

Resika & Boghosian make magic from mundane

By Laura V. Scheel

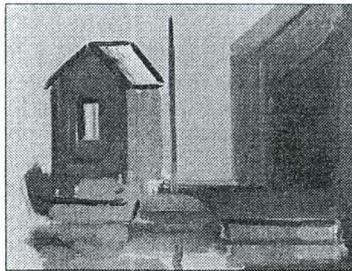
Though their mediums and their methods could not be more different — Paul Resika's use of vividly colored oils or pastels and Varujan Boghosian's melange of scavenged and mystically arranged physical objects — the works of the two artists are yet magically and intrinsically connected. Showing side by side and also as part of one another, Resika and Boghosian are joined in the upcoming exhibit "Together ... Again!" at the Berta Walker Gallery, 208 Bradford St. Featuring the individual works of each artist, the exhibit will also pay homage to several collaboration pieces of the two, a visual display of mutual friendship, respect and shared vision.

A previous collaboration exhibit at the Berta Walker Gallery in the early '90s revealed a certain harmony in how the two artists related to each other's works as well as sharing a unity of concept. "Resika and Boghosian truly have a great energy together," says Berta Walker, who has represented and known both artists for many years. "The two respect each other's work greatly and love to work and show together. They are beautifully psychically connected and share a certain purity and integrity in their work."

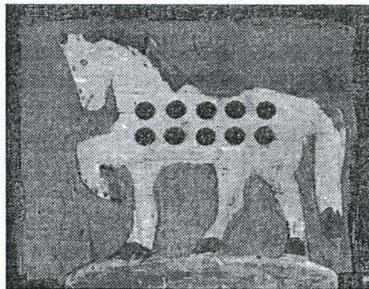
While their works at first glance are strikingly different, the two

share a sensibility to their individual subject matter that enhances each other's works. "Many of their works relate," continues Walker. "So often they deal with very similar layouts, themes and colors, entirely independent and unknowing of one another. The only obvious differences are the materials they use to create their art."

Resika has established himself through his vibrant use of color while portraying a repetition of themes and subjects. Painting primarily in oils, his painting hovers on abstraction while retaining a definite recognition of subject. Much of his



*"Cool Pier," oil on canvas
by Paul Resika.*



*"Trojan Horse,"
by Varujan Boghosian.*

work focuses on Provincetown and the fishing piers, a simplicity of boat, water and sky that bursts forth in a richness of light, color and reflection. In an earlier essay, poet Arturo Vivante wrote of Resika's paintings: "...things meet as if attracted to each other. The sea meets the sky, light meets shade, the shore and the advancing wavelets meet as harmoniously as fingers meeting the stops of a flute. An inner reality comes forth, more accu-

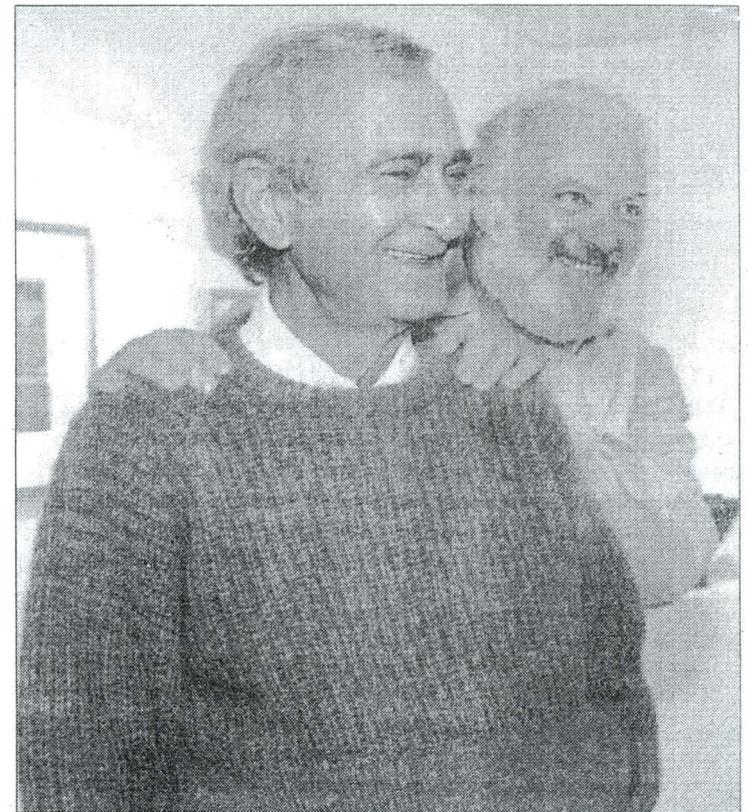
rate and telling than the everyday one." It is in this sense, Resika himself has also remarked, that it is not a particular subject that he is re-creating on canvas, but rather the form and color of a scene.

