

In the Shadow of Mount Agri

Galeri 77 is delighted to announce that it will present its exhibition, *“In the Shadow of Mount Agri”*, at the Erarta Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia. Open to visitors from November 22, 2024, to March 23, 2025, the exhibition brings together works by six Turkish and Armenian artists from the Galeri 77’s portfolio. Inspired by the legendary and multifaceted history of Mount Agri, civilizations influenced by this iconic landmark find expression in the unique styles of the artists featured in this group exhibition.

Hosted by the Erarta Museum in St. Petersburg, the exhibition highlights the shared history of two neighboring peoples and the creative potential born from this past. Under the physical and symbolic shadow of Mount Agri, the showcased works serve as a reminder of art’s power to transcend borders and its unifying role for humanity.

“In the Shadow of Mount Agri” embarks on a journey at the intersection of history, mythology, and art, interpreting the cultural heritage shaped around this iconic mountain through diverse artistic approaches. The exhibition sheds light on the artistic evolution of two communities that have thrived under Mount Agri’s shadow. Visitors are offered an opportunity not only to explore different cultural perspectives but also to experience a variety of artistic styles. Reflecting both individual and collective memory, this exhibition celebrates art’s ability to bring together differences.

By bringing together such a wide array of works produced in diverse styles and approaches within a single exhibition, *In the Shadow of Mount Agri* marks a first in the history of the Erarta Museum. The exhibition underscores the richness of art and the importance of diversity. Featuring works by Karen Arakel, Armen Gevorkian, Hakan Gürbüz, Vav Hakobyan, Mesut Karakiş, and Daron Mouradian, the collection spans a spectrum of styles—from surreal compositions and abstract expressionist approaches to experimental art, Neo-Renaissance, Neo-Pop Art, and Neo-Cubist pieces adorned with hyper-realistic details. The themes range from universal human conditions such as life, death, and religion to the mundane details of daily life. The exhibition aims to provide a unique experience, offering insights into the evolving landscape of contemporary Turkish and Armenian art.

Born in 1960 in Tbilisi, Georgia, and currently residing in Yerevan, **Karen Arakel** is renowned for his refined artistic approach that bridges the past with the present. Self-taught through studying the works of preceding artists, Arakel has developed an extraordinary technique, which has evolved multiple times throughout his career. He often works with the tempera technique on wood, merging Renaissance aesthetics with surrealist elements. His compositions, imbued with allegorical imagery and philosophical depth, combine human figures with landscapes that push the boundaries of imagination. Arakel’s art reflects a unique exploration of primal instincts and cultural heritage, taking the viewer on a profound inner journey.

It is impossible to discuss Karen Arakel’s works without referencing the aesthetics of various historical periods and civilizations. His art gains its unique form and significance through meticulous study and analysis. Arakel delves beyond merely grasping the formal representations of past artistic dimensions, seeking to understand the underlying causes, prerequisites, and the creators’ spirits, perceptions, and mentalities. Every artist, in their quest for personal vision and identity, embarks on individual research and finds sources of inspiration. Arakel, however, has chosen an unconventional path. Unlike others, he feels no urgency to achieve fame, define his style, or perfect a technique. Open to inspiration, he consciously identifies and aligns himself with art forms, eras, and artists that resonate with his spirit, artistic vision, and aesthetic values. Arakel’s encounters with cultures from different epochs and the themes they raise have become key tools in shaping his creativity. To this

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end, he has extensively analyzed and drawn from various artistic movements, including Archaic, Hellenistic, Classical, and Renaissance art, as well as Dadaism, Symbolism, Abstract Expressionism, Surrealism, and Post-Surrealist Modernism. His works, enriched by these deep explorations, embody his personal interpretations. Arakel's simultaneous backward-looking and forward-moving approach explains the diversity of styles he has cultivated.

Born in 1958 in Yerevan, **Armen Gevorkian** graduated from the Fine Arts Department of the Kh. Abovian Yerevan State Pedagogical Institute. Since 1980, he has participated in numerous national and international exhibitions, earning recognition for his distinct artistic language and irrational approach. Breaking away from traditional Armenian painting styles, Gevorkian offers a contemplative and serene atmosphere in his works, avoiding tragic or dramatic elements. Working in a studio devoid of natural light, the artist places his organic, independent figures in various settings and situations, presenting viewers with a harmonious yet emotionally resonant world. His works are featured in numerous international collections and museums.

The first striking aspect of Gevorkian's paintings is their unparalleled originality. In a world where nearly everything in figurative art has been done, seen, and experienced, avoiding the fate of being a derivative is increasingly challenging. However, Gevorkian, with his signature unconventional technique and irrational mindset, resolutely rejects the role of an imitator. Isolated in his box-like studio, cut off from natural light and the outside world, he allows his characters to traverse from one painting to another. These peculiar, non-existent yet organic and independent figures remain constant, while only their surroundings and situations change. The order and arrangement Gevorkian achieves in his works are commendable. There is no trace of improvisation, bohemian chaos, or artistic disarray, yet his paintings are far from cold mathematical precision. Despite a restrained use of color, his works avoid tragic or dramatic elements. Instead, they exude a tranquil and contemplative aura, offering a serene visual experience.

