

ARIEL AGEMIAN, K. S. G.

1904-1963

ARMENIAN ARTIST

Haroutin (Ariel) Pascal Aghemian was born in Brussa, Turkey. In 1926 he graduated from the Venice Academy of Fine Arts with a Gold Medal Award from the Associazione Artistica. Up to 1931, he worked and taught in Italy and from 1931 to 1938 in Paris. Aghemian was a representative of the school of academic realism and a skillful master of composition. He has painted national themes reflecting the ancient as well as the contemporary history of the Armenian people, frequently inspired by the distinct decorative-allegorical paintings of the Italian Renaissance. Aghemian was also a portraitist and a landscapist. He has painted murals with spiritual as well as secular themes. They can be found in Armenian and Western Rite Churches in France, Italy, Turkey, and in America in New York City, Belmont and Springfield Massachusetts. In addition to those works, there are paintings in the Mekhitarist College in Venice, the Monastery on the Island of San Lazzaro and also several homes of friends in the U.S.A..

His artistic career started in France. During the period 1931 to 1938, his paintings were appreciated and widely exhibited in Paris, Vienna, Venice and Milan. He was primarily concerned with religious art and profane subjects. He began to paint prolifically after resigning as art professor at the Moorat College in Sevres, France. Aghemian's mural technique reflected the influence of Old masters such as Titian. As time went on, he showed himself to be versatile, equally at home with small compositions as well as monumental murals. Subjects included portraits, still life, landscapes, nudes, figures and battle scenes. His portraits were of dignitaries from the political, religious and entertainment world. They included Giovanni Martinelli, Louis Martin, Minister of the French Navy, and he was most honored to paint Pope Pius XI and Cardinal Agagianian.

A deeply religious man, Aghemian was still nourishing the seed of a priestly vocation. He also wanted to spend some time in America and study the American people for a series of tableaus on democracy. Thus his decision to spend several months in the United States. This move in 1938 signaled the start of a new era for the young artist. An art exhibit in 1939 in New York was described as one of the most extraordinary assemblages to be seen on art gallery row in a long time. Critics proclaimed " the artist reveals a diversifying talent with the ability to deal with formal organization; a nice color sense; and a generally romantic approach", "obviously trained in European traditions of sound craftsmanship."

Shortly after Ariel Aghemian arrived in America, he set up a studio in New York City where he taught art and painted. He perfected the use of pastels on construction and working with the dark to light concept. On black construction he used white chalk and brought life from the black background. Ariel married Maria Roxas in June, 1939. They had a son, Stefan, and a daughter, Annig.

In 1943 Agemian became an American citizen and began to work for the Confraternity of the Precious Blood, a publishing house for Catholic literature in Brooklyn , New York. Agemian painted over 500 illustrations. They are in the books, My Daily Psalms, Christ in the Gospel, The Imitation of Christ, My Meditation on the Gospel and My Mass. His reproduction of Christ, from The Shroud of Turin, is considered the most exact by experts in the scientific research field.

After coming to America, the artist's technique and subject matter noticeably changed to purely religious. Only a few portraits of dear friends were painted during the next twenty years. He sketched daily, lived somewhat the life of a recluse and his works were not displayed publicly again after 1939.

In 1958, Ariel Agemian was given the highest honor bestowed upon a layman by the Catholic Church. He was awarded a Gold Medal from Pope Pius XII and knighted into the Order of Saint Gregory.

His legacy lives on in his works. There have been several showings in the Grand Junction and Glenwood Springs area in Colorado. Some religious works have been donated to Museums in New York City, Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church in Belmont, MA, St. Mark's and St. Bernard's Church in Philadelphia, PA. and Erevan, Armenia. In 2011, the painting, "Christ in the Temple" will be donated to Anna Maria College in Paxton, MA. from where his daughter graduated. The majority of works done in America have been in the private collection of Howard and Annig Agemian Raley in Glenwood Springs, Colorado.

Annig Agemian Raley

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