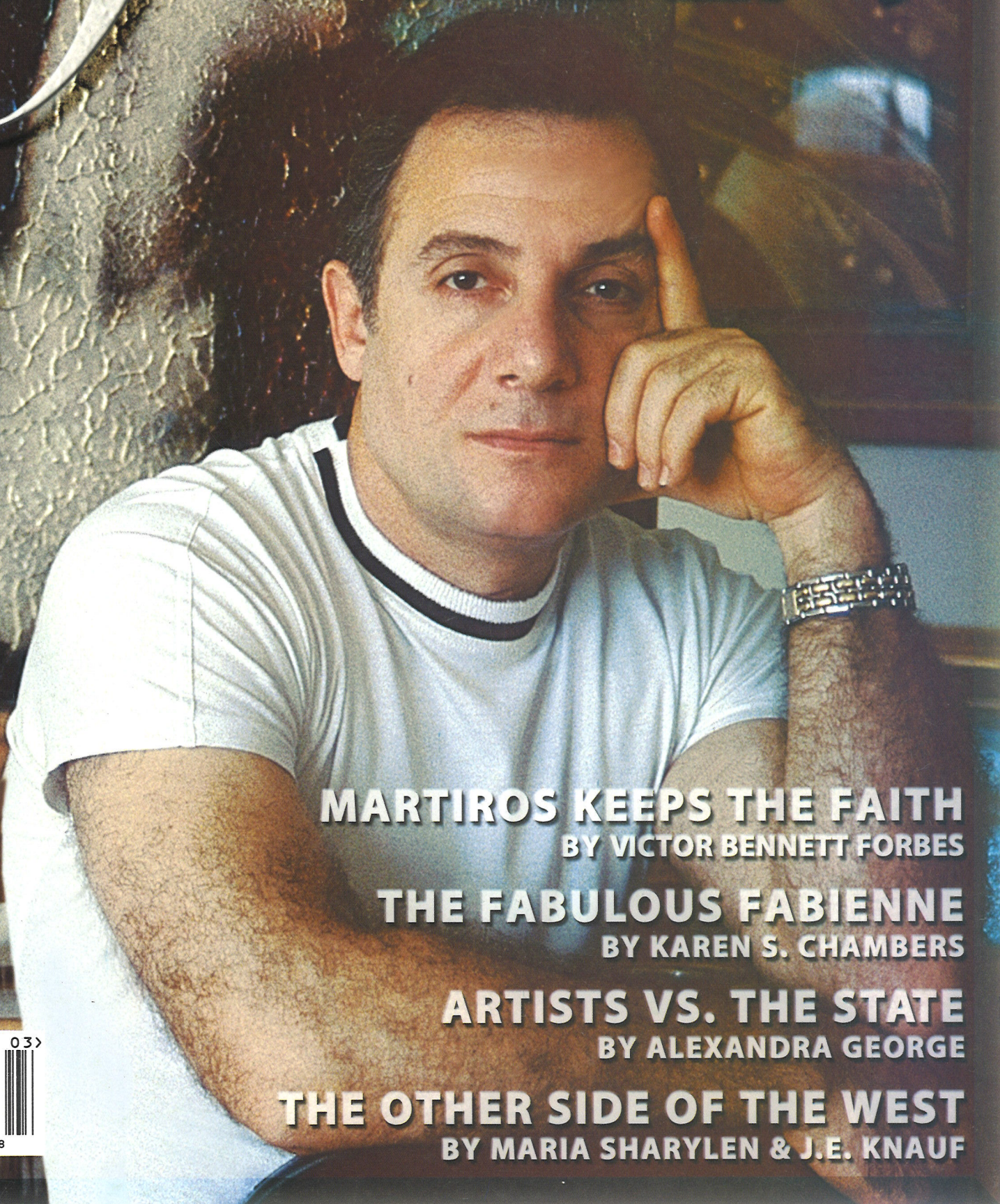


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Fine Art



MARTIROS KEEPS THE FAITH
BY VICTOR BENNETT FORBES

THE FABULOUS FABIENNE
BY KAREN S. CHAMBERS

ARTISTS VS. THE STATE
BY ALEXANDRA GEORGE

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WEST
BY MARIA SHARYLEN & J.E. KNAUF



MARTIROS MANOUKIAN

PART TWO

"The Healing Value of Art"

From: angelics@quik.com
To: <artspower@aol.com>
Subject: Uplifted
Date: Thu, 10 Feb 2000

Hi... I'm a collage artist going thru some difficult transitions in my life.

I took a time out, coffee at a bookstore. I found and bought my first copy of *Fine Art*. What a beautiful publication! Also the copy is quite good.