For many years Resika has been painting within that same realm, and while the subjects at hand are constant, the light and colors vary widely. His subjects go through perpetual transformation while still holding on to a certain familiarity. His works tend to be large, with swirling and broad strokes of color intended to reflect the changing moods of his subjects. In a 1995 essay, W.S. Di

Piero described Resika's work with light as a "desirous pursuit of its textures and temperatures. His pictures do not

illustrate or describe light, they enact its imperious, changeful presence."

Similarly, the assemblages and collages of Resika's good friend Boghosian invoke mood and memory in an entirely different context. Using a multitude of found objects, from antique toy children's blocks to coloring book cutouts, old fabric and metal pieces, Boghosian reworks common associations into new perspectives. His art relies on



*Varujan Boghosian (left) and Paul Resika
will show together at Berta Walker.*

these objects as his brush, the wood on which they are thoughtfully placed, as his palette.

In his gathering of pieces, his work is inspired by the past, though its purpose is not to remain there. Through the placing of the objects within his works, new meanings and associations are created and new identities are given to the familiar. Wrote Robert Doty of the Hood Museum of Dartmouth, where Boghosian began teaching in 1958, "The ordinary and commonplace are endowed with wonder; the logical and rational become mysterious and magical."

It is within the two artists' constant reinvention of the familiar that their themes merge together; that

one's work relates so well with the other. In showing their works, Walker sees an unusual connection between Resika and Boghosian. "Every single work of art needs its own breathing space," she says, "It needs to have its own conversation with the viewer and also with the other pieces around it." Side by side and also as a joint effort, Walker expects that the two artists' work will "bring out a very good conversation, all with great underlying truth, respect and clarity."

The show opens on Friday, July 30, with a reception from 7-9 p.m. The recent paintings and drawings of Jim Peters will also open at the Berta Walker Gallery, 208 Bradford Street. 487-6411.



CHARLES W. HAWTHORNE, *Waiting*, oil on canvas, 40 x 40"

Opening Friday, 7 - 9 PM

VARUJAN BOGHOSIAN

CHARLES W. HAWTHORNE

PAUL RESIKA

Berta Walker GALLERY

208 Bradford Street Provincetown, MA 02657 508-487-6411 (f) 508-487-8794
(East end of Town near Howland Street, Ample Parking)

BertaWalker@BertaWalkerGallery.com www.BertaWalkerGallery.com

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The Orphic Art of Varujan Boghosian

BY JOANNA FINK

A child at play may take an ordinary object, a doll or a block, for example, and imbue it with his or her own special meaning. A story then evolves around the object. Varujan Boghosian takes up the premise of “play” in his constructions, collages, and watercolors, transforming the artifacts of everyday life into the vehicles for his own stories. The found (or resurrected) objects that Boghosian collects and incorporates into his work become metaphors for grander themes of human endeavor. What differentiates the activity of the child from that of the artist is the breadth and complexity of the vision, but what remains common is the basic instinct to give structure and meaning to the world through metaphor.

