



Maya Meyer

MUSE Cosmic Cadences

TEXT **JORGE S. ARANGO**

Joseph Haroutunian's restless brushwork taps into the rhythms of life

Joseph Haroutunian's got rhythm. It's not just that he paints while listening to music, including jazz and world music, particularly the hypnotic *gnawa* of Morocco. One can certainly "see" the music in his abstract brushstrokes, hundreds – maybe thousands – of which squiggle, curl, zigzag, snake and vibrate across his canvases. His rhythm is more akin to what Jackson Pollock was expressing when he said, "The modern artist ... is working and expressing an inner world – in other words, expressing the energy, the motion, and other inner forces," all of which are constantly, dynamically in flux.

Haroutunian didn't start out as an artist. In fact, he first majored in philosophy. His father was a Presbyterian theologian, and he grew up on the neo-Gothic campus of Chicago's McCormick Theological Seminary. Both his grandfathers were ministers. "I didn't like church per se," the 76-year-old Haroutunian recalls, "but I wasn't averse to the theology."

Once in school, however, he started hanging out in the art department waiting for Gabriella Burrage, an art major who would become his wife. "I said to Gay, 'You get credit for this?'" Intrigued, he enrolled at the Art Institute of Chicago. He lasted until the first lunch hour. "The whole atmosphere was too young for me," he explains. His did like his teacher, however – German painter Paul Wiegardt, whose students included Claes Oldenburg, Leon Golub and Robert Indiana – so Haroutunian took additional private courses from him.

Gay eventually switched majors and got a degree in speech pathology at Boston University. In 1971, the couple made their way to Maine. "I fell in love with Maine immediately," says Haroutunian. "It was big and impressive and rural. I don't know that I was ever happy in cities." The state's rugged coast, with its rock formations, beaches, blueberry barrens and tidal flats, changed the course of his art.

Haroutunian became interested in the work of one of the Maine coast's foremost interpreters, John Marin. "That loosened up my watercolors," he explains. "The subject matter was similar, but [the previous work] was more controlled and tighter." Indeed, the skies in Haroutunian's watercolors are often, like Marin's, represented by little more than a single or a few slashes of blue. There are also similarities to the way Marin painted roiling water.

Eventually he met Marin's son, John Jr., and his wife Norma, who put an addition on their house and opened a gallery, where for some years they showed Haroutunian's work. Even then, however, the watercolors were simply a way to pull ideas from the landscape. Even in their figuration, they too are largely abstracted and seem to be more about the syncopation of trees, water and air currents.

That's because Haroutunian is uninterested in representational art. "The thing about landscape is that it's a genre, and I'm not into genre," he reveals. "It's the pattern and rhythm of landscape that comes out. We feel those rhythms, so it's really about the rhythm of human beings. That's more satisfying than painting any 'thing.' I just want them to be paintings that express that rhythm."

Other influences are the iconography of Asmat shields from New Guinea (a stylized praying mantis symbol can sometimes be discerned in his strokes), desert colors and forms, and Anasazi mythology. Ultimately however, true perhaps to his background in theology and philosophy, Haroutunian is after something more ephemeral: the very rhythms of the universe.

Littlefield Gallery, Winter Harbor, Maine littlefieldgallery.com

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“Green Above Naples” 2006 oil on canvas 34" x 24"



“Yellow Over Green” 2005 oil on gessoed paper 30" x 22"
(matted and framed size 37" x 29")



“Two Rocks, Schoodic Point (Turtle Island)” 1995 watercolor 11" x 15"



“Near Grindstone Neck, Winter Harbor” 1995 watercolor 11" x 15"



“One Tree and Flotsam” 2017 watercolor 11" x 15"



Warren Heath

GREEN & PLEASANT
Not since the Seventies have houseplants been so big! And why not? Studies show caring for plants can be as rewarding as loving a pet – they’re relatively easy to maintain, act as living décor and purify the air that surrounds us. **DESIGN NOTES:** This alfresco bedroom is all about bringing the outside in! A flowering and well-pruned tree is a sculptural anchor in this eclectic space while the suspended swinging bench brings a touch of outdoor whimsy undercover. A previously unloved courtyard is transformed into a hardworking kitchen garden and inside-outside garden installation. Open to the elements, it receives its due of sunlight and rain but is easily accessible as a delightful container and vertical garden that delivers. **TIP:** Urban gardening may be one of the biggest worldwide trends there is – and no wonder. Growing plants, edible or otherwise can be infinitely gratifying and they give you a chance to connect with nature no matter how big or small your space.