Born in 1990 in Denizli, **Hakan Gürbüz** is an artist who blends the inner conflicts of human nature with contemporary themes. His works often focus on a single figure, using distorted forms to establish a connection with the viewer. Employing a vivid and striking color palette, Gürbüz addresses the clash between personal ideologies and societal challenges through a Neo-Cubist approach. His paintings offer a compelling narrative of introspection and existential struggles through fragmented realities that construct abstract worlds.

At first glance, the influence of Cubism is immediately evident in his works. However, upon closer inspection, hyper-realistic elements emerge, presenting a hybrid understanding that goes beyond traditional Cubism. In this sense, Gürbüz's art can be classified as Neo-Cubist, as it elegantly combines multiple perspectives of an object on a two-dimensional plane. Additionally, traces of Futurism can be seen in his innovative approach. His dramatic compositions, characterized by a cacophony of colors and gestures, feature fragmented and geometrically reduced details that resemble collages. These details appear as if layered images from different universes of the same moment, creating a surreal and uncanny dream world where time and space intertwine. Perspectives are blended, people and worlds collide seamlessly, leaving the viewer in a constant search for focus in each piece. The most crucial element of Gürbüz's intricate approach is his deliberate use of colors to convey emotion and achieve a sense of unity. On a larger scale, his works balance harmony and discord simultaneously through deformed forms and vibrant hues.

Gürbüz's art draws on the concept of cultural memory. His compositions, centered on the struggles of individual existence and societal disconnection in modern society, are sprinkled with seemingly random yet intricately assembled details. These details represent mosaics of personal conflicts and reckonings, drawn from different times in the artist's life. He often focuses on a single central figure, engaging the audience with a direct gaze, forging a connection between the artwork and the viewer. These protagonists appear proud yet pensive, burdened by the weight of the world, embodying

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anguish and introspection. Gürbüz captures the existential dread of confronting his past, present, and future selves, a recurring theme in his body of work. As he explains: *“All of humanity alive today carries the memory of thousands of years of human history. This memory holds fears, knowledge, beliefs, traditions, customs, cultures, loyalties, and habits that form one side of our internal conflicts. On the other side are the geography we inhabit, technology, education, individual rights, freedoms, and the threats, anxieties, and challenges of our era. The more principles, ideologies, and ideas a person harbors, the greater their inner conflicts. What triggers these conflicts? How do we cope with them? What solutions do we create, if any? And what are the mental and physical effects of these conflicts on us?”* Through this introspection, Gürbüz’s works invite the viewer to confront these universal struggles, transforming deeply personal conflicts into a shared human experience.

Born in 1987 in Yerevan, Armenia, **Vav Hakobyan** discovered his passion for art at an early age, participating in significant sculpture symposiums. His education at the Panos Terlemezyan School of Fine Arts and later at the Yerevan State Academy of Fine Arts helped deepen his artistic vision. Since 2017, Hakobyan has undergone a radical shift in his practice, abandoning traditional notions of composition and form. Instead, he focuses on creating innovative forms and figures free from historical or reality-based constraints. His works utilize unpainted spaces and stark contrasts to invite viewers into a boundless world.

Hakobyan’s contemporary creations are characterized by impulsive and spontaneous use of color and form. He redefines classical concepts such as balanced composition, symmetry, light positioning, observation, narrative, and tonal harmony to create enigmatic figures and alternative icons that belong neither to the past nor the future. Through dynamic and constant transformation of forms and figures, he achieves aesthetic diversity and extreme contrasts. For Hakobyan, painting is an endless quest, emphasizing the process over the finished work. During this journey, he intertwines conscious and subconscious states to reveal icons and imagery that critique our reality without being overly didactic or enlightening. Hakobyan’s striking use of color complements his unconventional approach to form and composition. His works are dominated by a broad spectrum of hues. Rejecting the use of a traditional palette, he applies paint directly and spontaneously onto the white canvas surface. Rather than blending colors on a palette, he mixes tones directly on the canvas or layers them sequentially. The intensity of the paint varies across different sections of the composition. In contrast to a uniform application, some areas feature thick layers of paint, while others are defined by lines or sketches. This distinctive approach to color underscores the artist’s belief in dynamism and fragmentation. His use of paint creates rhythmic variations that enhance the work’s power, reflecting the aesthetic ideas behind the canvas.

