

TEMPLON

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GÉRARD GAROUSTE

BLOUIN - MODERN PAINTERS, March – April 2018



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A REBEL PAINTER:
GÉRARD
GAROUSTE

THE FRENCH ARTIST WHO
DEFIED CONVENTION WITH
HIS FIGURATIVE STYLE IS
NOW BEING CELEBRATED
WITH THREE EXHIBITIONS
IN PARIS IN MARCH

BY TOBIAS GREY

Gérard Garouste's "Naaman," 2017.
Oil on canvas, 160 x 195 cm / 63 x 76 3/4 in



COURTESY GALERIE TEMPLON, PARIS AND BRUSSELS. © GÉRARD GAROUSTE. PHOTO: JUST ZUTTI

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THE FRENCH painter and sculptor Gérard Garouste likens himself to a worm that has worked its way into a piece of fruit. In other words, he is a rebel. This not only applied to the 72-year-old artist's embrace of figurative painting at a time when conceptual art was the post-Duchamp thing to do in France. It also spoke of his refusal to conform to the values of a bigoted upbringing and education. In his 20s, Garouste, who was born a year after World War II ended, discovered to his horror that his father, a furniture merchant, who was virulently anti-Semitic, had despoiled Jewish property during the war.

"Either you adopted the rest of my family's approach which was to ask no questions or you tried to discover what really happened, which is something I did," said Garouste on a recent visit to Paris, where he maintains a studio.

Garouste, who spends most of his time on a sprawling, tree-filled estate in Normandy that he shares with his wife, the designer Elisabeth Garouste, is set to have a busy March with three exhibitions of his figurative art opening in Paris within days of each other. In 2009, Garouste scored a surprise hit on the French best-seller list when he published a slim autobiography titled "L'Intranquille" (The Unquiet One). Written in conjunction with the French journalist Judith Perrignon, it detailed Garouste's struggle with bi-polar depression which necessitated years of psychoanalysis and several stays in psychiatric hospitals.

In "L'Intranquille," Garouste discusses the motivation for his work: "To unpack the overarching way we are manipulated by religion



Garouste's "Raba Bar Bar Hana," 2016. Oil on canvas. 260x210 cm / 102 3/8 x 82 5/8 in

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COURTESY GALERIE TEMPLON, ANTWERP AND BRUSSELS © G. GAROUSTE PHOTO M. J. B. 10/11

Garouste, who was brought up as a Catholic, converted to Judaism several years ago and has been studying Hebrew for over 20 years

and family. That was my subject and it wasn't going to change." Garouste is often the protagonist of his own paintings. The cover of "L'Intranquille" is a 2002 self-portrait titled "Le Masque de Chien" (The Dog's Mask). In it Garouste appears as hunchback with a distorted body and a haunted look on his face, his feet turned back-to-front. Garouste is reluctant to explain the precise theme of this work but after pensively puffing on a Cohiba cigar he said that he has "always enjoyed treating very serious issues in a humorous way."

One of Garouste's upcoming shows consists of new oil paintings, on view March 13-July 1 at the Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature in Paris. The exhibition is inspired by the Greek myth of Diana and Actaeon. The French artist has often drawn on mythology to produce art that examines how myths can act on us in both conscious and sub-conscious ways. In an era of #MeToo, the allegory of Diana and Actaeon appears strikingly resonant. The basic narrative of the myth is that Diana, the goddess of the hunt, decides to take a bath with her nymphs just as the hunter, Actaeon, passes her way with his pack of dogs. Instead of moving on, Actaeon lingers to ogle the naked Diana. When Diana sees him watching her she takes her bow and pierces him with an arrow which transforms him into a deer. He is then eaten by his dogs.

After the Musée de la Chasse had approached Garouste to see whether he'd be interested in addressing the myth in a series of paintings, he showed them his preparatory sketches to see whether they still wanted him to go ahead with the project. As it turned out, they did.

"My version of the myth is quite pornographic," he said. "In my paintings, I

depict Actaeon as a pervert who when he sees Diana naked, sodomizes one of his dogs. There are a few paintings like that and some others which show why the dogs attack Actaeon and emasculate him. What pleases me about mythology is that you can interpret it as you like."

Also opening in March, at the Beaux Arts de Paris, is a Garouste exhibition featuring several large-scale installations painted on collapsible canvas, including the tent-like "Ellipse," originally presented at the Fondation Cartier in 2001.

There will also be an exhibition of 30 new oil paintings at the Galerie Daniel Templon, March 15-May 10, under the title "Zeugma" meaning "bridge" in Greek. The paintings are largely inspired by Garouste's reading of the Talmud, whose ancient text the artist suggests can be thematically linked to Greek mythology and great literary works such as "Don Quixote," the fables of Jean de la Fontaine and "The Divine Comedy."