I was especially moved by this quote by Victor Bennett Forbes in his article about Martiros Manoukian:

In this world of natural tragedies, plagues, all sorts of evils, there's a universal riddle we cannot solve. Sin and war and evil are in the world and part of human nature. Thousands can be killed in an earthquake in an instant. Will the survivors fall on their faces and worship or curse their plight? The choice is to the individual. Of course, the race is filled with non-believers, those without faith, but those who choose, when they praise God, remember how great a God He is. That's the basis faith—being sure of what you hope for.

I wrote it in a book I carry with me that has positive thoughts. Thank you for the beauty and the challenge of those words.

>>Karen<<

By VICTOR BENNETT FORBES

When last we left Martiros Manoukian, he was stepping out in faith, trodding on a surface that is not particularly amenable to supporting the physicality of a human being. Walking on water, as it were, or at least preparing to.

The correspondence above, from our dear new reader, Karen, is affirmation of two elements—that when we take the higher road it leads to the abundant life and that when such good news is published, all are blessed with encouragement.



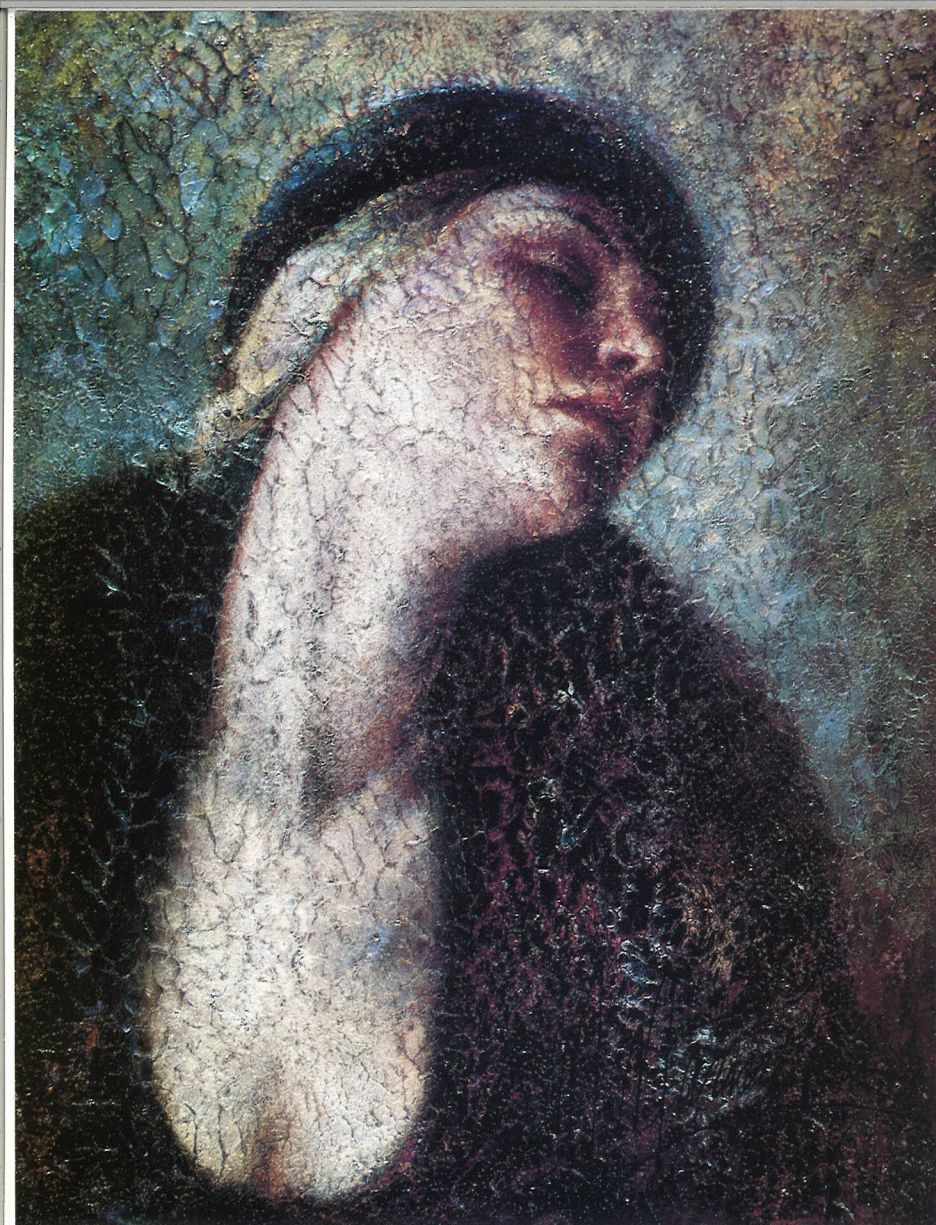
Requiem (Blue Nostalgia), 1989, Oil on canvas, 41" x 50", courtesy the Terry L. Ritter Collection

This is not to say that everything in this life is as we would like it. That Marathoner's wall crops up during each race. You wait for it, meet it head on if you can't side-step it, and if you are in shape, you burst through it, to victory. It's a race to the finish, and though the swift may be happening today, there is a tomorrow for those who opt to persevere.

