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ARTIST MARTIROS BADALYAN

Abstract

Martiros Badalyan's artistic legacy constitutes one of the most significant chapters of contemporary Armenian visual art, distinguished by its unique artistic language. In the artist's oeuvre, painting, collage, assemblage, and scenographic thinking are integrated into a coherent artistic system. The principal sources of his creative inspiration include the surrounding environment, the beauty of nature, the human being, and his homeland.

The thematic scope of Badalyan's work encompasses depictions of his birthplace as well as the landscapes of the Armenian Highlands, chapels, churches, and historical monuments. These representations extend beyond mere documentary function, becoming reinterpretations of national memory and sacred space. The themes of the Armenian Genocide, wars, and other humanitarian tragedies acquire profound expressive power in his art. His collages inspired by music reveal the artist's attempt to translate sonic structures into visual form.

One of the central directions of Badalyan's artistic practice is the self-portrait as a form of self-dialogue. His self-portraits transcend the conventional understanding of self-representation, becoming artistic expressions of his inner world, psychological states, and existential inquiries. At the heart of these works stands the individual on the path toward self-discovery. Rather than striving for an exact physical likeness, the artist reveals his inner self through a rich visual

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language. The city, flowers, and botanical elements function as symbols of memory, time, identity, and the continuity of life.

Keywords: *Martiros Badalyan, collage, self-portrait, artist, art, war, peace.*

Introduction

Martiros Badalyan is one of the "distinctive" representatives of contemporary Armenian fine arts, whose creative signature is determined by a combination of academic painting, national artistic tradition, and modernist thinking. In his art, painting, collage, assemblage, and scenographic thinking are united into an integrated artistic system and hold symbolic and philosophical significance.

Art historian Armen Gasparyan noted:

"In the relationship between man and the world, there is no chasm for M. Badalyan, no antagonism of opposing sides. He is within the world and carries many worlds inside himself. These are his themes. The artist exerts no effort when searching for motives; they are everywhere for him: a scene, a simple object, a memory, a dream, a state of mind, a mood, an unknown passerby, a spoken word, music, and so on..."[1]

Martiros Badalyan

Martiros Khachatur Badalyan, an Honored Artist of Armenia, painter, and representative of the art of collage, was born in 1952 in the village of Banants in the Gardman world. His years of professional education (graduating from the Yerevan Ph. Terlemezyan Fine Arts College and the Yerevan State Institute of Fine Arts and Theater) shaped the necessary academic artistic foundations that later manifested in the artist's creative thinking, imagery system, and means of expression.

His spontaneous style as a means of self-expression stands out for its originality and uniqueness. M. Badalyan's thinking is also distinct, blended with an inexhaustible sense of humor.

The artist's works are complex spatial objects where oil paint is combined with rusty metal, wood, mirrors, old springs, and brushes. For his work, he uses

[1] **Gasparyan** 2016, 3.

objects that possess a certain antiquity or history, or anything that inspires him at that given moment.

The master is not satisfied with canvas alone; he requires volume and three-dimensionality. His works break beyond the boundaries of the canvas's two-dimensional plane. The artist does not simply "place" objects, but also sculpts the form and paints on top of the objects.

The main sources of M. Badalyan's creative inspiration are the environment, the beauty of nature, man, the homeland, and so on. The artist does not equate freedom with license, but views it as a value requiring great responsibility, the meaning and price of which must be realized and appreciated.

The master-creator is convinced that love triumphs everywhere-both in life and art-and that an artist must first and foremost be honest, fair, and true to his principles. For the creator, art is an inseparable part of life-as irreplaceable as air and water. In the course of his creative activity, he resorts to various stylistic solutions that express his boundless imagination, multifaceted thinking, and the freedom of his creative mind."

It is definitely difficult to classify the artist's creative technique, as it combines the characteristics of different fields of fine arts. Notably, by M. Badalyan's own admission, he combines within himself "the painter, the sculptor, and the ceramicist." And the best testament to this is the creator's multifaceted art.[2]

As a pedagogue, M. Badalyan emphasizes the fact that a student must first and foremost master the rules of classical art, and only on that foundation pursue experimental searches and develop a personal style.

In the context of contemporary Armenian art, the author stands out for his experimental approach, where the two-dimensional space of the canvas acquires three-dimensional volume and theatricality.

The famous Russian journalist, TV host, and documentary filmmaker Pavel Selin,[3] referring to Martiros Badalyan's work, characterizes him as an exceptional phenomenon of contemporary art, even comparing him to Salvador Dalí. According to P. Selin's assessment, M. Badalyan is a creator who stands

[2] "Painting in Space": Creative Principles and Rules of Life of Martiros Badalyan, February 16, 2026.