This is also, one might conclude, the purpose of myth. Our struggle to make sense out of a world that offers up so many mysteries is manifest in the ancient stories that play out our highest hopes and deepest fears. Boghosian is an artist who understands the vitality and relevance of myth in the modern world. Central to his art is the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, which

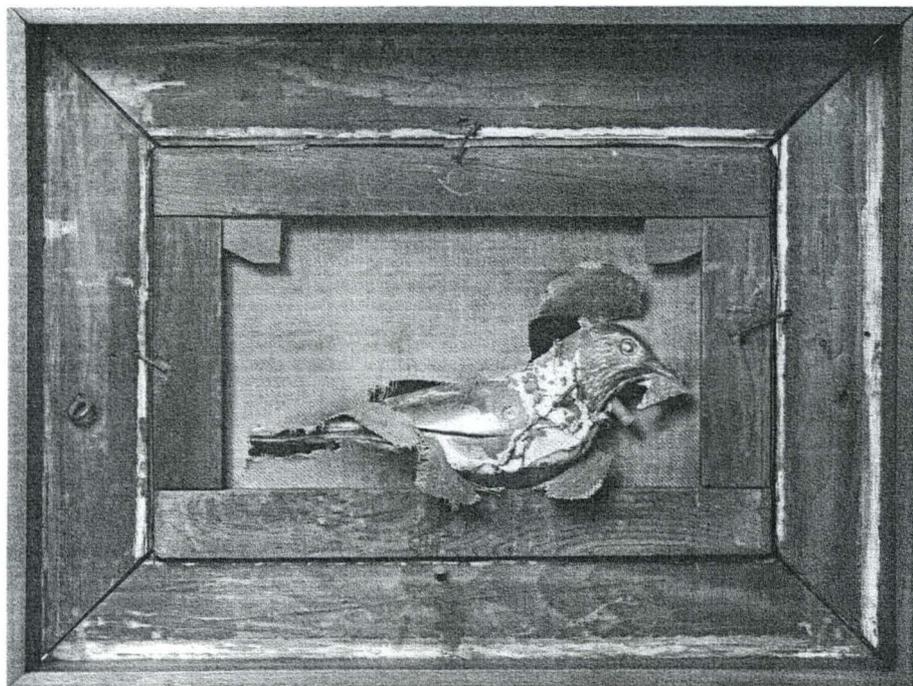


VARUJAN BOGHOSIAN, "ORPHEUS (THE PIPER)," 1993
CONSTRUCTION (WOOD, BRONZE, CARDBOARD)
PHOTO COURTESY ALPHA GALLERY, BOSTON

embodies themes that have captured the imagination of numerous artists, writers, and filmmakers over the years. For Boghosian, the idea caught on early. While still a student in 1957, he executed a portfolio of woodcuts and poems that tells the story: Eurydice, the wife of the gifted musician, Orpheus, dies after being bitten by a snake. She descends into Hades, but is rescued by Orpheus, who uses the power of his music to convince Pluto to allow her to return to earth. Orpheus leads Eurydice out of the underworld, on the condition that he not look back, or she will be lost forever, but Eurydice cries out for Orpheus, prompting him to look behind. She plummets back to the underworld. Orpheus returns to earth alone. He is subsequently killed by the Maenads and rejoins his beloved in Hades.

The myth illustrates the dichotomy between man and woman—the desire for the “other,” but also the fear of the consequences of that desire. With love comes the inevitability of separation, most poignantly through death. From an artistic point of view, the myth may also represent the (male) artist’s unrelenting search for the (female) muse, a quest that necessitates the artist’s abandonment of earthly reality. The muse must be met on her own turf.

Boghosian’s visualizations of the Orpheus myth have gone through numerous permutations over the years. In his recent monotype/collage “Orpheus and Eurydice” (1994), a proof from the series included in a portfolio for the Fine Arts Work Center, Boghosian poses two



VARUJAN BOGHOSIAN, "ORPHEUS," 1983
CONSTRUCTION (CLOTH, WOOD, BRONZE)

PHOTO JEFFREY NINTZEL

birds, one above the other, as representations of the doomed couple. The body of the Orpheus bird, on the top, is demarcated by notes from a musical score. A cut-out of paper flowers fills in the body of the Eurydice bird, which appears below. Orpheus is presented as the bearer of music, Eurydice as the bearer of feminine beauty. However, if one examines this collage closely, one recognizes that underneath Eurydice's flowers lies an obscured musical score, similar to that of Orpheus. Could it be that it is she who holds the mystery of the music, secreted behind her beauty? Does she then bestow upon her mate the power that the music contains through the inspiration of that beauty?