Karen, in the mornings for many years, I have been listening to Dr. Robert A. Cook on the Family Radio network. His gentle manner coupled with a folksy, often humorous style, inspires, encourages and challenges. The quote that moved you to communicate was based on one of his talks. He is broadcast nationally and his fifteen minute

messages are still re-run, five years since his passing, or as he would so aptly say, since coming face-to-face with his Saviour. Also keep in mind that the wonderful art critic, the Carmelite nun Sister Wendy, expressed that she never had faith because she never had doubt.

Those in this creative life have, along with gifts, great challenges. It seems, sometimes, that the greater the gift, the more difficulties with which you are presented. Runners are familiar with this wall and can beat it by conditioning. How we condition ourselves to our lives is what separates the leaders from the also-rans. The Law of Karma offers no hiding place, nor does the Father of Creation. *One Love* solves the problem. Get the extended



Graceful Pose, 1998, Mixed media, 24" x 30"

version and dance longer. "Still," says Martiros, "you want to consume life, not let life consume you."

Although he is eloquent and speaks beautifully, today's cell and portable phones are not conducive to exact communications, so I am not sure if Martiros, from his California studio, told me he seeks to be the world's greatest artist or the world's most grateful artist. Either way, he has a shot. What separates a talent who wields a brush for oils, or a scissors for collage, or any instrument of creativity from the pack reaching for whatever it is we are going after in our time on this planet? Certainly, pure skill is a factor, but there are so many gifted and talented; certainly "the breaks" come into play: luck; and certainly an unabashed desire to succeed, despite the whims of fate. Learning experiences just fatten up an artist's palette—how they handle it creates their impression on eternity. Will it be indelible or a fast, flashing fade?

Sir Thomas More described a Utopian state of non-competitiveness, where during each day a portion of the time was set aside for creative work. I was a staunch advocate of that concept for many years. Paint, write, play music, act, direct, compose along with all the others, then tend to the fields. It could work. But there would be no Oscars, no Grammys, no write-ups in *Vanity Fair*. No competition. It seems

that there is no compromise: just lead a graceful life, accept the grace that is bestowed upon you and take, in the words of Paul Butterfield, your pleasure where you find it. I use the lyrics of Peter Tosh, the great misunderstood Romantic Poet of reggae: "Got to build your love on one foundation, or there will never be no love at all." Adds Martiros, "Today's love might be tomorrow's anger or yesterday's depression."

Peter was gunned down in a hail of machine gun fire, in his own home. His desire was to share with all the beauty of nature, the beauty that God gave us, and that is Martiros' quest as well. "I need to go up to the mountains...down to the ocean. Look at the color of nature. Nature is my palette, nature is my reality. Nature is my daydream, nature is my teacher. It is the source of all the best things in life: beauty, freedom and challenge.

"I am a man from the mountains. Every morning I awoke to see my beloved Mount Ararat. It seemed so close yet I could never go there. Still, I received my energy and power from Ararat. After all, Ararat is where life started from Noah and I was born in the cradle of that mountain."

He is aware that many cannot see the same way an artist does and for that reason "God gave us talent and we have to share that talent. The most important thing is that you have to believe in yourself and what you are doing. There is something spiritual for everybody."

You may recall that in Part I of this two part article, Martiros spoke of his desire to reach America, and how, upon finally setting foot on US soil at the age of forty and becoming "free," that he encountered a whole new set of problems—from spiritual wickedness in high places in his native Armenia to unscrupulous people with power in the artworld in sunny California. Martiros has been able to work through all that to become a very successful artist



Echo of Nature, 1999, Oil on canvas, 48" x 48"



Tune of Unity, 1998, Mixed media, 29.5" x 36"



Trial of Endurance, 32 x 40, oil on canvas, 1983. Russian Period

"I felt then, as I do now, that life, like nature, is a jungle. You have to be strong to handle it. Life for me is a challenge, I have thrived in the jungle."

