



Rudolf Khachatryan: Light is life



In one of his latest self-portraits, he is seen standing at his easel. In his expression there is unbending strength and wise leniency, dignity and the power of that special kind which is born of creative talent. He holds a pencil like a sword, his easel being a shield.

The comparison is very much to the point, because Rudolf Khachatryan can be rightly called the Knight of the Art of Drawing. He neither sculpts nor paints, but his drawings can be said to have absorbed the three dimensions of sculpture and the colour of painting.

At the age of 22, he won the international competition in Vienna with his graphic "Portrait of a Girl Student". A year later, in 1960, he was admitted to the Soviet Artists Union. He exhibited his work in many countries, and is now holding a one-man show in Moscow on the new premises of the Museum of Arts of Oriental Peoples.

Rudolf never studied art formally. About 30 years ago, on seeing his drawings, a well-known Armenian artist, Ervand Kochar, went on record as saying: "I see Leonardo's spirit resurrecting." A chance meeting grew into a friendship. Kochar introduced the young man to the geniuses of Leonardo da Vinci, Rembrandt, and Goya, making Khachatryan a life-long follower of the three.

When a standard question, "What are your aspirations in life and art?" is put to him, he gives a rather unexpected reply: "I wish I could learn to love life better". Perhaps, it is this love for life, and his desire to express the world he loves so much rather than his own conception of it, that have prompted Khachatryan to return to realism after more than a decade of wandering from one fashionable "ism" to another.

Abstract means of representation proved poor or inadequate when he tried to portray his wife. Later on, having returned to the realistic tradition, he pencilled her portrait, bringing out the colour of the wreath of wild flowers on her head, and the bunch of flowers in her hands. In that portrait, she waits pensively, as if intent on the stirrings of a new life under her heart. The boy's eyes in "The Portrait of My Son" look at us with teenage intensity, and the uncompromising division of the world into black and white, with the confidence of youth.

Rudolf Khachatryan has produced a series of "instant" portraits, which are never exhibited and yet are very dear to him. It takes a very special burst of concentration to do such portraits within a minute or two by identifying oneself fully with the model and making one's whole

system (not just eyes and hands) take part in the creative effort.

Perhaps, it was in one of these revelations that Khachatryan struck on a discovery which made him quite distinct and easily identifiable as an artist. Khachatryan found a material all his own. He draws with sepia on priming, a mixture used by painters for a first coat on icon boards. The unusual combination of white priming and brown sepia gives his drawings a new dimension of light and colour in the wide range from beige to dark-red and black.

Having brought the art of drawing on a par with that of painting and sculpture, Khachatryan's discovery gave rise to a series of unusually expressive portraits of our contemporaries. For example, choreographer Maxim Martirosyan (1983), a man of remarkable artistry and noble spirit, Academician Migdal (1983), in whom the artist saw powerful intellect coupled with deepgoing if latent emotion, his fellow-artist Dmitry Bisti (1983), art critic Savely Yamshchikov, and others.

Khachatryan's characteristics are seldom straightforward or conventional, but in some cases they depart from our usual norms of comprehension in all but a mesmerizing manner. Thus, for instance, a portrait entitled "Karavan-Bashi" reveals those lower depths of human psyche



"My Wife."



"A Still Life."

which the artist himself considers taboo

Many people wonder why he portrays living models in old-fashioned clothes. "Because every person belongs to more than just the present time. He is moulded by ages of human history. Every person is human memory personified," Khachatryan explains.

There is neither background, nor time- or place-identifying accessories in his portraits. All of these are expressed through the model.

Khachatryan's rare insight into the surrounding world never fails to stir our own imagination and intellect. His works prompt people to think of human greatness and pettiness, as well as the indivisibility of the two in real life.

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