[3] Arsen Arakelyan, Pavel Selin.

out for his unique perception of the world, non-standard artistic thinking, and a singular way of perceiving reality: "He is an alien," his creative gaze is unusual, profound, and independent, and the artist's imagination goes beyond the limits of ordinary perceptions. Pavel Selin, together with film director Arsen Arakelyan, has initiated the creation of a documentary film dedicated to Martiros Badalyan, aiming to introduce the artist's work to the Russian-speaking audience as well, emphasizing his unique place in contemporary Armenian fine arts. The film also addresses the question of whether there are ideological or artistic connections between M. Badalyan's creative thinking and the art of Sergei Parajanov.

The free and unconventional use of materials allows the artist to form a structural multi-layeredness. The artist's experience in theatrical design (more than 40 productions) and cinematographic thinking (more than 12 short films) are directly expressed in his easel painting as well. As a result, each work is constructed as an entire visual system, where color, texture, and composition act as meaningful elements, creating an artistic environment characterized by internal tension and expressiveness.

The exhibition, organized in 2022 under the title "My Environment is the Palette,"[4] curated by Lusine Badalyan, presented M. Badalyan's creative heritage from recent decades. The exhibition, by uniting works of various thematic directions, creates a complete understanding of the artist's artistic thinking, creative searches, versatile interests, and stylistic diversity. Art historian Syuzanna Piloyan, in her opening speech dedicated to the exhibition, valued the mission of the artist Martiros Badalyan as follows: "Martiros Badalyan is one of those artists who enter the arena to say a new word, to form a new way of thinking."[5]

The thematic scope of M. Badalyan's art includes the depiction of his birthplace as well as scenes of his native highlands, chapels, churches, and historical monuments, which is not limited to a documentary function but turns into a reinterpretation of national memory and sacred space.

[4] Martiros Badalyan 2022.

[5] The Artist's Stunning Exhibition: What a Flight of Imagination, What a World of Ideas... November 30, 2022.

The themes of the Armenian Genocide, wars, and other universal human catastrophes acquire an expressive resonance in his art. Collages on musical themes reveal the author's attempt to visually reproduce sound structures.

For the artist, the figure of the grandmother holds a special value, embodying the idea of family, the strength of the hearth, national memory, and moral values. A special place in M. Badalyan's art is occupied by the depiction of elderly people. Depicting ancestors, grandmothers and grandfathers, the creator raises the traditional archetype of the grandmother to a universal aesthetic and philosophical level. This is a symbolic reinterpretation of the Armenian woman as an eternal bearer of life, ancestral memory, wisdom, and suffering.

In Martiros Badalyan's works, portraits of elderly people occupy a special place, embodying the collective images of mother and father. In the creation of these characters, the artist's reverence for the art of Rembrandt van Rijn is evident. His virtuoso drawing, which was characteristic even of the artist's youth, continues the traditions of the great masters of fine arts. The artist specifically emphasizes the faces of the elderly, furrowed with wrinkles. The historical memory and destiny of the people seem to be stamped on those faces. However, the wrinkles do not diminish or fade their beauty; on the contrary, these faces are endowed with inner beauty, spiritual strength, and vitality.[6]

At the same time, the artist has created a rich series of portraits of prominent figures of Armenian culture. His portraits of Arno Babajanian, Aram Khachaturian, Ohan Duryan, Lusine Zakaryan, and Sergei Parajanov aim to reveal the essence of their character and inner world. The portrait of Henrikh Mkhitaryan is unique, placed on the open-air balcony of the artist's studio. It is visible from the street and inevitably catches the attention of passersby, becoming one of the recognizable calling cards of the studio.

Collage in M. Badalyan's Art

The founders of collage are considered to be the representatives of synthetic cubism, Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, and Juan Gris, who in 1912–1913 applied the principle of combining newspapers, cardboard, posters, and other materials in fine arts, creating a new way of constructing images. This technique radically expanded the expressive possibilities of fine arts.

[6] The Pain and Joy of the Artist, Voice of Armenia.

In the 1930s, interest in collage decreased to some extent, but in the 1950s–1960s, it revived in connection with the development of pop art. Collage became an important means of artistic interpretation of mass culture, consumer society, and contemporary reality, and Robert Rauschenberg also made a significant contribution to the art of collage.

In the 20th century, collage became widely spread in Armenian fine arts as well, combining global artistic experience with national cultural thinking and a symbolic system. In the works of Armenian artists, it often served to express historical-cultural memory and spiritual values. In this context, a special role belongs to the art of Sergei Parajanov, whose visual thinking had a great influence on contemporary Armenian art. Within the framework of the same tradition, an important place is occupied by the collage works of Martiros Badalyan, which present an original ideological and artistic form of expression.