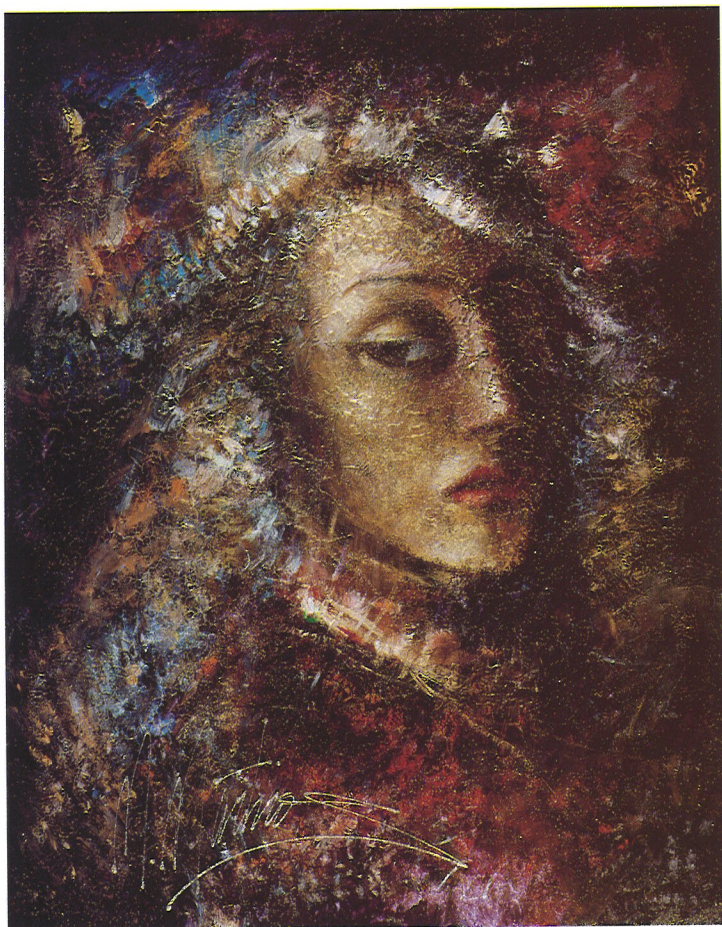


Enigma, 1999, Oil on canvas, 32" x 40"

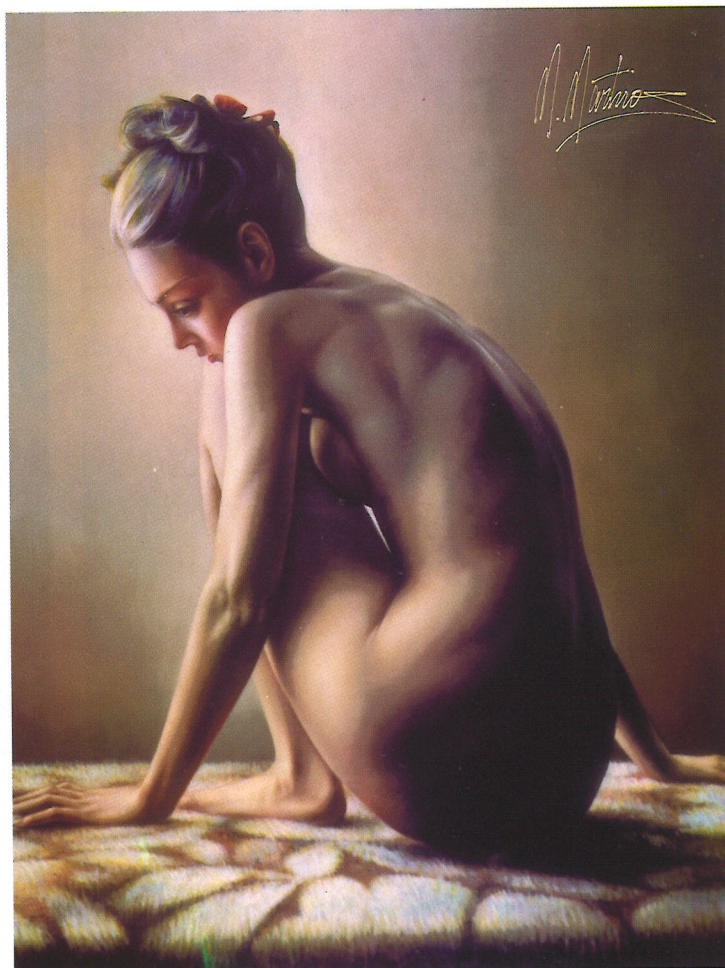
whose paintings are sought after by collectors and prized not only for their surface panache but for their resonating internal power.