Garouste, who was brought up as a Catholic, converted to Judaism several years ago and has been studying Hebrew for over 20 years. "I received a Christian education that was also an anti-Semitic one," Garouste said. "Ironically what this anti-Semitism did was make me curious about Jewish culture. When I was at boarding school I had some Jewish friends. I asked one of them what it meant to be Jewish. I came to understand that anti-Semitism was based on pre-conceived ideas and was grossly unfair. I deliberately betrayed my father by not thinking the way he thought."

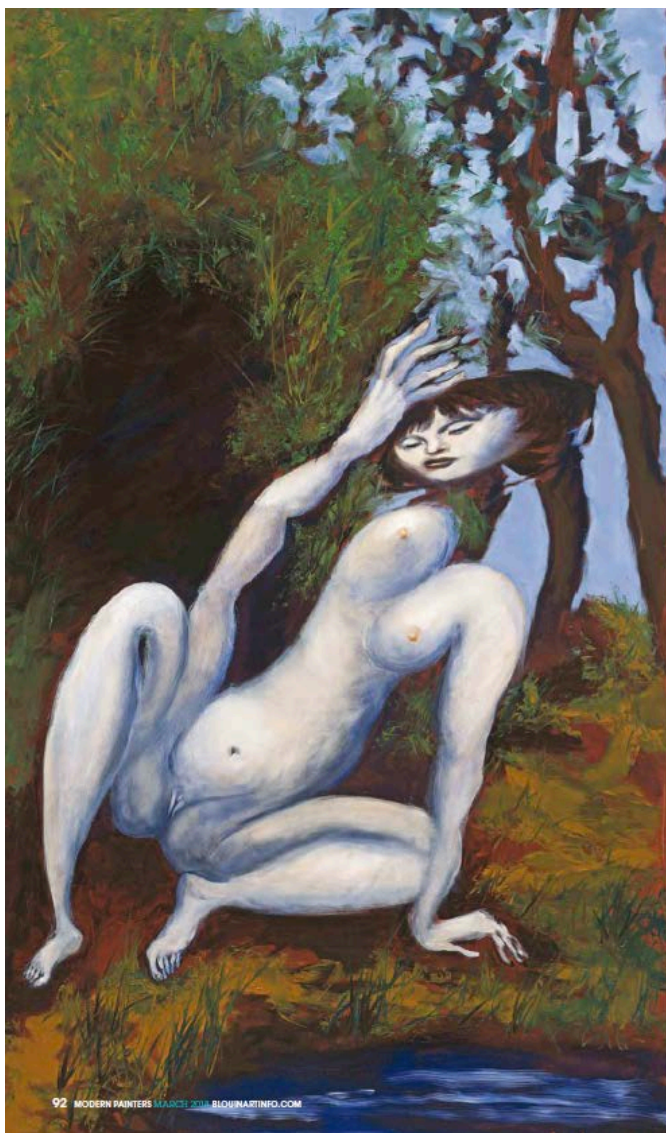
If "L'Intranquille" has a pre-dominant theme then it concerns Garouste's life-long struggle to escape the conditioning of his upbringing and culture. "It was my illness

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The first recognition for his painting came from one of New York's leading art dealers, Leo Castelli

and the stays I had in psychiatric hospitals which helped me to wipe the slate clean and start again from zero," Garouste said. "I had nothing to lose. For a long time I didn't earn a cent from my painting. I was suffering from depression and I didn't sleep much because it made me anxious. I used to lie down at the foot of my easel because it reassured me. And when my wife came into the room I would jump up and pretend I'd been painting."

Garouste's career began to take off at the end of the 1970s when the interior designer Andrée Putman introduced him to Fabrice Emaer, who owned Le Palace nightclub in Paris. Garouste designed classical decors painted in the Renaissance style for the club, which became the place to see and be seen at dancing the night away with the likes of Mick Jagger and Yves Saint Laurent. Though Garouste was finally making good money, he was not entirely satisfied: "In France I became pigeonholed as a nightclub designer whereas I really wanted to gain recognition for my paintings."