Characteristically, in the context of contemporary Armenian art, the author stands out for his experimental approach, where the two-dimensional space of the canvas acquires three-dimensional volume and theatricality. Collage thinking is one of the main features of M. Badalyan's art. In the artist's words: "Collage gives pause for thought: as much material as there is, that much work there is." This thought best describes the essence of his creative method. In the creator's works, everyday objects lose their functional significance and turn into symbols of memory, time, and personal experience.

One of the important originalities of the talented artist-collagist is the idea of giving material a "second life". He transforms household items into artistic means of expression, giving them a new semantic content. Paper, cloth, printed scraps, and randomly found objects become bearers of memory and time. This approach can be viewed as a reinterpretation of cultural memory, where the past is not only reproduced but reconstructed in a contemporary artistic language. The creator's collage structures are also characterized by a sense of scenic rhythm. The compositions are constructed in such a way that the viewer's gaze, moving in certain directions, pauses at key points and continues its course. This principle is due to the artist's theatrical experience, and under its influence, the organization of space resembles a stage action.

In M. Badalyan's art, painting, collage, and theatrical thinking combine into a unified artistic system. His creative signature is characterized by a free compositional structure, expressive color solutions, and an experimental

approach to materials. An internal tension is often observed in the creator's color system, expressed by the contrast of dark and bright shades.

The Theme of War and Peace in the Artist's Art

The work "The Landscape of War" (Fig. 1) is one of the expressive embodiments of the ideological opposition of war and peace in M. Badalyan's art. As the author notes, the theme of war and peace constantly accompanies him, and the material used suggests the creative solution. Refusing a flat surface, he experiments with a spherical format, which symbolizes the globe, the completeness of life, and universal human space. The work has a round (tondo) structure and is divided into two parts by a central dark, relief fissure; the latter turns not only into a compositional axis but also into a symbol of internal tension and the pain caused by war. Metal bullets contrast with the colorful surface of the work, showing the destructive impact of war. Green, yellow, blue, and red shades predominate in the upper and lower sections, embodying the vitality and tranquility of nature. The central section contrasts with them, crafted in dark brown, black, and metallic shades associated with scorched earth, explosions, and catastrophic war. "Bullets are not for shooting, but for painting and creating art," M. Badalyan said.[7]

The title "The Landscape of War" is contradictory in itself. The concept of a landscape is connected with peace, whereas here it negates its semantic meaning. The painting shows how the destructive power created by man invades the harmonious world of nature, destroying life.

Self-Portraits of Martiros Badalyan

One of the core directions of M. Badalyan's art is the self-portrait as a self-conversation. The artist consoles his longing for his beloved daughter, Lusine, who lives abroad, by interpreting his own image in a unique way, and these self-portraits (more than 600) have turned into an extensive series whose hero is love. The series of self-portraits reflects various states of mind-joy, admiration, surprise and regret, soul pain, will, grotesque, various experiences, emotions, thoughts, and ways out-embodied in one face.

[7] "Bullets are not for shooting, but for painting," Public Television Company, 2021.

In his works, the artist uses exclusively those objects that have their own "past." For example, if the artist uses brushes to create a self-portrait, they must be "old, having lived their life."[8]

M. Badalyan's self-portraits "break" the boundaries of the traditional perception of the self-image, turning into an artistic expression of the author's inner world, psychological states, and ontological searches. They are constructed through a conscious generalization of form, sharpened glances, and emphasized color contrasts, which contribute to the intensity of the character's emotional tension. The work "Self-Portrait" (Fig. 2) stands out for an imagery system characteristic of surrealist thinking, where reality and imagination merge into one symbolic space. What is depicted in the portrait is a bearer of memory, life experience, and the spiritual world. The architectural structures painted on the upper part of the head symbolize the author's past, living environment, cultural memory, and accumulated experience, turning into a visual metaphor of the inner world. The detailed linear elaboration of the painting, the subtle correlation of light and shadow, as well as the calm, balanced expression of the image, speak of the artist's profound reflections. External restraint contrasts with internal emotional saturation, giving the character psychological depth and symbolic multi-layeredness. The work prompts the viewer to reflect on the relationship between the "self" and time, emphasizing that human existence is conditioned not only by their physical presence but also by the experience of lived years, memories, and cultural self-awareness.

The work "Peace" (Fig. 3) is remarkable; the monument "We are our mountains" ("grandma-grandpa") of Artsakh is depicted on the hat of the self-portrait, symbolizing the indissoluble connection of the Artsakh land, historical memory, and national identity. The depiction of the monument emphasizes the strength of the roots of the Armenian people, historical continuity, and spiritual unity with the native land.

