



Arts & Living



"Dreaming of Freedom," Acrylic 44" x 28"

Painter Showcases Art on DVDs

FRANKLIN LAKES, N.J. — She grew up in the Garden of Gethsemane. This line could be the start of a romantic tale where the heroine goes on to travel to far reaches of the world pursuing her life as an artist. For painter Lucy Janjigian, this description for the most part, fits. While she did not grow up in the Garden of Gethsemane, a yearly visit to this historic site in Jerusalem was a family tradition.

By Dilani Yagaratnam
Special to the *Mirror-Spectator*

In solemn silence, surrounded by lighted lanterns and olive trees, Janjigian's yearly trips to the garden, on Maundy Thursday (the Thursday before Easter) made an impact on her. "That place has a very soft place in my heart," she said.

Since then, she has been a devout Christian, attending Bible study classes, for the past 20 years. Her positive outlook stems from her faith, she said. She describes her paintings as "very Christian-oriented" and spiritual. She even described her process as a "dialogue between color, form and canvas and me."

Portraying difficult subject matters, ranging from Judas' betrayal of Jesus, to horrific moments during the Armenian Genocide, Janjigian employs bright, bold colors to convey hope.

Janjigian paints in series, tackling one subject matter and "beating it until the end," she said with a laugh. Her series of paintings surrounding the week before Jesus was sacrificed is titled "Journey to Resurrection" and consists of 33 paintings. In another series, which began in 1984, "Uprooted," she tackles haunting images of the Genocide. Recognizing a similar plight between the homeless and the Armenian struggles of yesteryear, she created a series titled "Homeless." She wanted to show compassion for all types of struggles, not only Armenians, she said. In "Uprooted" while most of the paintings are on the Genocide, some are dedicated to the suffering in Africa and other genocides.

The two series, "Uprooted" and "Journey to Resurrection," containing her mainly acrylic-based paintings, are now on DVD, set to a narration with religious music in the background.

From childhood, she said, she remembered Russian nuns singing in the church.

see JANJIGIAN, page 13

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JANJIGIAN, from page 11

Through some detective work and luck she was able to track down the group, the Russian Nuns of Bethany, and have them sing the background music on her DVD, she said. In fact, George Stephanopolous's (President Bill Clinton's communications director) sister, who lived in Jerusalem, is one of the nuns singing on "Journey to Resurrection."

The idea for this unusual presentation of her art was not hers alone, she said. During the 90th anniversary of the Genocide, in 2005, she

was asked to exhibit her paintings as an accompaniment to some lectures given by various religious leaders.

Her daughter, who was then doing production work for the Sunrise Show, came to see her mother's artwork with her boss who was friends with producer Melvin McCray. She



Lucy Janjigian

suggested to Janjigian that her art be presented in a video format. With the help of McCray, she created these DVDs which are available for sale at various Armenian organizations in both Armenian and French translations.

Growing up in Israel, Janjigian did not plan on becoming a professional artist. Originally, she had wanted to be a biologist. Thus, at 19, upon receiving a scholarship, she left home to study at Heidelberg College in Ohio, where she received a BA in biology. Later, she received her master's degree in plant ecology at Emory University in Atlanta.

Her first job was doing research at the dermatology department at Columbia Medical

Center. Her husband, Edward, also worked there. When his work called him to Lebanon, she followed, but they came back to the US because of the unsafe environment, eventually settling in New Jersey.

