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Charles Garabedian, Dido, 2006. Acrylic on paper, 21 x 16 in. Private Collection.

The Elusive Creativity of Charles Garabedian **Artist Receives Recognition in Retrospective of 50-Year Career**

On View January 22 – April 17, 2011

“Creativity is a strange thing, very elusive. The important thing is that everybody has to do something and everybody should find out who they are.”

– Charles Garabedian

October 27, 2010 - While Charles Garabedian may be well on his way to finding out who he is in his nearly 50 year career as artist, the rest of the world, for the most part, has yet to discover him. Organized by the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, the exhibition ***Charles Garabedian: A Retrospective*** represents the first important museum presentation in 28 years devoted to the works of this elusive artist. Bringing together approximately 60 works from institutional and private collections across the United States, the exhibition represents the artist's entire career with an emphasis on paintings and drawings produced during the years since his first (and last) major solo museum exhibitions in 1981 (La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art) and 1983 (Rose Art Museum).

While Garabedian may not be a household name, his accomplishments and influence among artists on the West Coast in the last 30 years have been substantial. His persistently individual exploration of figure, landscape and subject matter paved the way for new generations of artists who demonstrated a renewed focus on imaginative representations of the figure. His works' relationship to an even younger generation of artists who emphasize narrative, attests to the continuing vitality of his work.

So, the questions arise, “Why this artist?” and “Why now?” Julie Joyce, SBMA Curator of Contemporary Art and exhibition organizer responds, “Charles Garabedian's substantial body of work has been too long overlooked and holds many revelations for younger figurative-based artists who owe him quite a debt. He has been labeled in the past as an eccentric, which I believe marginalizes the role his work plays in the realm of contemporary art in the United States. This exhibition will reveal his highly unique path as an

artist, but also, more importantly, reposition him as a figure who contributed to the pluralistic view of art, place, and practice that took shape on the West Coast in the 1980s."

Recently, *ARTnews* conducted a poll of artists, critics, curators, and art historians to find worthy figures who have fallen off the map or failed to receive their due attention from audiences and museum professionals. Herein New York-based artist, Fred Tomaselli, states "...Charles Garabedian, who is well into his 80s, did one of the best gallery shows I saw, at LA Louver in 2004–5. His work seems especially germane to the zeitgeist, given the current interest in inventive figurative painting."

Garabedian dismisses any perceived lack of attention, claiming that his work is more about understanding and expression of himself, not about providing a road map for an audience. In an interview, he remarked, "By nature, I'm suspicious of myself and curious about myself...I don't think it's true that without an audience you have no reason for working. When you work in relation to an audience you're a designer, not an artist...Once you start thinking of other people, you start thinking, 'Let me make this a little clearer.' If you do that with your paintings, it makes the painting dull."



Left: *Study for the Iliad*, 1992-93. Acrylic on paper. Corcoran Gallery of Art.

Right: *Ulysses*, 1985. Acrylic on paper. Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA; Museum Purchase with funds provided by the Ainsley I. Graham Trust.

Garabedian's work is far from dull. His paintings and works on paper explore themes of war, music, the body, dismemberment, heroism, comic pretension, love, and death—all conveyed with a sense of immediacy, intimacy, and poignancy. While a prominent influence stems from ancient characters and tales, including *The Iliad*, *Romeo & Juliet*, the Minotaur, and Apollo and Daphne, underlying the work is the artist's own elegiac confrontation with the joys and struggles that pervade our current, daily lives. Each painting or drawing creates its own world yet also reflects the turbulent times in which it was made.

Michael Duncan, art historian and critic, further comments on the artist's distinctive approach to artmaking in an excerpt from his essay that is included in the exhibition catalogue:

"In his extraordinary works, Garabedian approaches painting as a kind of battlefield of the psyche, manned by cultural tropes and personal memories. An instinctual Freudian, he offers mythic retellings of war, friendship, death, and sexual experience, mining both individual and collective consciousness for sparks of subconscious truth. This untamed process is everywhere evident on his canvases, manifested in dream-like landscapes and seascapes littered with lumbering forms, sketchy marks, crumbling architecture, and skewed body parts. These are visual representations of the artist's thought, designed to entice viewers to follow the associational processes of an artist on a voyage of self-discovery that just might result in shipwreck."

The thought-provoking power and occasional uneasiness that the works in this exhibition demonstrate lead us to realize that for the artist, and for ourselves, the journey of self-discovery may never be completely realized. This is part of the reason Garabedian continues to actively work in his studio, day after day—armed with the hope of getting closer to the truth. He notes in a previous interview, "I can do some bizarre things. I'm really a shy person. I can't proceed in a flamboyant way in public, so I make my work and I wonder where it comes from. It comes from who I am, obviously."

Related Programming:

Education programs related to *Charles Garabedian: A Retrospective* will provide an opportunity for SBMA to work with local middle schools focusing on the artist's use of classical mythology, architecture, and comparison with works in SBMA's paintings and antiquities collection. High school students will tour the exhibition exploring Garabedian's illustration techniques and imagery, both personal and archetypal, and his underlying and overt humor.