An earlier work poses a different set of questions. Boghosian's construction "Orpheus" (1983) again portrays our hero as a bird, this time cast in bronze, in the act of breaking through a weathered canvas on stretchers. The viewer is presented with the back of the canvas, and one can only imagine what lies on the other side. Clearly, the inference is of Orpheus re-emerging from the underworld, or that place which we dare not imagine. The violent tearing of the canvas suggests that it is not without some struggle that his mission is accomplished, like a baby chick who must crack its egg in order to be born.

But what is to become of this Orpheus bird? He has successfully made it back to the land of the living, but must now confront it alone. And once he has journeyed to hell, can he possibly return unscathed? It is worth noting the parallel between Boghosian's art and the poetry of his friend Stanley Kunitz. Kunitz has implied that, once one has witnessed hell, it remains embedded in one's psyche (see *Provincetown Arts*, 1992). In his poem, "In a Dark House," Kunitz acknowl-

edges the fate of Orpheus who, having been tainted by evil, found no place of comfort for himself back on earth. Eurydice's call to him was not accidental: she, too, knew that once her innocence had been lost, she could not return. Boghosian's construction echoes this dilemma of crossing over from reality to the dark unknown, and back again. The fact that we have experienced hell on earth (Kunitz refers specifically to the Holocaust) points to the continuing relevance of myth in our time.

A comical twist to this theme is evident in Boghosian's sculpture "Orpheus (Piper)" from 1993. In this instance, the figure of the musician is seated awkwardly on a pile of building blocks, his arms stiff, his head tilted to one side. A sprue, the remains of the bronze casting method used to create the figure, leads from the hands to the chin, becoming the pipe with which he plies his trade. He wears a conical hat, a dunce cap. Perhaps the artist sees a bit of himself in this hapless musician. After all, the artist too is a kind of performer, doing his best to express something of the soul through his chosen medium. And perhaps the dunce cap implies that one has to allow oneself to be a bit of a fool in order to undertake such a task—a fool for love.

Boghosian's lifelong appropriation of this myth is apt for an artist whose own creative process leads him on a journey into the dark recesses of our visual history. Like Orpheus' music, it is Boghosian's particular talent that enables him to traverse back and forth. The artist finds the muse in the land of lost objects. His Eurydice calls out to him, and he answers. ■

Joanna Fink is the director of the Alpha Gallery in Boston. Her book reviews have appeared regularly in Art New England.

*Boghosian & Resika:
"Together...Again!"
a show with Jim Peters*



"American Flag" by Varujan Boghosian

Inspired by the past and by his friend and colleague Paul Resika, Varujan Boghosian's sculptures celebrate the lives of legacy and myth, of people and objects and of images and iconography that lasts.

"Together...Again!, both Resika and Boghosian, co-founders and members of the now defunct Long Point Gallery, have collaborated in a show at Berta Walker Gallery that combines their unique styles. Boghosian sculpts and Resika paints.

For artists whose media are worlds apart, the rough assemblages of Boghosian exist quite beautifully alongside the soft, stunning and elegant palette of Resika's paintings.

Perhaps it's because the two men are friends. Perhaps it's also because during their long association at Long Point Gallery, they and the other gallery members learned to work together, bounce ideas off one another and engage in dialogue that helped each, in turn, to develop and grow into their unique and individualistic styles.

No matter the reason, their collaborative exhibit at Berta Walker Gallery is a stunning tribute to each man and his work.

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"The most improvised thing is the most ordered, rehearsed thing," he said. "I was out there painting every day, but I never get bored because I was in a trance. You have to be in a trance to make art work."

Resika also created a series of pastels made up figures on the beach during family gatherings in the late afternoon "when the light is beautiful." These tight little drawings and some prints, a medium Resika has recently begun exploring, are also featured in this exhibition.

Another well-known artist showing with Boghosian and Resika is Jim Peters, a painter referred to also as a constructionist because he likes the idea of what he calls "trapped energy."