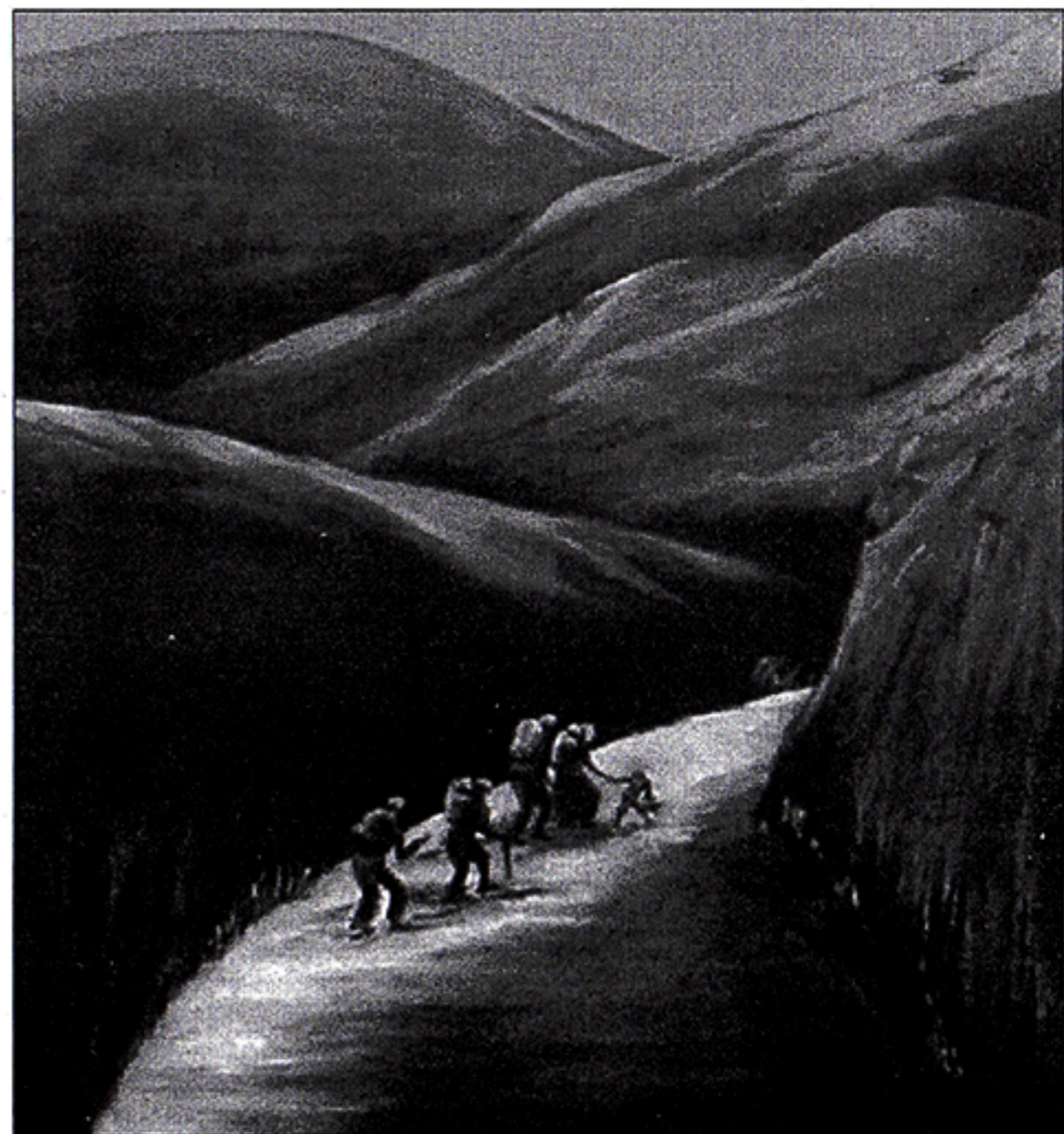
After having her third child, Janjigian decided it was time to start pursuing her career as an artist. She has not looked back since then. To hone her craft, she studied at the Stacy Studio Workshop in New York.

Whether a coincidence or fate, what Janjigian has noticed is the way significant numbers appearing in Christian history have come up in relation to her work. For example, the number 33 is the number of years she has attended her art workshop, while it is also the age Jesus was when he was crucified. Another example, is while painting "30 Pieces of Silver," the size of the painting turned out to be 30" by 30." The fact these numbers have appeared in relation to her work is amazing to her, she said.

While the numbers may be a coincidence, she is sure spirituality is intertwined with her process of painting. "I have an idea. I work it out on the canvas. It's resolved [there]. It tells me where to go."

Clearly, her work is getting noticed. Recently, the band Musical Oratorio, inspired by her paintings in "Journey to Resurrection," created music which they performed earlier this month. In addition, the Commission on Holocaust Education in New Jersey has requested to use her "Uprooted" DVD for viewing in schools. "It's just so exciting," Janjigian said. Meanwhile, her "Journey to Resurrection" DVD can be viewed on the Episcopal Church and Visual Arts website, www.ecva.org.

In addition to painting, she gives lectures on issues close to her heart, she said. One of those lectures is titled, "Perspective on the



"Desolation," Acrylic 40" x 46"

Middle East."

Janjigian has two sons and one daughter, and all of whom are artistically inclined; however, none are full-time artists. Artists don't get paid much, she said. Thus she is grateful to her husband for "financing" her career as

an artist.

To view her work, visit homepage.mac.com/edlujig/Artists. Her DVDs are available for sale at the Armenian Library and Museum of America (ALMA), in Watertown, Mass.