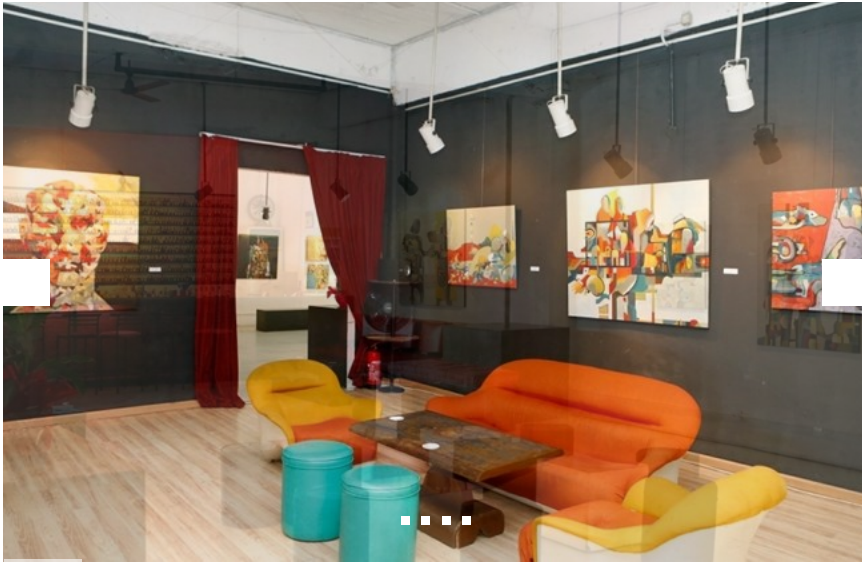


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Janet Hagopian's colorful reflections on shifting perception



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India Stoughton | The Daily Star

BEIRUT: There's a reason Pablo Picasso's "Guernica" is one of the best known paintings in the world. The black-and-white oil from 1937 captures the aftermath of a bombing carried out by German and Italian warplanes intervening in the Spanish civil war. It captures the horror and violence of war in an image that contrasts beauty and suffering.

One of the more powerful paintings in "A Moment Suspended in Time," Iranian-Armenian artist Janet Hagopian's solo show at Art Lounge, evokes Picasso's masterpiece.



A gallery shot of 'A Moment Suspended in Time' at Art Lounge. Photo by Azakir
Entitled "Ethic of War 1915," the acrylic and charcoal-on-canvas work seemingly depicts scenes from the Armenian genocide – which is widely held to have started 100 years ago this month.

A tangle of distorted faces, limbs and body parts in stark black-and-white, the painting's palette evokes Picasso's work – so different from the rest of Hagopian's vibrant work.

Patches of deep blood red accent the work, emphasizing the violence, while the head of a horse – its mouth seemingly open mid-scream, as if echoing the human faces in the painting – evokes Picasso further.

As in "Guernica," the humans and animals in "Ethic of War 1915" suffer together.

As noted, "Ethic of War 1915" is an anomaly amid the rest of Hagopian's exhibition, which is characterized by rich, bold colors and geometric designs. The paintings of the Beirut-based artist are influenced by the experience of belonging simultaneously to three different cultures, and aim to cast light on the social and religious influences that shape the life of women in the Middle East.

A three-portrait series entitled "Anarchism I, II and III" hang alongside each other on one wall of the bar-cum-gallery, glowing in the dim thanks to well-positioned spotlights.

Executed in subtle autumnal hues, the first piece depicts a figure facing the viewer, its head made up of what look like puzzle pieces. Hagopian has created a clever faux-three-dimensional surface, in which the pieces come together to form a single image while somehow appearing to connect in impossible ways, like the components of a M. C. Escher drawing.



A gallery shot of 'A Moment Suspended in Time' at Art Lounge. Photo by Azakir

The second portrait captures a head of the same size and in the same position, but comprised of black-and-white elements – birds, shoes, hands and abstract geometrical forms – that come together to form human features.

The series final piece is a bright conglomeration of reds, oranges and pinks set against a gray backdrop. Accented with touches of vivid yellow and royal blue, the painting captures a visage made up of irregular shapes. Evocative of architectural features, they suggest doors, windows, pillars and balustrades.

Viewed in succession, these three portraits explore the potential of figurative work to excite the viewer's imagination, capturing multiple concepts and subjects in a single layered image.

The majority of the paintings in Hagopian's show employ this sort of double perspective, using lots of small elements grouped together to create a single larger composition.

"Intention," for example, again alludes to the work of Picasso, thanks to its bright color palette and almost cubist composition.

A complex collage of independent shapes comes together to resemble what might be the outline of a human figure, with one elaborate eye fringed with long, colorful lashes.

Within the overall composition, smaller images are discernable – the outline of white-headed, colorfully winged birds, shaded archways and what might be letters from some unknown alphabet.

In her canvas "Malak'allah" (King of God), Hagopian picks out the form of the Arabic letters to write out the word against a black background. Each letter is comprised of blocks of color, conveying the impression that they are segments of a larger composition, concealed by the black sections of the painting as a veil hides sections of the face.



A gallery shot of 'A Moment Suspended in Time' at Art Lounge. Photo by Azakir
"A Moment Suspended in Time" is a decorative show that conveys a deeper message about perception and hidden influences. Fans of geometrically driven artwork – from Picasso's paintings to the colorful collages of Hussein Madi – will enjoy Hagopian's aesthetic and her talent for building up simple individual elements to create a complex whole.

Janet Hagopian's "A Moment Suspended in Time" continues at Art Lounge through April 11, Wednesdays through Saturdays from 4 to 9 p.m. For more information, please call 03-997-676.

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