Left: *Adam and Eve*, 1979-80. Collage, transparent and opaque watercolor, charcoal and graphite pencil on paper. Whitney Museum of American Art, Gift of Laura-Lee and Robert Woods 91.110a-b. **Middle:** *Dead*, 1999. Acrylic on paper. Private Collection, Los Angeles.

Right: *Prehistoric Figure (Brunette Female with Skull)*, 1978-80, Acrylic on panel. Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, Gift of Jeanne K. Lawrence.

Sunday, January 23, 2:30 pm

Charles Garabedian Panel Discussion

Artist Charles Garabedian will join scholars and contributing authors to the exhibition catalogue to discuss his work. Mary Craig Auditorium

Free with suggested admission

Thursday, February 24, 5 - 6:30 pm

Panel: *Artist's Artist*

Charles Garabedian joins artists Dan Connally, Mary Heebner, Hank Pitcher, and Tom Wudl for a lively discussion about painting and influence. This is a rare opportunity to hear candid conversation regarding the legacy of Charles Garabedian and the ways in which these established artists regard his and each other's works. Come early to see the exhibition as galleries close at 5 pm. Mary Craig Auditorium

Free with suggested admission

Thursday, March 24, 5 – 6:30 pm

Helios Dance Theatre Performance: *The Lotus Eaters*

Inspired by the chapter of the same name in Homer's *Odyssey* (from which Garabedian also drew), this sensual and evocative piece will be performed in segments: first on stage in the Mary Craig Auditorium, then in a processional upstairs to continue, and finally end with a solo dancer in the galleries. Helios dancers and director will remain in the galleries for an informal discussion following the performance.

Free with Museum admission

Saturday, April 9, 2:30 pm

Ancient Greeks/Modern Lives

Staged Readings from Classical Greek Drama

Ancient Greeks/Modern Lives is part of an extensive National program of workshops and performances to inspire people to come together to read, see, and think about classical literature. This staged reading, directed by Peter Meineck, Artistic Director of Aquila Theatre and Associate Professor of Classics at NYU, will include selections from the *Illiad*, the *Odyssey*, and other works that resonate with Charles Garabedian, as well as the Museum's permanent collection of antiquities. Professor Dorata Deutch will lead a discussion following the reading. Plaza outside Museum's Park Wing entrance

Free

Sunday, April 10, 2:30 pm

Lecture: David Pagel

As an essayist, professor, and critic for the *Los Angeles Times* and many other publications, David Pagel has become one of the foremost authorities on contemporary painting in Southern California and beyond. His illustrated lecture addresses the work of Charles Garabedian, and its context among other contemporary figurative painters. Mary Craig Auditorium

Free with suggested admission

Tuesday – Friday, April 12 –15, 12 noon

Lunch Time Poetry Reading: *How to Eat A Poem*

Each day at noon a different poem, a different poet—both inspired by the work of Charles Garabedian.

Exhibition Catalogue:

The exhibition catalogue represents the first book devoted to the artist since the early 1980s: a hardcover publication comprising 212 pages and 95 color illustrations, and designed by award winning designer Lorraine Wilde/Green Dragon Office. Contributors include historian/critic Michael Duncan; critic/professor Christopher Miles (Department of Art, California State University, Long Beach); author/television and film screenwriter, Nevin Schreiner; exhibition curator and SBMA Curator of Contemporary Art, Julie Joyce; and SBMA Director, Larry J. Feinberg. Copies of the catalogue will be available for purchase in the Museum Store.

More About the Artist:

Charles Garabedian was born in 1923 in Detroit, served as a staff sergeant in the US Air Force, as an aerial gunner on a B-24 in over 30 missions over Europe. After WWII he worked for Goodrich Tire as a tire builder and as a clerk on the Union Pacific Railroad. He began his career at age 32 when he began studying drawing with Howard Warshaw, then entered graduate school at UCLA, where he studied with William Brice and others and received his MA in 1961. He joined the legendary Ceeje Gallery in Los Angeles in the early 1960s, debuted nationally in the 1975 Whitney Biennial, was represented in Marcia Tucker's notorious 1978 *Bad Painting* exhibition at the New Museum, and was hailed as a major force in the revival of figurative painting in the 1993 Corcoran Biennial. Garabedian's work was the subject of solo museum exhibitions at the La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art (now the MCA San Diego) in 1981, and the Rose Art Museum in 1983. This is his first important solo exhibition at a major museum since that time.

Garabedian's work has been represented by L.A. Louver Gallery in Venice, California, since 1979, and the focus of many solo exhibitions there and at Hirschl & Adler Modern in New York (1984, 1987, 1995), Betty Cunningham Gallery in New York (2004, 2006), and Paule Anglim Gallery in San Francisco (1985, 1993, 1998, 2008), among others.

Exhibition Support:

This exhibition is made possible through the generosity of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, The Grace Jones Richardson Trust, Jill and John C. Bishop, Jr., Les and Zora Charles, Jane and Ken Anderson, Marianne and Norman F. Sprague III, LLWW Foundation, and The Broad Art Foundation.

The Santa Barbara Museum of Art is a privately funded, not-for-profit institution that presents internationally recognized collections and exhibitions and a broad array of cultural and educational activities as well as travel opportunities around the world.

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1130 State Street, Santa Barbara, CA.

Open Tuesday - Sunday 11 am to 5 pm. Closed Monday.

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