Ted Barr’s Cycles of life art

Barr’s enigmatic art emerged into the international art scene because its aesthetic quality and profound philosophic background. His research areas are: symbolism, deep space, religion and especially death rituals among cultures, Buddhism and reincarnation philosophies.

Barr found his own unique journey related to abstract expressionism especially to Color field abstraction and the Action painters.

Barr deals with the occult symbols, with the expression of life and death through ancient religions, his images are demonstrations of the micro and macro cosmos resemblance, his large scale canvases express emerging power and turbulence that resembles the everlasting movement, explosions, and dynamic eternal changes in deep space as within every living creature.

There are three main painting series created by Ted Barr:

Deep space - based on the Hubble telescope images

Human formation – inspired by Lennart Nilsson inner body photography of embryos, ovum, sperms and organs.

Cycle of life –That merges Deep space and Human formation with the symbolic esoteric language he developed into a coherent statement about the place of human life in the vast cosmos and what in his view is the human destiny.

The first two painting series, Deep space and Human formation have similar images and are defined by ‘alloverness’ creating chromatic content richness with multiple fractal forms in the merging areas between the layers, The last Cycle of life series, though it’s similar technique is different in the sense of space and flexibility achieved from the fact that only the central canvas space is painted so wide white margins enables the painting to ‘breath’.

Barr has no official art education he was the disciple of the Israeli master Shlomo Tzafrir with whom he took seven years of painting lessons till Tzafrir sudden death in 2002, from this year Barr developed his multi-layered tar technique which he delivers in art workshops around the world. This technique is based on multiple layers starting with thick gesso , in each layer there is a combination of tar, oil colors, acrylic and wooden lacquer, his tools are spatulas and chop sticks, with brushes only for the figurative symbols that are planted within the painted image, Barr’s painting process involves gentle movement of fluid colors on the canvas and along with the gesso lines previously installed in order to capture the painted object basic form. The virtuous assemblage of all layers causes a stunning and surprising art that is almost impossible to refer to any known art movement or category; Barr’s unique images comply with innovative shape and colors to create strong, vibrant and thoughtful expressive works.

Barr’s exceptional art is based on several repeating symbols as: spiral, the eye, the mouth, bird, the butterfly and above all his private symbol DE – Dual Eternity that encapsulates his life philosophy.

Because the importance of symbolism in Barr art I will dig deeper into this subject.

The Spiral – As the symbol of infinity, movement, flow of life, cycles and continuation, Spirals are also galactic symbols, most galaxies are spiral and move in spirals as our own Milky Way galaxy. Spirals were used from the prehistoric era as the power of life symbol and as connection between planetary and higher life as with the Hindu gods.

Hundertwasser explained that the Spiral for him resembles the passage from the inner self to the outer world and vice versa , in Barr’s art the manifestation of this thought is the Cycle of life painting series that speaks about cycles and infinity.

On 2011 Richard Sera exhibited his work Cycle, in the Guggenheim gallery in Chelsea, NYC the 50 feet long, 12 feet high work seemed like a triangle Spiral in which the viewer is invited to walk within in round paths and with that experience never-ending dwelling process from different angels, as Sera said: “the space is my main medium”.

The eye – in most of Barr’s works there is a figurative blunt eye, in some there is the symbol of an eye as a white dot within dark circle. The eye symbolizes the duality between perception and reality, between self-conduct and destiny.

Because the vibrant chaotic, unexpected images in Barr works, the eye is often a safe haven for the viewer eye, the first spot that would be recognized and from there deepening in Barr’s multi-layered paintings would begin.

The Eye motive is a key emblem in ancient Egypt as in the Osiris and Horus eyes resemblance of protection and sight that reaches beyond the known physical realm.

Rembrandt painted his eye watching the viewer within the soldiers in the Night watch, again the viewer painted object dual relations. Every human being creates his own reality as depicted in Magritte’s Eye from 1928 where reality as cloudy skies is part of a large scale eye image and the interaction between painted object- reality- viewers - reality perception- art, creates a time to ponder about life and its meaning.

Another important symbol in Barr art is the bird that appears not only in his paintings but in his writings as in the allegoric novel ‘Frau Gruber farm’ a thrilling fable about the Nazi regime that is located within a chicken coop. Barr wrote a children book named Krombee about the life of a young rooster.

In his writings and paintings as in all his teachings there is a dual meaning for the bird symbol, the ability for overview through elevation and from the other hand the victim as depicted by his chickens and roosters.

In Barr’s words: “ I try in my art to connect the largest formats in our known universe as galaxies and galaxy clusters to the elementary bricks of creation, Quarks, Atoms, molecules, in my eyes Gama rays bursts on stars resemble the embryo’s fingers emerging in the 14 week of pregnancy.”

In his Cycle of life series there is a merge between those subject matters in his unique symbolic way Barr deals with dreams, fears, sadness and inspiration that determines each individual human life journey.

Barr doesn’t use his name as a signature but rather signs with a private symbol , depicted out of 35 white dots (35 in numerology is 8 that resembles infinity) there are 2 figure symbols that hold the ANKH an ancient Egyptian symbol referring to life and death cycles a dominant subject in Barr’s art.

Ted Barr had shown in galleries and museums in NYC, Dallas, Miami, Cinchiano, Guadalajara, Tel Aviv, Kathmandu, Grand Rapids, Detroit, San Francisco, Paris, San Antonio, Toronto, Montreal and Marseille.

Dr. Dalia Hakker-Orion - curator