Understanding Hakobyan’s art on an aesthetic level is a challenge, as his works resist instant consumption. While he addresses urgent themes such as violence, madness, and socio-political issues, his art remains open to interpretation, refraining from imposing any doctrine on the viewer. One of the defining aspects of his practice is his rejection of populist concepts and superficial critiques. Hakobyan approaches socio-political subjects without controlling the audience’s perception, empowering viewers to decipher his works independently. This unique quality invites the audience to think critically and reflectively. His paintings serve as open and creative platforms, encouraging viewers to evaluate their surroundings. In this way, Hakobyan’s works are not just visual statements but also tools for contemplation, offering an intellectual space to navigate the complexities of modern life.

Born in 1976 in Sakarya, **Mesut Karakiş** is a formalist painter who pushes the boundaries of abstract art. His sophisticated technique draws from the balance between creation and destruction; transforming surface layers with chemical reactions between acrylic paint and water to create unique textures and depths. Karakiş’s works explore the relationship between the surface and underlying layers, creating an illusionary effect for the viewer. His art can be defined as a meditative exploration of form and material.

Driven by the goal of doing what has never been done before, Mesut Karakış's art-making process is highly meticulous, entirely planned, and rejects conventional painting techniques. It is a laborious process where the artist engages in a battle of control with the canvas surface, acrylic paint, and water. His sophisticated and unique new technique, developed independently without using brushes, consists of two main stages: the first stage (creation) involves layering different colors of acrylic paint over the canvas surface in a precise order, with a predetermined color palette, applying an average of 70-80 layers one day at a time. The second stage (destruction) involves meticulously scraping and sanding the paint-laden canvas surface with water, revealing the underlying layers and bringing different colors to the surface, thus giving the piece an entirely new appearance and impression. When viewed from a distance, the perceived depth and textural values combine with the smooth, flat surface of the canvas at close tactile proximity, creating a complete illusionary effect for the viewer. Like a color scientist, Karakış has to calculate time, ambient temperature, humidity, and many other environmental factors affecting the painting. Completing a single piece takes approximately 3-4 months on average.

Deeply influenced by the incredible order, wholeness, and absolute harmony of nature, Karakış considers forms and colors to be essential artistic elements. While planning his compositions, he focuses on the internal structure of the painting, aiming to create a maximum aesthetic and visual impact that draws the viewer in. His works characteristically feature natural patterns, organic distortions, lyrical expressions, geometric grids, and lines forming dynamic matrices, complex textures, and vibrant colors. These are works where the pictorial style is more prominent, and the psycho-visual effect is focused on color.

Born in 1961 in Yerevan, Armenia, **Daron Mouradian** is renowned for his intricate and fantastical works that merge elements of Armenian culture with Eastern and Western traditions. His art delves into themes of mythology and history, enriched with surreal, fairy-tale imagery reminiscent of a medieval atmosphere. While evoking nostalgia, Mouradian's works critique human frailties through irony and humor, inviting viewers into a dreamlike yet profoundly thought-provoking realm.

Mouradian's art foregrounds the subconscious, transforming every detail on the canvas into an animated exploration filled with passion, irony, and wit. His works bridge the worlds of dreams and imagination, making abstract ideas tangible. The artist blurs the lines between reality and fantasy, plunging viewers into a liminal space where objects and beings are transported to otherworldly realms. Religious texts, mythology, and a boundless imagination play significant roles in Mouradian's surreal compositions, which are filled with constant surprises. The viewer navigates his mesmerizing yet unsettling world, oscillating between amusement and contemplation. Despite the elegance of his imagery, Mouradian's critique is sharp: his whimsical compositions expose the absurdity of power and the irrationality of violence. Through a masterful use of color, Mouradian creates enchanting yet ironic narratives that capture the viewer's admiration while delivering a biting critique of authority and human folly. His works are a compelling mix of wonder, satire, and a profound understanding of human nature.

This multifaceted exhibition, which focuses on the cultural development of two similar geographies located under the shadow of Mount Agri in the ancient lands often referred to as the cradle of civilizations, offers the opportunity for comparisons between them. It can be visited at the Erarta Museum in St. Petersburg until March 23, 2025, and can also be followed simultaneously through the social media accounts of Galeri 77.

About Erarta Museum:

Erarta, Russia's largest private art museum, has enriched the country's historical and artistic fabric for the past 15 years. The museum's name is derived from the combination of the words "Era," meaning "art age" in Russian, and "Art," symbolizing a new era of art. Located in St. Petersburg, Erarta

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Museum features a permanent collection of over 2,300 works and serves as a dynamic art center through exhibitions and events held throughout the year. The museum showcases works by Russia's leading contemporary artists and hosts international projects. By bringing together works across different disciplines, including painting, sculpture, photography, installation, and multimedia, Erarta aims to make art accessible to everyone.

For more information: <https://www.erarta.com/>

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Hakan GÜRBÜZER

Vav HAKOBYAN

Mesut KARAKIŞ

Daron MOURADIAN

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Erarta Museum of Contemporary Art

2, 29th line of Vasilievsky Ostrov, 199106, St. Petersburg, Russia

Visiting Hours: Every day except Tuesday, 11:00-23:00