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# Samuel Gareginyan

**Boston Artist Makes a Living Commissioning Folkloric Paintings**

BY NADA HASSANEIN

**A**s a kid, Samuel Gareginyan often wandered the library at school — but there’s one instance engraved in his memory. He was 15 years old and had picked up a book featuring the etchings of German Renaissance painter Albrecht Dürer. He remembers admiring the fine-line details of Dürer’s *Melancholia I* — its allegorical nature intrigued him.

The Old Masters, whom he calls, “my beloveds,” and their work — along with watching his uncle sculpt little ornaments as a child — are what planted the



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seeds in his youth that would make him flourish into an artist.

The characters in his paintings have a folkloric feel, with sly looks, slanted eyes and dramatic body language — in some, the figures seem to be gossiping and in others, they’re lamenting. The vibrant, bold colors are reminiscent of Medieval fairy tales, and maybe even his Armenian childhood, because, “Armenia forces you to express yourself with color,” he said.

Dürer’s work, Rembrandt’s and others were magic to him. “I understood that I didn’t want to do anything else,” Gareginyan said.

## **CLASSES AND COMMISSIONS**

The emotions in his paintings are inspired by not only what he observed in people, but also from his own psyche.

1 *La Boheme*, 2001, by Samuel Gareginyan. Oil on linen, 24" x 24". 2 *Lighthouse*, 2011, by Samuel Gareginyan. Oil on linen, 22" x 11". Copyright © Samuel Gareginyan. Used by permission of the artist.

“I’m a very sensitive person. Every artist is a sensitive person — maybe art does that to you. ... Art is not a humor, it is not a joke — it’s a drama,” he said.

In 1991, Gareginyan earned his Master of Fine Art at Yerevan Institute of Fine Arts, Armenia, and went on to teach art classes at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, where he moved 20 years ago. Now, he teaches occasional private art classes, but his time is dedicated to painting. “It’s not easy, but I love to live by doing paintings — it’s my way of living.”

Gareginyan prefers not to be represented by galleries. Instead, he has an open-door policy to his “Renaissance-air” studio where prospective buyers stroll around to look at his work. “People come to my studio, have some wine and see if they like a painting,” he said. One satisfied buyer tells his or her friend, and that’s how word spreads about his art. He has learned to talk about his work with customers and be confident about it, having “spiritual conversations, understanding the art and the essence of it and this is how they start to commission paintings.”

Commissions are a major source of his income — “that’s how I survive,” Gareginyan said. Mostly, it’s customers who are familiar with his imaginative still lifes and portraits, so they trust the pieces he makes. “They commission me to do anything I like — they trust me. And they give me a certain size and I play with the size and I do whatever I like to do. Sometimes, I work with an interior,” he said. When buyers invite him for dinner, he suggests ideas that would complement their environment. A commissioned portrait can sometimes range up to \$8,000 or \$10,000. He takes a nonrefundable 30 percent of the total before starting a commission — “but if you buy and take it home, you have one week to change your mind and demand it back, guaranteed... That’s how I keep myself honest.”



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Along with participating in more than 40 group and solo shows in the U.S., he has shown artwork in countries from Argentina to Lebanon to Spain and created cover art for books such as Philip Nikolayev’s *Letters from Aldenderry*. But now, Gareginyan has focused his artistic visions on those commissions and sales

instead of saving work for an exhibition. “Instead, he sells them right away, and only leaves a few in his studio for visitors to look at..”

For Gareginyan, there’s no time to sit and bask in his success — because he’s still “in motion.” Instead, he has pride in his *skills* and is determined to become more well-rounded with each day he spends in the studio. “My hand can do what my eye can see. I can do whatever I think and do whatever I see,” he said. **PA**

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3 *Fountain*, 2014, by Samuel Gareginyan. Oil on linen, 42” x 48”. 4 *Self-portrait*, 2013, by Samuel Gareginyan. Oil on linen  
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