

Nudes, and Naked Aggression

By Eric Ernst

For those who enjoy viewing art that represents two extremes of the emotional spectrum, the Jade Nectar Gallery in Southampton is currently offering an exhibit titled "Late Summer Nudes" and the James Salomon Gallery in East Hampton is presenting new works by Rima Mardoyan in a show bearing the grim title of "Genocide Paintings."

Based in part on the 1915 extermination of Armenians by the Ottoman Turkish government, the 20th century's first genocide and a landmark in modern history, Ms Mardoyan's highly atmospheric approach to composition powerfully expresses the inhumanity and horrors of both past and present, absent figuration or overt dogmatism.

Instead, in her use of abstraction to conjure emotional rather than specific images, the artist creates a maelstrom of physical impressions that undoubtedly appeals to the eye, but gains its greatest impact on a much deeper intellectual level. The paintings thereby betray the superficiality and lack of awareness on the part of critics who decry so-called "victim art" as self-indulgent meanderings.

Instead, Ms. Mardoyan's works reflect the composer Dimitri Mitropoulos's observation that "only life suffered can transform a symphony from a collection of notes into a message of humanity." Further, by eschewing representation in favor of pure abstraction, Ms. Mardoyan creates a sense of psychological connection that heightens the viewer's ability to interpret meaning on many different levels in the works. Evoking the pitiless malevolence that humanity always leaves in its wake as a reminder of mankind's relentless historical stumbling, the works establish an almost audible dialogue between conceptions of painterly beauty visual postulates about mankind's addiction to explosions of inhuman atrocities.

This contrast is underscored in works such as "Women in Rwanda," "Darfur," and "Story of the River Tigris," all of which also serve as reminders that the barbaric plagues of cruelty and ignorance that stretched throughout the 20th century have since followed us into the 21st.

Structurally, the works gain some of their profound impact from their construction, which has as one of its underpinnings encaustic paints immersed in layers of beeswax. This creates a stunning sense of depth that is enhanced by the artist's application of a swirling vortex of colors and intensified by the clear puddles of wax that shimmer and eddy on the surface of the paintings.

As Jean Paul Sartre wrote in a 1961 essay on art of the Holocaust—expressing a thought that echoes resoundingly throughout Ms. Mardoyan's exhibition—"the viewer must identify and reconstruct the conjugation of striae and beautiful yet sinister colors; this is the only way of experiencing the meaning of martyrdom. Incarnated in plastic substance, it allows us to sense, through the frenzy of colors, mutilated flesh and unbearable suffering."

The exhibition of recent works by Rima Mardoyan, "Genocide Paintings," continues at the James Salomon Gallery in East Hampton through November 23. Meanwhile, presenting an exhibition as completely different as visual imagery could possibly be, the Jade Nectar Gallery in Southampton is offering a group show of works that have the naked human form as their subject, in an exhibit titled "Late Summer Nudes." Featuring 15 artists and photographers working in a variety of styles

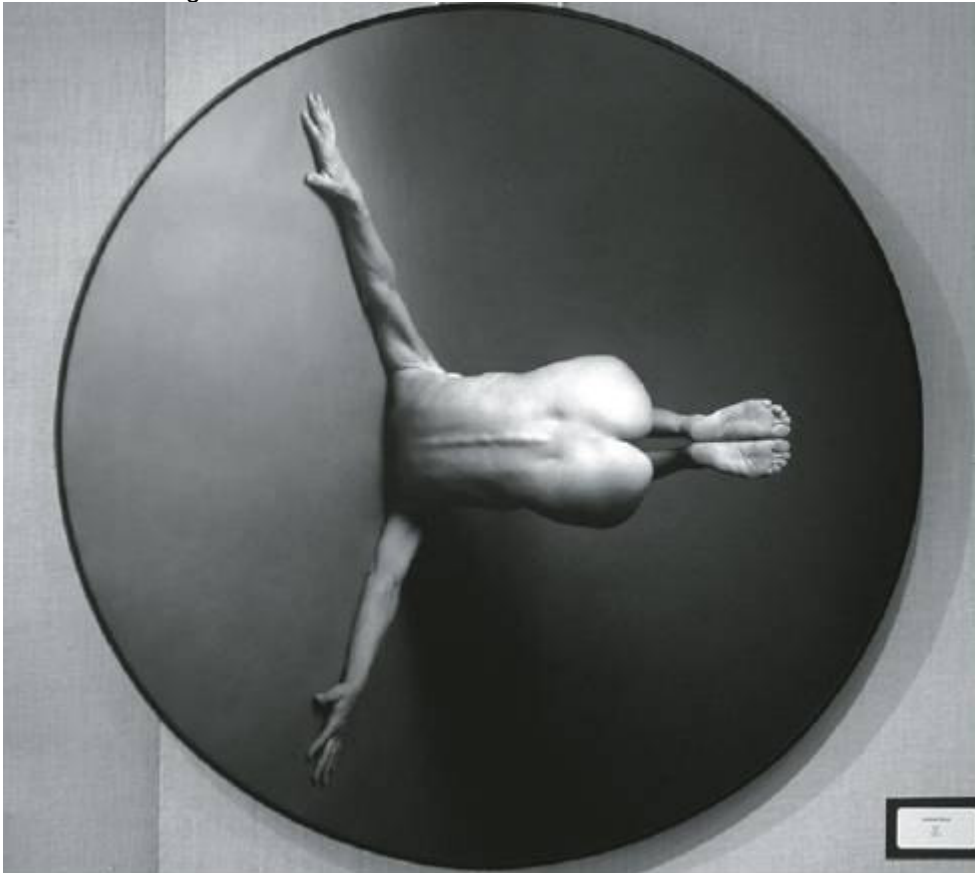
and mediums, the installation is a bit busy and could have benefited from a more discriminating curatorial hand, but the exhibit is nevertheless entertaining in its effect.

Of particular note are Jonathan Morse's digital photographs, "Eyes Only" and "Flying," each of which establishes the subject relative to the viewer from a rather unorthodox physical perspective. This is especially notable in the latter, in which Mr. Morse has turned the axis of the work sideways, thereby imparting the sense that either the model or the viewer is floating somewhat aimlessly in a realm where gravity has no meaning. Perhaps equally as impressive are the warm tones that Mr. Morse is able to create, giving a feeling of substance and tactility to the images, which I have frequently found lacking in most digital photographic endeavors.

Also of interest is Victor Udovichenko's photograph, "Day," which, in much the same way as Edward Weston's landmark series of nudes, dramatically highlights contrasts in textures and tones in a manner that is superficially sculptural and gently cinematic.

Also paying homage to a great master in art history is Lana Santorelli, whose portrait, titled "Self" (acrylic on canvas), echoes the dark and sinister eroticism of Edward Munch's 1894 masterpiece "Madonna."

The exhibition at the Jade Nectar Gallery on Jobs Lane in Southampton, "Late Summer Nudes," continues through October 17.



Jonathan Morse's "Flying" is one of the works on view at the Jade Nectar Gallery in Southampton.



"Red Crimson Water" by Camille Perottet is also on view at the Jade Nectar Gallery.