# CELEBRATING LIFE WITH A BRUSH

*Posted on July 10, 2016 by Keghart*

keghart.com

**Category:** Opinions

**Arthur Hagopian**, NSW, Australia, 5 July 2016

Since early childhood, Sarkis Antikajian had nurtured one paramount dream: to paint, to be an artist, to give expression to the creative urges in him by metamorphosing them into landscapes, portraits, and still life. But the fact that he was growing in a part of the world where art took last place to the struggle for survival, did not prove conducive to the realisation of that dream. So he had to bind his time and be content with continuing to study, to hope, and to plan.

Antikajian was born in Amman, the capital of Jordan, but spent part of his formative years in Jerusalem. Walking along the cobble stoned alleys of the Armenian Quarter of the Old City, he absorbed the unique ambience of the holy precinct, his keen eyes taking detailed note of the palette of the gold and copper of the ancient walls, the blue of the skies, the red sunsets over the domes, minarets and and towers. It was a heady education, an experience he would later translate into his prolific output as he experimented with the immense variety of artistic expression--a lifelong delight and accomplishment that resulted in a formidable portfolio of paintings, and a book, evidence of an artist who is "extraordinary gifted and versatile, equally facile in several genres from impressionism, expressionism to nonobjective or abstract art," in the words of Shannon Ray, director of the Lawrence Gallery in Oregon where Antikajian now lives.

**Arthur Hagopian**, NSW, Australia, 5 July 2016

Since early childhood, Sarkis Antikajian had nurtured one paramount dream: to paint, to be an artist, to give expression to the creative urges in him by metamorphosing them into landscapes, portraits, and still life. But the fact that he was growing in a part of the world where art took last place to the struggle for survival, did not prove conducive to the realisation of that dream. So he had to bind his time and be content with continuing to study, to hope, and to plan.

Antikajian was born in Amman, the capital of Jordan, but spent part of his formative years in Jerusalem. Walking along the cobble stoned alleys of the Armenian Quarter of the Old City, he absorbed the unique ambience of the holy precinct, his keen eyes taking detailed note of the palette of the gold and copper of the ancient walls, the blue of the skies, the red sunsets over the domes, minarets and and towers. It was a heady education, an experience he would later translate into his prolific output as he experimented with the immense variety of artistic expression--a lifelong delight and accomplishment that resulted in a formidable portfolio of paintings, and a book, evidence of an artist who is "extraordinary gifted and versatile, equally facile in several genres from impressionism, expressionism to nonobjective or abstract art," in the words of Shannon Ray, director of the Lawrence Gallery in Oregon where Antikajian now lives.

It was no easy task to gain acceptance, as is usually the way of life with art: but assiduous work and self-motivation, backed by timely opportunity, provided by the workshops with leading contemporary artists that he attended, helped propel him into the mainstream. "After years of uncertainty, at this part of my journey, I am pleased to call myself a painter--and sometimes, with a smile, an artist," he says.

For over 30 years Antikajian worked as a pharmacist, and raised a family. "I cannot recall a day during those years that I did not attempt to find ways on my own to learn the craft of drawing and painting," he says. "Throughout this process of learning I stressed the need to draw, not so much to render accurately, but to lean towards the gestural quality that I desire. This was accomplished through my persistent drawing of the landscape, still life set-ups, or years of weekly drawing from live models."

Looking at his paintings, one is inescapably drawn to a comparison with Van Gogh. There is the same symphony of color, the same, call it "abandon", of ritualism. Examine his nudes. There is no trace of lasciviousness in the contours of their limbs, rather a mysterious essence that is as old as humanity.

Antikajian believes in giving the viewer a mere suggestion of what is, or can be, in tender watercolor strokes, the way the child puts out its hand and touches its mother's cheek--can the viewer's response be anything but the feeling of a mother for her child?

Some of his pencil sketches are also reminiscent of Norman Rockwell. In his "Girl in Green" he has dwelt a little longer on the face of his model as if coaxing the child concealed within the folds of the canvas to come forth, and manifest itself.

In "Girl with Puppy," all Antikajian has to do is angle one of the girls' posture slightly, to convey the depth and nature of affection for the animal.

Antikajian showcases some of his work on his website and has encapsulated an impressive gallery in a book, "Paintings, Drawings and Images in Words," (available from Amazon), a celebratory exposition where he frames his pictures with flights of poetry that reinforce his love of nature.

He remembers one particular outing that says it all:

"It must have been sometime
in March, on a Saturday afternoon,
the crocus had broken the soft fertile soil
to usher a new beginning."

But it is Jerusalem where the heart returns, and he pays tribute to it with bold, eloquent strokes of a brush that has succeeded, with a minimum of line, color and shade, in absorbing the mystique of that city and conveying it onto the canvas: see how economically he has depicted the stones of Jerusalem, letting his brush caress its walls, streets and gates with soft fascination: Antikajian does not want to influence or instruct you, but rather to invite you to discover and experience Jerusalem

for yourself, by offering you a portal into its heart. And what joy you will find in that journey and exploration.

And what joy will you find in that journey and the exploration.