

Armenian artist Anna Navasardian is drawn to the dark



-- PHOTO: HELMI YUSOF



by Helmi Yusof

She's young, talented and pretty. At 24, Armenian-born artist Anna Navasardian has surpassed most of her peers by winning awards for her paintings and gaining gallery representations.

At her solo exhibition in Galerie Michael Janssen in Gillman Barracks, one can see why. Her portraits of children, families and individuals have a dark, haunting life of their own. Melancholy eyes peer at you, hinting at a kind of terror and isolation beneath their simple poses.

Her images of school-children posing for class photographs, for instance, dramatise the tension between the strict discipline schools enforce on children and what the children really want to be - free and uninhibited. The children are shown seated obediently in neat rows and wearing uniforms, but their deadened eyes and stiff bodies barely conceal their resentment. "I looked at photos of my mother from the Soviet era. As a child of Armenia, she was often photographed in these black-and-white school photos. That tension between what society and country expected of these children, and what they wanted to be, was palpable to me. It felt like a direct conflict between the innocence of these children and the strictures of the state," she says.

Using strong contrasts of light and shade, mass and void, and angular slashing brushstrokes, the paintings pulsate with angst and frustration.

Navasardian says she is heavily influenced by the German expressionist artists at the turn of the 20th century like Max Beckman and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, who were known for their examination of the human condition that range from the piercingly frank to the precariously bleak.

Though she admits most art collectors prefer to buy her lighter, less sombre paintings - most collectors generally do in the case of other artists' works too - she finds herself naturally drawn to "the immediacy, the rawness" of creating darker works.

Before she graduated from Carnegie Mellon with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in painting in 2010, she had already caught the attention of her teachers and other art observers - winning the John L Porter Art Award for outstanding students not once but twice.

Still, the lithe and attractive former model is careful not to appear too lucky. It was only after much prodding that she admits: "The galleries that represent me say I'm the youngest artist they have."

Now residing in Brooklyn, New York, she produces between three and four paintings a month - a respectable output for any artist. But the price she pays is a near-hermetic lifestyle. "There's too much distraction in New York," she says. "There's always something to do, something to see. The only way I can get a lot of work done is to coop myself up, switch on

some music by The Doors or Jack White, and just paint.”

“In the art world, someone can appear and disappear quickly. Now that I have galleries showing my work internationally, I just want to keep working so that doesn’t happen to me.”

Anna Navasardian’s solo show titled Kids is now on till May 5 at Michael Janssen Singapore gallery in Gillman Barracks. The address is 9 Lock Road, #02-21.

For more information, contact 6734-8948

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- See more at: <http://stcommunities.sg/entertainment/show/news/armenian-artist-anna-navasardian-drawn-dark#sthash.SLk7vgjA.dpuf>