

Artist draws from roots deep in Armenian soil

By Naomi Siegel
special writer

When Tazian's "Transitions," in the Oakland County Gallery's executive office building, 1200 N. Telegraph, Pontiac, continues through July 15. Hours are 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday-Friday.

When Tazian's one-man show, "Transitions," was nearing, the artist's family obligations also required him to show his work in his children's school.

His commitments to family, education and fine arts usually dovetail smoothly, but even he found it difficult to be in two places at once.

Yet, when Tazian's works are in view, a pervasive sense of mystery — perhaps the fabled mystery of the East — suggests that in many ways, Tazian is in two places at once.

Born in Lebanon among the three percent Armenian population "which was small, but very influential," Tazian grew up speaking Armenian, Arabic, English, French and Turkish lan-

guages, but was materially very poor. It was not until his older brother, Zohrab, now a land developer in Fort Wayne, Ind., had come to the United States that Tazian's adventures in Western culture "and my discovery that art was to be my lifework" began.

"A youngster who was poor didn't even dream of such a career," he recalled, standing in his Bloomfield Township studio, amidst dozens of works "in transition."

MUCH OF his work is dreamlike. The somber faces, fine-featured, beautiful in almost idealized contours, gaze into the distance, their haunting expressions reflections of the aftermath of the 1915 invasion of the Turks.

"As a child, I saw such faces," Tazian observed.

Indeed, the sorrow of women in headscarves and native gowns marks many of Tazian's works, whatever their medium.

His wide-ranging, facile use of bronze, marble, clay, oils, watercolors and found objects — such as wood and,

increasingly, industrial machine parts and cast-off packing materials — has brought criticism, possibly born of envy.

"Why would I — why should an artist — rule out any medium?" Tazian asked.

In 16 years as an instructor of fine arts at the Orchard Ridge Campus of Oakland Community College, his diversity and intensity have benefited his students "and kept me fresh and new, each time I work in a different medium, or attempt an experiment," he said.

Experimentation, growth, sentiment that is far from saccharine, and increasing strength are evidenced in Tazian's works.

Figures, not from life at the moment before him, but impressed on him long ago or recently, emerge from natural orifice or man-made shapes, whole or half-relief.

THE VISUAL PUN, the metaphor, the madonna and child, Tazian's imagination works them to his remembered images, always striving to "present the viewer with more than a single moment's pleasure of communication . . . I wish to call them back again and again, so that discovery echoes, the work unfolds for the one who studies it again and again."

"Texture . . ." he said, running his hand over the flowing, surface of a large piece of polished wood to the tiny bronze figures emerging from its natural opening, "texture in art has its counterpart in music and literature."

From a nearby doorway, daughter, Taline 11, and twin sons, Vabe and Vatche, 8, listened as their father explained his plans for a new slab of marble and a number of heavy metal discs, factory castings and cast-offs, which suggest artistic opportunities.

Hang about the work tables and in

the adjoining room, Tazian's large oils and watercolors have a gentle power. The community of his youth, his beginnings, are portrayed as variations on a theme.

After nine years in America, he returned to Lebanon, where he then met his wife and brought her here, after a correspondence courtship.

The idealized faces in his paintings seem far more realistic after one sees Mrs. Tazian's quiet beauty, "But I do not have live models as I work," Tazian said.

Glenn Michael's portrait, which hangs in their home, shows a younger Tazian, but the intensity was already there.

First a student at the Fort Wayne Art Institute (now the art department of the University of Indiana), Tazian earned a bachelor of arts degree from St. Francis, then a masters in fine art. Studies with Wayne State University's

G. Alden Smith and other mentors, as John Ambroski, followed, along with a second masters at Wayne.

Clearly, Tazian's energy is an asset for, as he reflected, "being an artist is not a part-time job. Among the differences between the artist and non-artist, I think is that, for the artist, things have meaning in more than one context."

As if to punctuate this observation, a slender fantasy figure of bronze flowing out of a cast impression of a driftwood form, comes into focus. Khalil Gibran's poetry and art, the Impressionists who Tazian admires, and the artist's inventiveness which captures, too, the spirit of his adopted land's openness to change, seem influential.

"An artist is affected and influenced by everything he or she experiences," Tazian said, "ultimately, we are a composite of these impressions."

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