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Robert M. Doty, curator of a Boghosian retrospective said, "The creative act is a process of reclamation and re-attribution. By dislocating and repositioning, Boghosian is able to explore the nature of identity and to create new syntheses and new conditions of meaning from items which have seemingly been drained of the possibility of ever transmitting new values or ideas."

In this show, Boghosian honors not only Resika's palette, which he said "always sends me off," he has created three new pieces honoring Cezanne (because he painted so many apples), Klee (a variation on gardens, on flora and fauna) and Ed Giobbi's floral meditations.

Resika continues to paint boats, piers and fish houses that vibrate and float in a sea of color unlike any found in nature. But their beauty and form are so well organized and balanced, so incredibly beautiful to view, an orange sea or purple sky is amazingly real.

He compared his fascination with this theme to improvisation by Coleman Hawkins and his rendition of "Body and Soul."

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Boats in boxes or figures in confined interiors are subjects explored by Peters in canvases always under construction.

Peters is especially known for his darkly erotic interiors of relationships between lovers.

Starting with a female figure, "his hero" or "main character," Peters continually revises and repaints until the female figure takes on a narrative.

"My paintings are like an ongoing film, the characters constantly moving, the scenery changing," he said.

Peters has responded to the darkness of his palette and subject matter by saying he likes the night and is drawn into mystery and the anticipation imparted by the energy of darkness.

Creating the right tension, Peters uses his saws, a broom, a brush, pieces of wood, tin, photos, wire and glass as he constructs, deconstructs and reconstructs each painting. Peters relies on the energy of the creative process to know when each work "is right."

In the juxtaposition of the two-dimensionality of illusion and the three-dimensional reality of the piece itself, the "object" is the crux of Peters' "trial and error" process.

"Together...Again! with Boghosian and Resika and the paintings of Jim Peters will continue at Berta Walker Gallery until August 16.

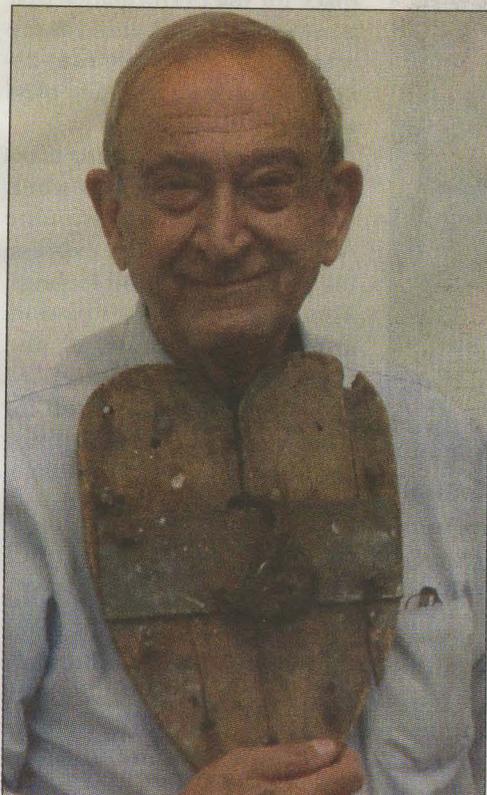
Varujan Boghosian and his circle of friends

By **Susan Rand Brown**

BANNER CORRESPONDENT

“The best ones are the simplest ones,” sculptor-assembler-constructionist Varujan Boghosian, who is showing at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum through Aug. 30, says with a twinkle in his deep-set brown eyes. The morning is cloudy, and despite the early hour, others are milling around, spellbound by his poetic wood and metal constructions covering the four walls of the Provincetown Art Association and Museum’s large back gallery. Hence the horrified look on a few faces, as Boghosian lifts “Mazur’s Apron” (2009) right off the wall, and playfully proceeds to open and close the long wooden fingers of a hidden hand, remains of a store mannequin found long ago. They are poking from the pocket of a painter’s apron used by artist Michael Mazur, an important influence within Boghosian’s large circle of friends who also work and show in Provincetown.

