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GÉRARD GAROUSTE

ARCHITECTURALDIGEST.IN, 1 February 2020

Delhi: Lose your heart and mind to the dramatic and sometimes absurd world of Gérard Garouste, at NGMA, Delhi

The French Embassy and the Ministry of Culture have collaborated to unveil The Other Side, a special retrospective on the revered French artist, Gérard Garouste, at NGMA Delhi. 60 of his theatrical paintings and lithographs are on show at NGMA, Delhi



Uma Nair | PUBLISHED: FEB 01, 2020 | 07:00:26 IST



Galerie Templon Paris



*Les trois maîtres et les oies grasses / The Three Masters and the Fatted Geese, 2017. Acrylique sur toile / Acrylic on canvas
200 x 260 cm ; 78 3/4 x 102 3/8 in. Courtesy Templon, Paris - Brussels. Photo : ©Bertrand Huet / Tutti*

Art aficionados, get ready to be treated to works that are a vibrant combination of surrealistic imagery, literature, classical mythology, Judaism and Christianity. When Gérard Garouste started his artistic studies in 1965 at the age of 21, his father told him: “You’re not Picasso, painting is a joke.”

A Whirlwind Study of Art History

“The entire set of works tell us that for an artist to grow and progress, literature and history are as important as one’s observations from life and one’s own experiences,”

TEMPLON

II

GÉRARD GAROUSTE

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says DG, NGMA Adwaita Gadanayak who finds the exhibition both marvellous and fascinating for its world of dramatic fantasy.

Garouste's retrospective is like a whirlwind study of art history condensed into quaint characters with long, stretched necks, sublime hands, draped in tight fitting or loosely garbed attire, all part of heady haunting compositions. "All that is good in my drawings is spontaneous," says the artist. One can imagine the surfeit of characters and stories that spring out of his sketch books and note books.



Shamir, 2005. Huile sur toile / Oil on canvas 200x260cm;783/4 x1023/8 in. Collection privée / Private collection. Photo: © Bertrand Huët / Tutti

Freedom and Fullness

One of the leading figures in French art, he is obsessed by the origins of culture, myths and the legacy left by the Old Masters. His self portraits too look back at you and you can't miss the accuracy of emotion and energy. But above all, there is an eclectic freedom. According to him, freedom implies an awareness of the fullness in which one is born. In his words: "It consists in knowing that one is locked up in a cage. It is precisely

TEMPLON

II

GÉRARD GAROUSTE

ARCHITECTURALDIGEST.IN, 1 February 2020

this which makes it possible to free oneself from it and speak of freedom. To exist, I had to build myself a prison with a frame, a canvas, brushes, pigments...because in my opinion, an artist never creates better than through the constraints he has set himself." His own life is the springboard for his work as we see a 'dismantling of images and worlds'. He has a fascination for the questions of origins, time and transmission. His paintings are born of a summary of associations. They are sometimes disturbing, sometimes melancholic, sometimes unsettlingly joyful. But they are also teeming with a cast that includes animals, and a combination of different characters. His sources range from the Bible to popular culture and literary greats, from Cervantes to Rabelais. The fat geese look unreal, the three masters at the table are full of animation.



*Naaman, 2017. Huile sur
toile / Oil on canvas 160 x
195 cm; 63 x 76 3/4
in. Courtesy Templon, Paris
- Brussels. Photo : ©
Bertrand Huet / Tutti*

Maestro of the Absurd

The pièce de résistance of the show is Garouste's Warsaw Bridge and Donkeys 2017. He recreates the scene from the Talmud and the tale of the death of the sage Honi Ha-Me'éguel. The legend goes: He fell asleep near his donkey and a carob tree—a tree that takes seventy years to bear fruit. The sage falls into a long sleep, and during this time the tree gives its fruits. When he wakes up, the sage is rejected by his peers who no longer recognise him; he takes refuge in a cave for an eternal sleep. But in Garouste's world, the sage is projected into the Warsaw ghetto and takes on the features of an iconic Jew. The bridge is the visual translation of the equivocality, the donkeys an allegory of the lives