The first real recognition for his painting came not from France but one of New York's leading art dealers, Leo Castelli. At the beginning of the 1980s, Garouste had been selected along with nine other French artists to show some of their work in New York. Garouste's monumental painting "Adhara" — a stunning synthesis of order and chaos pitted against the backdrop of a moor on a stormy night — immediately set tongues wagging when it went on display at Holly Solomon's gallery. Not long afterward Garouste

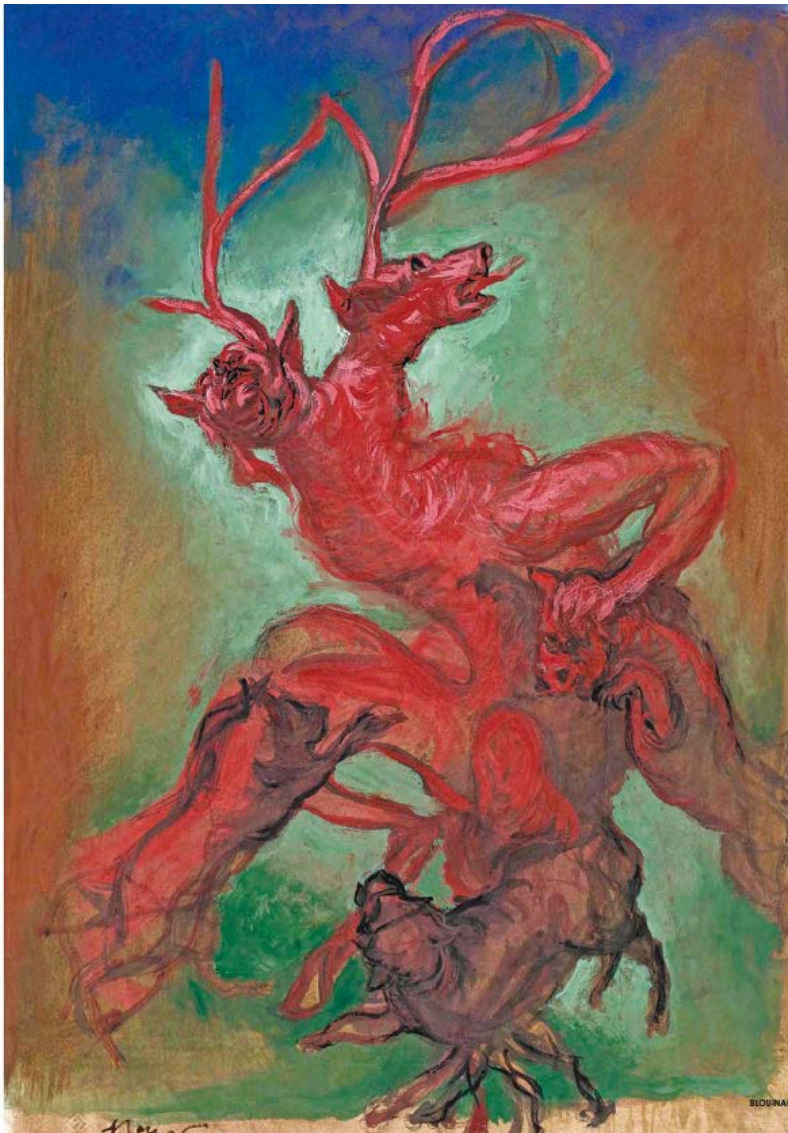
"Diane," 2017.
Oil on canvas.
195 x 114 cm /
76 ¾ x 44 7/8 in

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"Action rouge," 2015.
Gouache on paper,
73 x 52 cm /
28 3/4 x 20 1/2 in

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(Left) Hormin, the two mules and the two bridges, 2017. Oil on canvas, 260 x 200 cm / 102 3/8 x 78 7/8 in

(Right) Garouste's "Actéon émasculé," 2017. Oil on canvas, 142 x 114 cm / 57 1/8 x 44 7/8 in



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“New York is fine for a week but any longer, things start to get complicated,” said Garouste

was introduced to Castelli at a party at the French Embassy in New York. “The first thing he said to me was ‘I’ve heard a lot about your painting, we’re going to work together,’” Garouste recalled.

Work together they did but Castelli, who died in 1999, always regretted that Garouste never moved out to New York. “I just couldn’t do it,” Garouste said. “New York is OK for a week but any longer, things start to get complicated. I come to Paris once a week but being in a big city makes me overexcited and I have to avoid any strong emotions. In somewhere like New York even emotions that are not that strong are too strong for me.”

But even if Garouste didn’t conquer New York quite as he’d like to have, his career in France and Europe has grown from strength to strength. In the last ten years he has had solo shows at the Villa Médicis in Rome, the Fondation Maeght in the southeast of France, and the Musée des Beaux Arts de Mons in Belgium. Throughout it all he has never lost sight of the distance he has had to travel to get to where he is. The leitmotif of the donkey in Garouste’s work is testament to this.

“At school I was quite dyslexic, no doubt because of my father who was quite violent,” he said. “I remember one time I received zero in a dictation and my teacher made me a bonnet d’âne (a donkey’s hat) which I had to wear during the recess. Of course all other children took the opportunity to make fun of me. Since then I have developed an abiding affection for donkeys.” ^{SEP}

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