Magician-like, Boghosian pulls a red-tipped wooden dowel from the apron’s narrow vertical pocket. Suddenly the eye is drawn to red, dancing across the surface: dabs of red paint on the apron, a small metal strawberry in a chain of flowers welded to a small flute, a “magic flute,” he calls it. This casual display of artistry is Boghosian’s tribute to another whose work he loves. It is also a tribute to the art and shared inspiration that defines his history in Provincetown, where, 45 years



Varujan Boghosian with his “Unlocked Heart” (2009), mixed media construction.

ago, prowling Highland Light beach at low tide, he found a ship’s beam, a remnant of a boat that had splintered, and lugged it across the sand to his studio. “I still consider myself the greatest beachcomber of all times,” Boghosian laughs.

The event at Highland Light was a milestone as he was moving from watercolor and woodcuts to this form which juggles intuition, serendipity, empathy for the hid-

den life of discarded stuff, a good eye, and an almost feline willingness to wait: it is the eye of the artist, not the found objects themselves, which makes meaning. You can pick something up and save it, but there needs to be a “click” before a piece can be born.

Boghosian came to town in 1948 in his early 20’s, with art school friends Sal Del Deo, Ed Giobbi, and Romanos Rizk; they too remained part of the fabric of the town. His first townie job was dishwasher at Pablo’s, a long-gone Commercial Street restaurant, where he was “sort of adopted” and quickly promoted to salad man.

Boghosian kept coming back to town, married a woman whose aunt had a house in the East End (later Norman Mailer’s), and settled into a cottage in Mayflower

Heights which has been a seasonal refuge since. He went on to become a founding member of the Long Point Gallery, and for the past 15 years has been showing at the Berta Walker Gallery.

The earliest object in this show (1963) is “Pluto,” the inner form a circular hat-block studded with little nails (one of the rare times Boghosian manipulated what he found) in a swirling pattern. This dismembered head is framed by a cow-lick box (used to hold blocks of salt), a utilitarian object whose worn wood glows with age. The cow-licks were a find from a Kiley Court antique shop. As in all of Boghosian’s work, less has become more. Pluto is the Roman god of the underworld, and god of the wounded: the salt, the nails, the wounding are all clues to meaning.

In “Portrait of the Artist” (ca. 1980), a bronze bird breaks free from the reverse side of an aged can-

vas: in a deep dramatic voice, the usually self-effacing Boghosian deems this construction “perfect.”

“There are only two elements here, the bird and the canvas stretcher,” he explains. “Years later I look at certain things and say, ‘That’s not right.’ But this one is here to stay.” What makes for perfection? “If you have age, and experience, and have looked at a lot of art history, and other constructions that have a sympathetic feel – the surrealists, the Dadaists – you just know that it’s right.”

“My later years have been minimalist,” says Boghosian. Strolling the gallery we pause at “Cinderella Much Later” (2009), where wit and humor carry the day: Cinderella’s updated story is symbolized by an antique white shoe, its lace moldy and worn, and a bronze mouse lodged into its heel (only hours later did the reference become clear

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— Cinderella’s friendly mice!). Provincetown artist Paul Bowen gave him the backdrop, the inside of a peeling book cover, its paper deliciously torn away from the cardboard. “The shoes were in a shop. I had them for less than a year. The minute I had the shoe I knew that something had to be in there, so I went looking for a mouse.”

“Pollock’s Palette” (2009) and “Pollock Painted a Duck” (2009) are recent constructions with humor, minimal parts and an art-historical reference. The “Palette” is really two palettes, one set inside the other, each loaded with gobs of color randomly applied. Students had tossed them after the

semester’s art class. Boghosian scooped them up. Then there is “Duck,” a marvel of simplicity and humor. He found it this way, an old hunter’s decoy ready-made with splashes of paint.

“It’s nice ... you go back and forth from myth, to nursery rhymes, to experience, to imagination. It’s a combination of everything,” he reflects while moving toward “Unlocked Heart” (2009), whose pieces are an aged heart-shaped wooden board, perhaps used in a cranberry bog, and an old heart-shaped lock with a key.

In collaboration with this exhibit, Boghosian’s work will be shown at the Berta Walker Gallery, 208 Bradford St., Provincetown, Aug. 21 through Sept. 7.