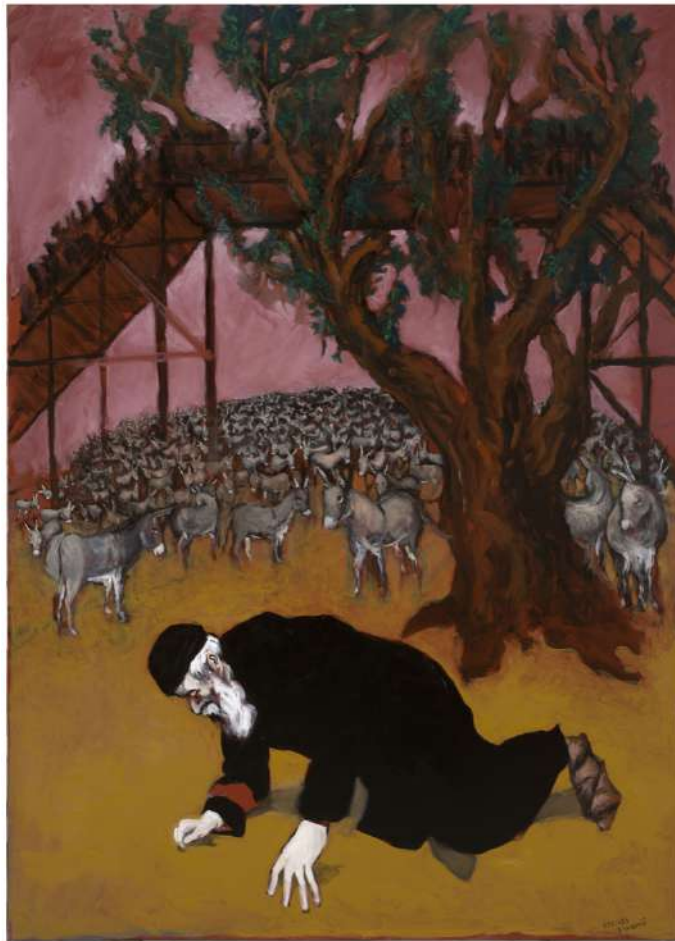
TEMPLON

II

GÉRARD GAROUSTE

ARCHITECTURALDIGEST.IN, 1 February 2020

destroyed during this period. No wonder Garouste says: "I stage stories, the painting then makes them travel. It deposits them on other retinas than mine, awakens other memories, other deaths, other questions."



Le pont de Varsovic et les âneses / Warsaw Bridge and the She-Ases, 2017 Acrylique sur toile / Acrylic on canvas. 220 x 160 cm ; 86 5/8 x 63 in. Collection Daniel Templon / Daniel Templon Collection Photo : ©Bertrand Huet / Tutti

Allegory and Myth

Between allegory and myth, his figurative paintings, are often enigmatic and complex, as he depicts hybrid characters fermented in his imagination, his dreams, his "delusions" as well as inspired by literary stories like Don Quixote and Dantes and Faust. Between attacks of a bipolar disorder and nervous breakdowns, his day begins listening to Schönberg. He suffered from depression for 10 years and had to work with what was left

TEMPLON

II

GÉRARD GAROUSTE

ARCHITECTURALDIGEST.IN, 1 February 2020

in his life. The retrospective is about the resonance and resilience that is left after a person suffers. We are reminded that we can all lead creative lives through trials and tribulation.

According to art critic, Olivier Kaepelin, Gérard Garouste uses the “power of questioning” founding myths and sacred texts. His art is inextricably linked to an engagement that is simultaneously private, spiritual and political: “When I paint armed with the texts that have irrigated the centuries, shaped the thinking of our forebears (...) when I paint in oil (...) it is in order to look inside ourselves, reveal our culture, our dominant philosophy, our unconscious. I want to be a worm in the fruit.”



La figue et l'hysope
(autoportrait) / *The Fig and the Hyssop* (self-portrait),
2007 Huile sur toile / Oil
on canvas
130 x 97 cm ; 51 1/8 x 38
1/4 in. Collection privée /
Private collection - Paris
Photo : © Bertrand Huet /
Tutti

The Other Side at NGMA Delhi runs till March 28, 2020