

CHARLES GARABEDIAN: WORKS FROM 1966 – 1976

June 2012 Written by Doug Harvey 0 Comments

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L.A. Louver. Los Angeles, CA.

For anyone who missed his stellar retrospective at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art last year, Charles Garabedian's recent "Works from 1966–1976" at L.A. Louver offered a glimpse at the most pivotal moment in the evolution of perhaps the most underrated of contemporary West Coast painters. Garabedian (who will turn 90 next year) got a late start, graduating with a master's degree in painting from UCLA close to the age of 40 before staking out a portion of the LA artscape alongside friends like Robert Irwin and Ed Moses.



Charles Garabedian *Daytime T.V.*, 1966 flopaque and plaster on board, 41 3/8" x 61 3/8" Courtesy of L.A. Louver, Venice, CA

His big break didn't come for another decade, until Marcia Tucker included him in the 1975 Whitney Biennial and the landmark "Bad Paintings" show in 1978, when his deliberately awkward figuration was identified as a precursor to the then burgeoning neo-expressionist movement. Yet, as with many of the artists associated with that art historical moment, his work has outlived the usefulness of such a pigeonhole through its longevity and sheer idiosyncrasy.

Some of Garabedian's most idiosyncratic experiments come from the pre-recognition decade covered by this exhibit. *Daytime T.V.* (1966) inserts a large image of a television screen (featuring a scene of ambiguously erotic, violence — under what appears to be a collaged ceramic tortilla/sun) into an urban landscape, marginalizing the actual cityscape into a decorative border. The low camera angle interior shot *Restaurant (The Waitress)* (1966) shares a similar pulp sensibility, as well as *Daytime T.V.*'s weird-ass medium: a grungy craft paint called "flo-paque" — the somewhat limited aesthetic possibilities of which Garabedian made a perversely extended exploration during this period.

Only slightly less eccentric were the artist's forays into the use of clear synthetic resins — an important material for the LA-based Finish Fetish artists of that era (as well as post-minimalists like Eva Hesse). But Garabedian's employment of its pictorial potential is distinctive. In works like *Jack Nicholson* (1973) — a weak cutout likeness (abutted by outsize pints of liquor, dollar bills, and a bowling pin) that seems to prefigure the actor's role in *Chinatown* the following year — he uses layers of the hard



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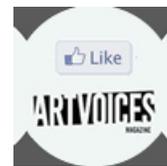
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glossy transparent plastic to achieve a typically awkward
Pop rendition of renaissance glazing, as well as a
remarkable shallow 3-D effect similar to a lenticular
postcard.

Charles Garabedian *Jack Nicholson*, 1973
wood, resin and acrylic 30" x 18"
Courtesy of L.A. Louver, Venice, CA

Resin is also a component in the elegant near-Minimalist *China Wall* (1968), a more conventionally
anging resembling a folding screen; the gaps between the painted wooden panels
ick slats of the translucent acrylic compound. As with many artists who work with
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oratives, Garabedian developed a sensitivity and eventually had to back off from this
work. Luckily, he had discovered his affinity for regular acrylic paint. After a hiatus,
during which he produced some very odd, furniture-like painted sculptures — two of which are
included here — he reemerged with a flurry of virtuosic near-abstractions, including *Henry Inn No. 3*
(1975) and 4 (1976), which close this small survey on a high note, pointing out the consummate and
ambitious formalism that distinguishes Garabedian's art to the present day.

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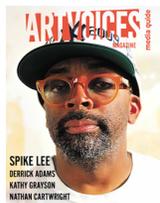
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