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ART REVIEWS

By DAVID PAGEL
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Poetic License: At 69, **Charles Garabedian** is making some of the best paintings of his career. His most recent acrylics on canvas and paper, collectively titled "Studies for the Iliad," bring such extreme poetic license to the Greek epic that it functions as little more than a springboard for the artist's dream narratives. His whimsical pictures are compelling precisely because of their freewheeling vigor: They dissolve the differences between classicism and cartoons.

Garabedian's idiosyncratic images avoid the pitfalls that plague other artists interested in the fleshy pleasures of figurative painting. His sense of humor embodies a generosity of spirit absent from the shrill neoclassicism of cynics such as Carlo Maria Mariani (currently exhibiting at the L.A. County Museum of Art) and David Ligare, whose lifelessly formulaic paintings prevent any kind of vitality from entering the picture.

In contrast to the over-composed human forms depicted by these well-mannered formalists, Garabedian's cartoonish figures always seem to be awkwardly trapped in his paintings. It is as if his lumpy, uncomfortable characters know they cannot possibly live up to the overblown roles they are called upon to play in the grand epic of history. Like funny underdogs, they have a sense of humility that allows them to take on an emotional power far greater than that of ordinary cartoons.

Garabedian exaggerates his figures' inability to achieve the goals of their Greco-Roman forebears by depicting them dead or asleep, with missing limbs or lost in reverie. In a 7x20-foot mural-like painting, five fleshy figures float in an abstract landscape in gravity-defying positions as their limbs contort in impossible configurations.

The scene is riddled with so many illusionistic inconsistencies and gaps in logic that its only sense is that of dreams. By cleverly arresting time, Garabedian's painting suggests that the best reason to go back to classicism is to go ahead with the randomness of fantasy—a spiraling motion neither free of history nor bound by its linear movement.

■ *L.A. Louver Gallery, 77 Market St., Venice, (310) 822-4955, through April 18. Closed Sundays and Mondays.*