

**Garegin Kotanjian**

**THE ARTISTIC LEGACY OF  
IMPRESSIONISM  
AND ARMENIAN PICTORIAL ART**

**(second half of XIX – first half of XX cc.)**

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THE ARTISTIC LEGACY OF IMPRESSIONISM AND ARMENIAN PICTORIAL ART  
(second half of XIX – first half of XX centuries)

## **SUMMARY**

The book is dedicated to a paramount problem of the Newest Time of Armenian visual arts, that is, to the role of Impressionism in its formation and development. After several centuries of stagnation, Armenian Fine Arts joined a new phase of its history, which laid the foundation for its revival in the second half of XIX century. At the end of the same century a galaxy of outstanding masters came forward, who were educated in Europe and Russia and had successfully assimilated the pictorial and graphical system of the modern Western Art. The formation of creative art of this generation of Armenian masters coincided with the time when French Impressionism was spreading in European countries. The main achievements of Impressionism due to which European pictorial tradition was renewed, as it is well-known, were the enlightenment and activation of the color palette, spontaneity of the artistic accomplishment, freedom of compositional mastering, boldness of artistic ideas realization and the most significant - the turn to plein-air, in other words, out of door painting with all ensuing consequences.

The ardent engagements with the above-mentioned issues were common for artistic endeavor of Armenian painters as well, the very reason why Impressionism did not become an accidental and transient phenomenon in Armenian art. The creative use of its achievements favored considerably for the shaping and development of Armenian painting school of XX century.

The research is arranged due to analyzes of a range of prominent Armenian masters' creative work of the considered period, whose art revealed the trend of Impressionism rather vividly.

In this relation a special place occupies our compatriot, great marine painter **Hovhannes Ayvazovsky** (1817-1900), both among the group of the artists we have chosen and in the history of the world art (suffice to say that one of the greatest British painters, Josef Turner was so impressed with the pictures by the young Ayvazovsky, that he composed a verse, praising his genius). Though he never used to work out of doors (as it was used to by the Impressionists as the key of their method), his canvases are distinguished by exceptional liveliness and truthfulness. Overcoming the sluggishness and restriction of the academician Russian painting he created his own improvisational method of execution based on the use of his phenomenal visual memory and imagination in the conveyance of elements of nature, those as water and air - the true "heroes" of his creations. His key was the "atmospheric painting" (the term used by the artist himself), in other words the plein-air painting, which anticipated and synchronized with that of the French Impressionists.

**Eghishe Tadevosyan** (1870-1936) was one of the first among Armenian masters who creatively

assimilated the pictorial achievements of Impressionism. His outstanding artistic individuality, intrinsic national world outlook, subtle sense for the nature, endowed him with an ability to work out the principles of the classical Impressionism and to create inimitable "tadevosyanian" pictorial style. His rich artistic heritage became a kind of an "interpreter" of the brilliant achievements of the French pictorial art of the second half of XIX century for the Armenian artists of further generations, as well defined the unique character of pictorial art school of Armenia in XX century.

**Sedrak Arakelyan's** (1884-1942) subtle sense for nature, affection towards plain images is common with that of the masters of Impressionism. In his landscape paintings the exactness and truthfulness of representation harmonizes with the poetical interpretation of nature. At the same time Arakelyan with his freedom of rendering and boldness of generalizations of graphic forms, unlike French Impressionists, always preserves the definiteness and clarity of artistic images. Some of their technical mediums (for example, the spot technique), were not characteristic of him as well.

Another outstanding Armenian painter - **Vahram Gayfejian's** (1879-1960) mastering of the French Impressionism's inventions was much versatile, independent and complex. During the years of his early creative activity he was enchanted with issues concerning the means of color expression, which were manifested in two similar series of abstract graphic pages. In the subsequent years (the period from 1910 to 1930), his interests towards Impressionism took even a vivid appearance. Later on, in his works of the next two decades, he worked out an individual manner of treatment in which the principles of Impressionism were not distinguished apparently, but were absorbed in the original way of the visual perception of the master.

For **Martiros Saryan** (1880-1972), one of the most well-known Armenian artists, the communication with Impressionism passed in rather complicated and mediated way. His first insight into Impressionism took part during the years of his apprenticeship. But the ample of possibilities provided by the trend were revealed and applied much later, after almost three decades, during the Parisian period of his artistic endeavor and henceforth. And here one has to consider that Saryan's attitude towards Impressionism was not unequivocal. Based on Impressionism and with the support of the latter's and some other further artistic movements' achievements he went back over to reconsider and renew the means of expressions of his brilliant art, and worked out a new, original pictorial-graphic language marked with poetical subtleness, frankness and intimacy.

The next painter whose art is included in our study - **Hovhannes Ter-Tadevosyan** (1889-1974) - is not ranked among the well-known Armenian masters. Ter-Tadevosyan favored during his study, being first a student to E. Tadevosyan, later on in Moscow having two prominent teachers - famous Russian artists K. Korovin and A. Arkhipov. Owing to them he got his lessons of Impressionist painting, which he used during all over his creative activity. But his works are not fully represented in Armenia. Alas, a substantial part of the artist's creative legacy hasn't been available for us by now, as he spent the second and the longest period of his lifetime out of Armenia and marked an

important contribution in the rise and formation of chisel painting in Middle Asia. Though the high artistic value of his best canvases, the brilliant luminosity of his palette, Chiaroscuro of colors, as well as, the ardent feeling towards the outdoor motives and masterly handling makes his art congenial with that of the Impressionists.

The art of **Gabriel Gyurjyan** (1892-1986), though it has not an immediate connection with Impressionism, nevertheless is included in the present research by certain considerations. Though he was an ardent realist painter, he could enrich essentially the pictorial language of his plein-airism with discoveries of the French masters in this field, but in a moderate, cautious and restrained way. Shaping his pictorial art in the mentioned way he replenished the "sanctuary" of our fine arts with works which bear high artistic value.

However, the involvement of the artist into the chosen group of painters in connection with our topic is stipulated not merely with this fact. A much more important event occurred in his cultural-social activities. By his own initiative there was founded an itinerant studio in Armenia with no analogs in the world practice. It had a great significance for the history of our art in the middle and the second half of the last century. The Itinerant gave an opportunity to Armenian artists to work out of doors, the very key of Impressionistic method. It gave a chance for creative association between the artists of different generations, including experienced masters and big gingers as well, providing an important artistic inheritance in Armenian pictorial arts.

Armenian painting of the New Times using the legacy of Western pictorial tradition, in particular, the artistic achievements of Impressionism, took part in European cultural movement at the threshold of XX century.