

Critics' Forum
Visual Arts
Lara Minassian: Contemporary Armenian Artist
By Adriana Tchalian



Painter Lara Minassian is set to showcase her work this coming week at Harvest Gallery in Glendale, California. Minassian's work will appear alongside the sculptures of her mother, Diana Minassian, for the first time. The exhibition, entitled *Sinuuous Parallels*, will run from August 5th to the 13th, with a special artists' reception on Friday, August 5, from 6 to 10 p.m.

Lara Minassian has been practicing her craft for a number of years. She began her career while earning her Bachelor of Arts at California State University, Northridge, with an emphasis in drawing and painting. In 1991, she was awarded the University's Arts Council Scholarship and then went on to receive the Studio Channel Islands Arts Center's Saul Bernstein Scholarship in 2002. She studied there with retired Professor Saul Bernstein, whose influence is felt throughout her work. She went on to earn a Masters in Fine Arts from Claremont University, with an emphasis in painting.

Minassian's work has been exhibited numerous times. A partial list of the exhibitions would include "*Supersonic*"—*Wind Tunnel*, Art Center of Design, Pasadena, California

(2004); “*Kaleido-gestures*” at Claremont Graduate University (2003); and “*Gallery 825*” in Los Angeles, California (2000).

Minassian’s paintings can best be described as spontaneous outbursts of movement and energy. Minassian herself has described her work as the pictorial equivalent “of figures being transformed into abstractions.” She believes that “things at rest lack the validity and vitality of objects in motion.”

This notion of “objects in motion” bears a resemblance to the mid-twentieth-century movement known as Abstract Expressionism, and especially to the work of one of its foremost practitioners, Lee Krasner. Krasner (who was once married to Jackson Pollock) regarded painting as one of the purest form of self expression. Her difficult, abstract images are a result of what she considered a kind of automatism, which she defined as the spontaneous production of painting without conscious control or self-censorship.

Minassian’s improvisational style is likewise impulsive and uncontrived, though without Krasner’s heavy brush strokes. Minassian’s paintings therefore lack the customary psychological anger and agitation found in much of contemporary art, coming across instead as poised and self-possessed.

Minassian utilizes a cool palate of blues, indigos and violets to create her signature rhythms and movements. These high-frequency colors impart an almost scientific quality to her work. According to Minassian, science and technology offer a constant source of inspiration. Minassian has said that she is “inspired by contemporary technology” and that “virtual reality informs” her work. According to Minassian, “in the same way that digital software organizes space by mapping a form's points of movement, I model gestures and specific phenomena.”

There is an inherent stillness and tranquility about Minassian’s work. Even her more turbulent compositions, such as *Maelstrom* and *Vortex II*, exude a certain calm and serenity—all the movement and uproar is somehow hemmed in by the balanced composition. The result is a simplicity and composure not found in much of contemporary art.

The resulting stillness in the art also suggests other influences. Some of Minassian’s paintings, for instance, bear a distant resemblance to a mandala, the Hindu or Buddhist symbol of the universe, evoking images of the sacred, the transcendental. Stylistically, her distinctive brushstrokes and arabesque curves may even remind the viewer of Zen brush painting, Hindu text, or Arabic script. Could she have also been inspired by Armenian illuminated manuscripts?

Much of contemporary art, it seems, revolves around gimmicks and trends. Minassian’s work offers a refuge from the banality of present-day art and culture. It touches on some important (and much-forgotten) aspects of fine art and reminds us that there is room for the craft of art. It reminds us as well of the intriguing possibility that beyond the banal lies the sacred, which has long gone missing from contemporary art.

All Rights Reserved: Critics Forum, 2005

Adriana Tchalian holds a Masters degree in Art History and has managed several art galleries in Los Angeles.

You can reach her or any of the other contributors to Critics' Forum at comments@criticsforum.org. This and all other articles published in this series are available online at www.criticsforum.org. To sign up for a weekly electronic version of new articles, go to www.criticsforum.org/join. Critics' Forum is a group created to discuss issues relating to Armenian art and culture in the Diaspora.