In the self-portrait "Late Spring" (Fig. 4), the artist resorts to other expressive means, constructing the character from flowers, leaves, and plants. The use of plant elements creates an organic unity of man and nature, emphasizing their interconnectedness and harmony. At the same time, the combination of flat and relief structures enriches the plastic expressiveness of

[8] Painting in Space, Creative Principles and Rules of Life of Martiros Badalyan, February 16, 2026.

the work and strengthens the artistic impact of the material. “Late Spring” is one of M. Badalyan’s warmest and most lyrical self-portraits.

In these three self-portraits, the central theme is man on the path of self-knowledge. The author does not strive for an accurate reproduction of external resemblance, but reveals his inner world by using figurative language. The city, flowers, and plant elements act as symbols of memory, time, identity, and the continuity of life.

Conclusion

M. Badalyan’s work is one of the most important pages of contemporary Armenian fine arts, standing out for its original artistic language. He has managed to create a system where national thinking and tradition are interpreted anew through innovative forms, theatricalization, and free experimentation with materials. The international resonance of the creator’s art (exhibitions in Austria, France, Germany and so on) proves that local and national themes in the author’s works have acquired universal, psychological, and philosophical quality.

Art is the meaning of his life, and his life is art. This is how one can characterize one of the significant figures of Armenian fine arts, the artist Martiros Badalyan.

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Fig. 1. *The Landscape of War*

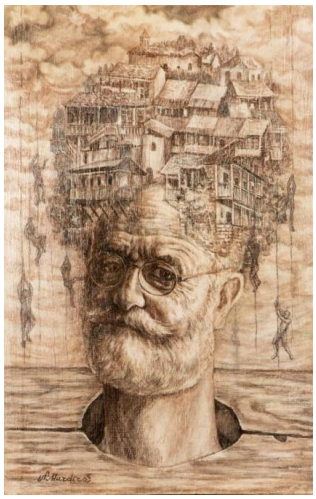


Fig. 2. *Self-portrait*



Fig. 3. *Peace*



Fig. 4. *Late spring*

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Ամփոփում

Մարտիրոս Բադալյանի ստեղծագործությունը, որն աչքի է ընկնում իր ինքնատիպ գեղարվեստական լեզվով, հայ ժամանակակից կերպարվեստի կարևորագույն էջերից է: Նկարչի արվեստում գեղանկարչությունը, կոլաժը, ասամբլյաժը և բեմանկարչական մտածողությունը միավորված են ամբողջական գեղարվեստական համակարգի մեջ: Նրա ստեղծագործական ներշնչանքի հիմնական աղբյուրներն են շրջակա միջավայրը, բնության գեղեցկությունը, մարդը, հայրենի երկիրը և այլն: Վարպետը ազատությունը չի նույնականացնում ինքնաբավության հետ, այլ դիտարկում է այն որպես մեծ պատասխանատվություն պահանջող արժեք, որի նշանակությունն ու գինը անհրաժեշտ է գիտակցել և արժևորել:

Մ. Բադալյանի արվեստի թեմատիկ շրջանակը ընդգրկում է ինչպես ծննդավայրի, այնպես էլ հայրենի լեռնաշխարհի տեսարանների, մատուռների, եկեղեցիների և պատմական հուշարձանների պատկերումը, որը չի սահմանափակվում վավերագրական գործառույթով, այլ վերածվում է ազգային հիշողության և սրբազան տարածության վերաիմաստավորման:

Հայոց ցեղասպանության, պատերազմների և համամարդկային այլ աղետների թեմաները նրա արվեստում ստանում են արտահայտչական ինչեղություն: Երաժշտական թեմաներով կոլաժները բացահայտում են հեղինակի փորձը՝ տեսողականորեն վերարտադրելու հնչյունային կառուցվածքները:

Նկարչի արվեստի առանցքային ուղղություններից մեկը ինքնադիմանկարն է՝ որպես ինքնազրույց: Մ. Բադալյանի ինքնադիմանկարները «ճեղքում են» ինքնապատկերի ավանդական ընկալման սահմանները՝ վերածվելով հեղինակի ներաշխարհի, հոգեբանական վիճակների և գոյաբանական որոնումների գեղարվեստական արտահայտության: Նրա ինքնադիմանկարների կենտրոնական թեման մարդն է՝ ինքնաճանաչման ճանապարհին: Նկարիչը

չի ձգտում արտաքին նմանության ճշգրիտ վերարտադրմանը, այլ բացահայտում է իր ներաշխարհը՝ կիրառելով պատկերային լեզուն: Քաղաքը, ծաղիկներն ու բուսական տարրերը հանդես են գալիս որպես հիշողության, ժամանակի, ինքնության և կյանքի շարունակականության խորհրդանիշներ:

Բանալի բառեր՝ *Մարտիրոս Բադալյան, կոլաժ, ինքնանկար, նկարիչ, արվեստ, պատերազմ, խաղաղություն:*