

Patty Look Lewis Gallery: Brush Strokes that Elicit Subtext

By Kerry Methner / CASA

CERTAIN PAINTINGS ARE ESPECIALLY POWERFUL - to the viewer - but also in the painter's memory. Each brush stroke elicits the time, place, and circumstance of their creative process, serving as reminders of turning points in an artist's career.

Irma Cavat, who's work will open in an exhibit at Patty Look Lewis Gallery this 1st Thursday from 5 to 8pm shared as much about *Pomegranate Basket*, a 5x5 foot painting that she completed upon returning from Turkey to Santa Barbara after breaking her leg. Doing the painting signaled a new taking up of life for her after the ordeal. "I had them build a scaffold so that I could paint it," she shared. "It was a test of self discipline; I knew that if I made even one drip on the background I'd have to start all over again."

Cavat often paints pomegranates that, along with other orchard fruits, grow around her home. "I came from Brooklyn; living here in Santa Barbara with the orchards and fruits, is like a miracle," she shared.

Another painting that will be in the exhibit marked a



Irma Cavat

turning point for this New York native. Emerging from a post 9/11 solely black and white period, Cavat painted *Chaos and Compassion*. The black and white is complimented by a green pear and the face of a calf. "I don't plan my paintings at all," Cavat confessed. In *Chaos and Compassion* "I started at this end [right] and painted one item at a time...It's my canvas, I can do anything I want with it."

This attitude perhaps reflects Cavat's roots growing up in New York amidst, and on first name basis with, many of the Abstract Expressionist group with its emphasis on expression of the unconscious, spiritual, and sometimes rebellious tendencies. "I was the one they sent for the paper," she recalled. It was in that early time that she really became a painter and an abstract expressionist herself, sitting for hours, observing.

As her work developed Cavat studied with Russian sculptor, Alexander Archipenko; modeled for Renee Magritte; studied at the New School for Social Research in New York; and worked with Willem De Kooning in the 1950s. Later, on a Fulbright Scholarship to Rome, she pulled up a chair by the fire with "the backbone of culture in the U.S." "That was my education," she explained.

Cavat's stay in Rome lasted from 1955 to 1964, where her daughters, Karina and Nika were born. She and her family



Pomegranate Basket, 60"x60" oil/c, by Irma Cavat

located in Santa Barbara in 1965 when UCSB offered her a position as a Professor of Art. She stayed and taught until her retirement in 2000.

Cavat, who studied sculpture as well as painting, last did sculpture in 1995 when she collaborated with landscape architect, Isabelle Greene and Walter Kohn, to create the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation's Sadako Peace Garden on the 50th anniversary of the Hiroshima tragedy. That work, like her paintings offers a subtext. That double-edge, is what keeps her painting. "What I see, I convert. With an artist the world is the pallet. It enriches my life that everything [I paint] has a double meaning."



The Patty Look Lewis Gallery is located at 25 E De la Guerra Street and is open Tu-Sa 12 to 5pm and for 1st Thursday, August 7th, from 5 to 8pm. For information call 965-2525. Cavat's work will be on display through August 30th.



Chaos and Compassion, 20"x80" oil/c, by Irma Cavat