister from 1973 until his death in 1999. He had left instructions for his collection to be discarded in the town dump. Fortunately for American art history, Lawrence E. Joseph, the best-selling author of *Apocalypse 2012* bought the cottage and rescued the collection just in time. A feature story about the artist and his life was included in the August 2010 issue of *American Art Review* magazine.

The traveling exhibition and the small works show is accompanied by a 128-page hardcover book with essays by art historians, Richard J. Boyle, Peter Hastings Falk, and William Innes Homer; art critic John Perreault; conservator, Jonathan Sherman; author, Lawrence E. Joseph; and, Pinajian's artist-cousin, Peter Najarian. The collective essays present one of the most compelling discoveries in the history of twentieth century American art. Dr. Homer wrote, "Even though Pinajian was a creative force to be reckoned with, during his lifetime he rarely exhibited or sold his paintings. Instead, he pursued his goals

in isolation with the single-minded focus of a Gauguin or Cézanne, refusing to give up in the face of public indifference. In his later years he could be compared to a lone researcher in a laboratory pursuing knowledge for its own sake. His exhaustive diaries and art notes make it clear that he dedicated all of his days to his art. He was passionate and unequivocally committed.”

It is interesting to note the astonishing resemblance between Pinajian and the hero in Kurt Vonnegut’s *Bluebeard: The Autobiography of Rabo Karabekian*, a 1987 novel about an eccentric painter. Both Pinajian and Karabekian, a.k.a. Bluebeard, were Armenian-Americans, raised by parents who survived the 1915 Turkish genocide of approximately one million Armenian children, women and men, and who then made their way to the United States where they raised their families during the Great Depression. Both Pinajian and Bluebeard began their careers as illustrators in New York and had some early success. Both then served with the United States Army during World War II in the European theatre, each earning a host of ribbons and medals, including the Bronze Star. After the war, both abandoned their careers as illustrators for higher artistic pursuits, joined the Art Students League in New York, and hung out with the Abstract Expressionists at the Cedar Tavern in Greenwich Village. Both eventually moved to Long Island near the ocean, where they kept their paintings tightly locked away in a garage.

As a boy growing up in an Armenian community in West Hoboken, New Jersey, Pinajian was a completely self-trained cartoonist. During the Great Depression he became one of the pioneers in a new medium: the comic book. In 1940 he created “Madam Fatal,” the first cross-dressing superhero, for *Crack Comics*. After World War II, he enrolled at the Art Students League in Woodstock. For twenty-two years, his life revolved around Woodstock — albeit largely reclusively — while he passionately pursued his painting. His admirable poetic color combinations are linked to the tonalities of his better-known fellow Armenian, Arshile Gorky [ca.1904-1948]. Late in life, he moved with his sister to Bellport, Long Island. There, he strived for visual and spiritual conclusions regarding flatness and color that parallel the goals of the Abstract Expressionists.

Dr. Homer concluded, “Ultimately Pinajian’s work reflects the soul of a flawed, yet brilliant, artistic genius. When he hits the mark, especially in his abstractions, he can be ranked among the best artists of his era . . . His life is, above all, a model for those who feel that they must follow their calling despite a lack of public acceptance.”

▶ To see additional Pinajian images, go to: PinajianArt.com

▶ For more information, review copies of the book, or hi-resolution images, contact:

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