

The art of Russia

Sculptor's work has ranged from realism to cubism

By Bill Iddings

CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

MOSCOW, Russia — This sculpture, artist Rudolph Khatchatrian tells his guest, he will recreate to be placed at the hub of Yerevan, the capital city of his homeland, Armenia.

The sculpture, somewhere between 3 and 4 feet high and placed on a pedestal, will be expanded, by request of Yerevan's mayor, to 10 meters high.

Characteristic of the three dimensional sculptures on which Khatchatrian now concentrates, this work of painted wood's prominent images are feet. Its overall impression recalls Pablo Picasso.

In the main room of Khatchatrian's spacious, multi-room apartment and studio workshop, the sculptor is surrounded by his artistry. Some of the painted-wood pieces revolve on turntables, giving them a fourth dimension, creating optical illusions.

Many of the sculptures will be on exhibit this month in Armenia.

This particular morning, as a panorama of Khatchatrian's neighborhood spreads outside the picture window of his multi-room apartment and studio workshop, Khatchatrian is the artist as host.

Shortly after 10 a.m., Khatchatrian, as he did in 1976 for another guest, American writer William Saroyan ("He was tall, straight and very attractive"), pours Armenian cognac for his current American journalist guest.

Khatchatrian says he and Saroyan polished off a whole bottle of cognac while he painted Saroyan's portrait. By noon, this journalist's penmanship has deteriorated to marginal legibility.

Khatchatrian, about whom noted critic Dmitry Sarabianov has observed, "Khatchatrian belongs to the world of his own fancy," has set a large table with Armenian grapes, apples, pears and peaches.

A native Armenian who since 1971 has lived in Moscow, Khatchatrian in 1985 sojourned one month in Detroit when his work was exhibited there. That exhibit made Khatchatrian the first Russian to have a personal exhibition in the United States after the end of the Cold War. So, Khatchatrian is asked, what do you think of the mid-1980s in Detroit and America?

"It was a good time for such unrealistic art," Khatchatrian says, noting his exhibit was covered nationwide by American television. He says he liked the international spirit in Detroit, "in comparison

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SCULPTOR from 1F

with Europe," and, "of course, it is more free, not so nationalistic ... Independence and freedom are very important, but it has two sides, as everything in your life."

Khatchatrian's sculptures, of course, have more than two sides, as has his career. At 60-years-old, Khatchatrian has gone through five periods. He began with Renaissance-style portraits, and you may have seen his realism and

never realized it: Khatchatrian in 1987 was commissioned by Time magazine to draw a cover portrait of Russia's then-president Mikhail Gorbachev.

Such work is a far cry from Khatchatrian today, his period of super realism. Sarabianov writes of Khatchatrian "mastering reality," giving "into it at the same time he responds to its rhythm and

follows the imperious lines of his growth." Khatchatrian's world is phantasmic, Sarabianov says, "not fettered by the everyday and the obvious."

After periods which have included realism, surrealism and cubism, Khatchatrian tells his visitor, he now is in his London Metamorphosis, returning to the influences of his youth and his surrealistic period.

Khatchatrian presents his American guest with three publications of his works. He autographs each, one with "The warmest greetings," another with "From the deep of my soul."

And, although basically what the journalist has in common with Saroyan is working in the same alphabet, one last toast with Armenian cognac.

Rudolf Khachatryan (1937–2007)

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