With his freedom attained, Martiros' set his sights on becoming a great artist in his own time. His early American works, during what has become known as his "Blue Period" 1988-89 reflected an internalization, a sense of sadness that thematically was a continuum of the somber work he was doing in his homeland before he left. There is great strength in these works, in particular, *Requiem*, which speaks to the heart and soul of us all

with its interpolation of the beauty of music and the female figure with grotesque forms. Further proof that the blues is universal. As the great musician Mike Bloomfield so aptly said, about the similarities of the wide varieties of music emanating from the various neighborhoods of his home, Chicago, "suffering knows no nationality or boundary." Yet, in these works of despair, Martiros always leaves us an out, an escape clause, so to speak. His new found freedom gave him the luxury to play out his anguish on canvas. "If a person is not free for a long time, it is hard to even walk at first. It's like the blinding light of day



Lettering Pose, 1997, Mixed media, 24" x 30"

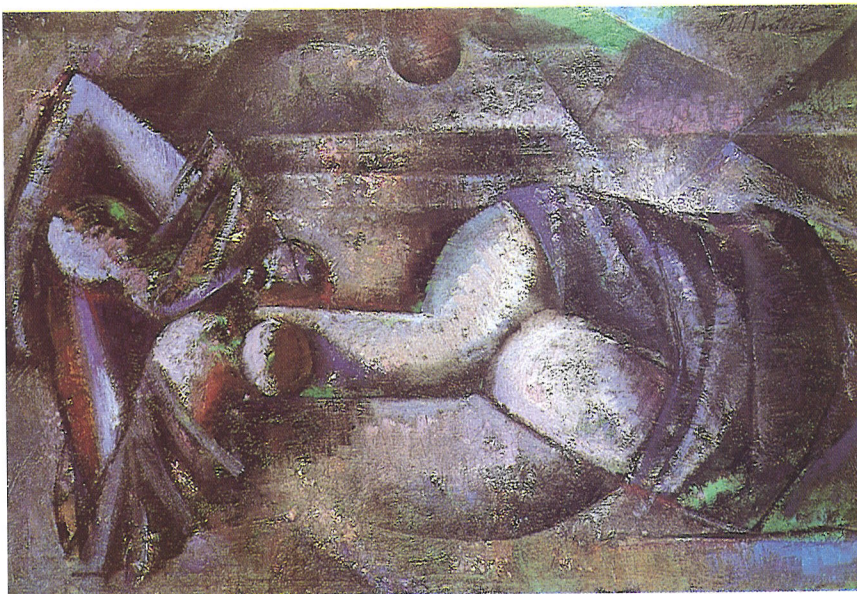


Texture of Love, 1998, Oil on canvas, 36" x 48"

after being kept in a dark prison for a very long time. Maybe I'm asking too much, but I believe in what I am doing. I would like to shape the horizon. Creation just comes from my nature. I never decided what I have to paint, I just wake up in the morning and give what beauty I can to the canvas. One day I know I will just find something about which I am really dreaming to create." Martiros is certain this is actually going to be happening and when it does, a whole new level of artistic communication will be reached. "This century is going to be different, this is going to be a century for the intelligent." Yes, there is great beauty in much of what Martiros paints, and emotion. Sometimes, he feels, "Too emotional. I can see my emotions through my paintings." But then again, more people if they could express what they see, or feel, then they would paint."

Martiros has a dexterity with the tools of his trade that only a select few have attained and he feels he is entering a crucial phase of life for an artist; that he had better be at the top of his game. Time is a fickle friend. One minute you think you have forever and then, you're hoping for enough minutes in the day, or in your life, to finish your next piece, or your next body of work. "For an artist, age is very important. A sportsman—at 24, 25—he may be done. Great masters create in later ages" and Martiros has chosen a path toward greatness. Nothing less will satisfy him. His struggle, then, is the struggle of all true artists who have a passion for perfection on every step of the journey. His mentality allows for nothing less. Perfection and perfectibility, great notions; tried, true Romantic artistic notions of poets and philosophers, from Lao-Tsu, to Shelley, to Christ.

As the interview wound down, we reached back to our take-off point. The e-mail from our new reader, Karen. Martiros then told me, "You can change people's lives. We need people like you: otherwise an artist is creating his vision in a studio and it is going nowhere. . . You don't expect some



Wistful, 1989, oil on canvas, 28 x 40, from Martiros' "Blue Period"

"Seldom do you find a master artist so in touch with the human spirit."

—Terry Ritter

one to send you this kind of message, to reach someone in such a way. For a couple of seconds, she saw a magazine and I can feel that in the life of this lady something has probably changed...actually you are dealing with a beautiful thing: the value of art, healing value of art."